

IntechOpen

IntechOpen Series  
Sustainable Development, Volume 15

# Gender Inequality

Issues, Challenges and New Perspectives

*Edited by Feyza Bhatti and Elham Taheri*





---

# Gender Inequality - Issues, Challenges and New Perspectives

*Edited by Feyza Bhatti and Elham Taheri*

Published in London, United Kingdom

---

Gender Inequality – Issues, Challenges and New Perspectives

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.110910>

Edited by Fezza Bhatti and Elham Taheri

#### Contributors

Adalbertus Fortunatus Kamanzi, Adriana Baez-Carlos, Adriana N. Ortiz-Ortega, Alexandra Busemann, Andreea Molnar, Anne Brüggemann-Klein, Aura Saskia Zahwa Zeusta, Burcu G. Özcan Büyüktanır, Carine Khalil, Chia-Heng Chang, Dila Okyar, Dwight Figueiredo, Fezza Bhatti, Foteini Marmani, Isabella B. Metelmann, Judith Namabira, Lisamarie Deblasio, Monument Thulani Bongani Makhanya, Naurissa Biasini, Prasenjit Das, Shelley Jones, Yancili Lozano-Torres, Ziya Hasan

© The Editor(s) and the Author(s) 2024

The rights of the editor(s) and the author(s) have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. All rights to the book as a whole are reserved by INTECHOPEN LIMITED. The book as a whole (compilation) cannot be reproduced, distributed or used for commercial or non-commercial purposes without INTECHOPEN LIMITED's written permission. Enquiries concerning the use of the book should be directed to INTECHOPEN LIMITED rights and permissions department ([permissions@intechopen.com](mailto:permissions@intechopen.com)).

Violations are liable to prosecution under the governing Copyright Law.



Individual chapters of this publication are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License which permits commercial use, distribution and reproduction of the individual chapters, provided the original author(s) and source publication are appropriately acknowledged. If so indicated, certain images may not be included under the Creative Commons license. In such cases users will need to obtain permission from the license holder to reproduce the material. More details and guidelines concerning content reuse and adaptation can be found at <http://www.intechopen.com/copyright-policy.html>.

#### Notice

Statements and opinions expressed in the chapters are these of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the editors or publisher. No responsibility is accepted for the accuracy of information contained in the published chapters. The publisher assumes no responsibility for any damage or injury to persons or property arising out of the use of any materials, instructions, methods or ideas contained in the book.

First published in London, United Kingdom, 2024 by IntechOpen

IntechOpen is the global imprint of INTECHOPEN LIMITED, registered in England and Wales, registration number: 11086078, 167-169 Great Portland Street, London, W1W 5PF, United Kingdom

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Additional hard and PDF copies can be obtained from [orders@intechopen.com](mailto:orders@intechopen.com)

Gender Inequality – Issues, Challenges and New Perspectives

Edited by Fezza Bhatti and Elham Taheri

p. cm.

This title is part of the Sustainable Development Book Series, Volume 15

Topic: Inclusivity and Social Equity

Series Editor: Usha Iyer-Raniga

Topic Editor: Ebba Ossiannilsson

Print ISBN 978-1-83769-020-6

Online ISBN 978-1-83769-021-3

eBook (PDF) ISBN 978-1-83769-022-0

ISSN 2753-6580

An electronic version of this book is freely available, thanks to the partial funding support of libraries working with Knowledge Unlatched. KU is a collaborative initiative designed to make high quality books Open Access for the public good. More information about the initiative and links to the Open Access version can be found at [www.knowledgeunlatched.org](http://www.knowledgeunlatched.org)

# We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

7,000+

Open access books available

187,000+

International authors and editors

205M+

Downloads

156

Countries delivered to

Our authors are among the  
Top 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index  
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?  
Contact [book.department@intechopen.com](mailto:book.department@intechopen.com)

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.  
For more information visit [www.intechopen.com](http://www.intechopen.com)





# IntechOpen Book Series

# Sustainable Development

## Volume 15

### Aims and Scope of the Series

Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development endorsed by United Nations and 193 Member States, came into effect on Jan 1, 2016, to guide decision making and actions to the year 2030 and beyond. Central to this Agenda are 17 Goals, 169 associated targets and over 230 indicators that are reviewed annually. The vision envisaged in the implementation of the SDGs is centered on the five Ps: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. This call for renewed focused efforts ensure we have a safe and healthy planet for current and future generations.

This Series focuses on covering research and applied research involving the five Ps through the following topics:

1. Sustainable Economy and Fair Society that relates to SDG 1 on No Poverty, SDG 2 on Zero Hunger, SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities, SDG 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 17 Partnership for the Goals
2. Health and Wellbeing focusing on SDG 3 on Good Health and Wellbeing and SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation
3. Inclusivity and Social Equality involving SDG 4 on Quality Education, SDG 5 on Gender Equality, and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
4. Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability comprising SDG 13 on Climate Action, SDG 14 on Life Below Water, and SDG 15 on Life on Land
5. Urban Planning and Environmental Management embracing SDG 7 on Affordable Clean Energy, SDG 9 on Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, and SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities.

The series also seeks to support the use of cross cutting SDGs, as many of the goals listed above, targets and indicators are all interconnected to impact our lives and the decisions we make on a daily basis, making them impossible to tie to a single topic.





# Meet the Series Editor



Usha Iyer-Raniga is a professor in the School of Property and Construction Management at RMIT University. Usha co-leads the One Planet Network's Sustainable Buildings and Construction Programme (SBC), a United Nations 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (UN 10FYP SCP) aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 12. The work also directly impacts SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities. She completed her undergraduate degree as an architect before obtaining her Masters degree from Canada and her Doctorate in Australia. Usha has been a keynote speaker as well as an invited speaker at national and international conferences, seminars and workshops. Her teaching experience includes teaching in Asian countries. She has advised Austrade, APEC, national, state and local governments. She serves as a reviewer and a member of the scientific committee for national and international refereed journals and refereed conferences. She is on the editorial board for refereed journals and has worked on Special Issues. Usha has served and continues to serve on the Boards of several not-for-profit organisations and she has also served as panel judge for a number of awards including the Premiers Sustainability Award in Victoria and the International Green Gown Awards. Usha has published over 100 publications, including research and consulting reports. Her publications cover a wide range of scientific and technical research publications that include edited books, book chapters, refereed journals, refereed conference papers and reports for local, state and federal government clients. She has also produced podcasts for various organisations and participated in media interviews. She has received state, national and international funding worth over USD \$25 million. Usha has been awarded the Quarterly Franklin Membership by London Journals Press (UK). Her biography has been included in the Marquis Who's Who in the World® 2018, 2016 (33rd Edition), along with approximately 55,000 of the most accomplished men and women from around the world, including luminaries as U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. In 2017, Usha was awarded the Marquis Who's Who Lifetime Achiever Award.



# Meet the Volume Editors



Associate Professor Dr. Feyza Bhatti is a mixed-methods social science researcher with substantive experience and interest in gender studies, particularly focusing on understanding gendered workplaces, gender inequalities, and the social and work experiences of women, men, and marginalized groups in developing countries. After completing her BA and MS in Economics, she received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

She is currently the vice dean of the Faculty of Business, director of the Center for Gender Studies, and director of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research at Girne American University, Cyprus.



Assistant Professor Dr. Elham Taheri has a Ph.D. in Economics from Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus. She is currently a lecturer in the Department of Economics at the same university. Her research interests include the labor market, particularly gender inequalities, health economics, and economic development.



# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>XVII</b>
<b>Section 1</b>	
Tracking Progress towards Gender Equality	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>3</b>
Introductory Chapter: Where the World Stands in Gender Equality? <i>by Feyza Bhatti</i>	
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>13</b>
Gender Inequality in South Asia: Tracing Impediments to SDG 5 of UN Sustainable Development Goals <i>by Ziya Hasan</i>	
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>27</b>
Whose SDGs and Who's Making Them Happen?: Insights from Women in Uganda <i>by Shelley Jones</i>	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>51</b>
Getting There with Gender Equality in the Namibian Enterprises, but Questioning Empowerment <i>by Adalbertus Fortunatus Kamanzi and Judith Namabira</i>	
<b>Section 2</b>	
Opportunities and Challenges	<b>69</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>71</b>
Walking through the Leaky Academic Pipeline in STEM: Equity Not Equality Needed for Women and under Represented Minorities (URMs) <i>by Dwight Figueiredo</i>	
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>97</b>
Factors Influencing Young Women to Enroll in IT <i>by Andreea Molnar, Carine Khalil and Anne Brüggemann-Klein</i>	

<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>117</b>
Non-Inclusivity, Discrimination and the Othering of Female Students in Higher Education with Lived Experience of Trauma and Adversity <i>by Lisamarie Deblasio</i>	
<b>Section 3</b>	
Politics of Gender: Planning, Policies and Laws	<b>137</b>
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>139</b>
Addressing Gender Inequality through Local Planning: The Colombian Case <i>by Yancili Lozano-Torres</i>	
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>155</b>
Challenges for the Constructing of Equity and Equality in Mexico <i>by Adriana Ortiz-Ortega and Adriana Baez-Carlos</i>	
<b>Chapter 10</b>	<b>167</b>
The Gendered Electoral Choices: Insights from an Experiment on Gender Stereotypes in Political Issues, Parties, and the Voters Preferences for Candidates <i>by Chia-Heng Chang</i>	
<b>Chapter 11</b>	<b>185</b>
Article 175 of Turkish Civil Code, No. 4721: Assessment of Debate on the Duration of the Poverty Alimony <i>by Burcu G. Özcan Büyüktanır and Dila Okyar</i>	
<b>Section 4</b>	
At the Time of Crises	<b>197</b>
<b>Chapter 12</b>	<b>199</b>
Refugee Camps in Greece: Conditions in Reception Facilities on Gender Perspective <i>by Foteini Marmani</i>	
<b>Chapter 13</b>	<b>221</b>
The Vicious Circle of Health Security: Vaginal Fistula in Conflict Settings and Its Interdependency with Female Oppression <i>by Isabella B. Metelmann and Alexandra Busemann</i>	
<b>Chapter 14</b>	<b>235</b>
Causes and Consequences of Toxic Masculinity: Can HeForShe Be a Solution for Gender-Based Violence? <i>by Monument Thulani Bongani Makhanya</i>	

<b>Section 5</b>	
Portrayals of Women	251
<b>Chapter 15</b>	253
Sexism, Language, and Women: A Study of Some Proverbial Expressions Used in the Barpeta District of Assam, India <i>by Prasenjit Das</i>	
<b>Chapter 16</b>	269
Reconstruction of Women Portrayal in Indonesian Movies <i>by Naurissa Biasini and Aura Saskia Zahwa Zeusta</i>	





# Preface

*Gender Inequality – Issues, Challenges and New Perspectives* brings together scholarly contemporary research on the developments and empirical studies on gender (in)equalities from different parts of the world.

The five sections of the book highlight the contemporary issues relevant to gender inequalities and contribute significantly to the understanding of gender (in)equalities across the world. A clear message of the book is the need for inclusive and participatory processes for the development of policies and programmes for gender equality. If women's voices are not heard and their local contexts are not understood, being successful in attaining gender equality at the global level will take a very long time.

The initial section of the book focuses on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Chapter 1 provides a brief global and regional overview of progress in gender equality in education, health, the labour market, and legislation over the last decade. Chapter 2 focuses on the regional- and country-level state of SDGs in South Asia and explains the social, economic, and cultural reasons behind why progress is stagnating in most of the countries. Chapter 3, utilizing a longitudinal study with participatory action research with women from poor communities in Uganda, shows and argues that women, although being central actors in achieving SDGs concerning gender equality, have not heard about the SDGs and have not had their voices heard because they are not included in the processes of developing policies and programmes. In Chapter 4, which highlights the gender equality of businesses led by women and men in access to land, finance, use of ICTS, and exposure to corruption, the authors argue for the decolonization of the idea of women's empowerment through Ubuntu, which can take the idea of empowerment from being a contested place to a place that creates an alternative space of knowing for African communities.

Section 2 focuses on higher education in high-income countries. Chapter 5 uses a desk review and intersectional approach to investigate the reasons why women from minority groups are underrepresented in STEM fields in higher education. Chapter 6 uses semi-structured interviews with women enrolled in IT degrees in Germany to explore the motivations of women entering the IT field. Chapter 7, on the other hand, explores the experiences of women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who faced adversities during their studies at UK universities, indicating how policies might not translate into practices.

Section 3 focuses on enablers of gender equality, including politics and legislation. Chapter 8 shows the gaps in planning and implementation of gender-responsive planning in twenty-one Colombian municipalities along with the importance of advocacy through grassroots organizations and political will for implementation of plans. Chapter 9 stresses the connections between formal and informal female political organizing to build parity democracy to amend prevailing gender inequalities in

Mexico. Chapter 10 investigates how gender stereotypes attached to political parties and topics affect individuals' perceptions of male and female capability of handling different issues in the United States. Chapter 11 focuses on family legislation and poverty alimony during divorce under Turkish law and suggests alternative interpretations for the existing criticism.

Section 4 focuses on gender issues at the time of crisis. Chapter 12 explores living conditions in temporary accommodation centers and the existing social relationship structures in refugee centers in Greece. Chapters 13 and 14 focus on violence against women. Chapter 13 focuses on conflict-related sexual violence, more specifically traumatic vaginal fistula, to reinforce the links between violence, conflict, and health insecurities for women. Chapter 14 brings together the causes and consequences of toxic masculinity and proposes the HeForShe movements in Lesotho and Mexico as a strategy for preventing violence against women.

The last section focuses on the portrayals of women in language and movies. Chapter 15 explores the sexist proverbial expressions on women by the Assamese-speaking people of the Barpeta district of the state of Assam in India. Chapter 16 investigates the contemporary deviations in depictions of women in Indonesian action movies and, based on two movies and four characters, shows the positive changes and reduces gender stereotyping of women as marginalized and obedient.

This book is a useful resource for students, teachers, and researchers in social sciences and humanities, as well as professionals, employers, and practitioners working with women and on gender issues.

**Feyza Bhatti**

Faculty of Business,  
Girne American University,  
Kyrenia, North Cyprus

**Elham Taheri**

Faculty of Business and Economics,  
Eastern Mediterranean University,  
Famagusta, North Cyprus

---

Section 1

Tracking Progress towards  
Gender Equality

---



## Chapter 1

# Introductory Chapter: Where the World Stands in Gender Equality?

*Feyza Bhatti*

## 1. Introduction

The last two decades marked with substantial improvements in gender equality across the world. There have been important advances in closing gender gaps, particularly in education and health, yet the progress in closing gender gaps in economic and political participation has been very slow. Based on the progress between 2006 and 2023, it is estimated that the gender parity in political participation and economic participation will be reached after 162 and 169 years, respectively [1].

There is no country in the world that has achieved gender equality. Gender inequalities persist in all countries and regions of the world, but the nature and level of inequalities vary. The gender differences in economic and political participation, access to opportunities and decision-making power and social norms and expectations with regard to the gender roles continue to make the world unequal for genders.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise the need to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’ by 2030. SDG5 calls for elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women, ensuring equal opportunities in leadership and full and effective participation of women and pledges for the recognition of unpaid care work.

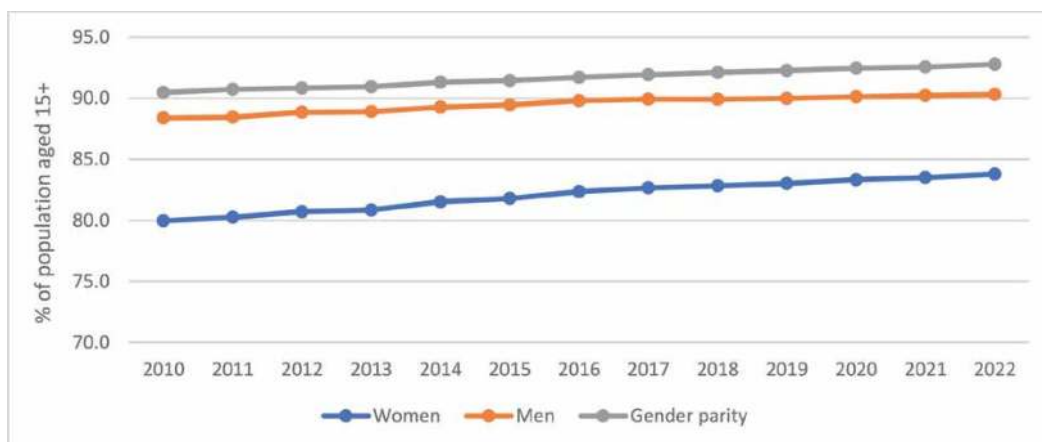
Halfway to the SDGs 2030 agenda, this introductory chapter aims at providing a snapshot of the progress in gender equality by the regions of the world.

## 2. Gender inequalities in education: access to opportunities

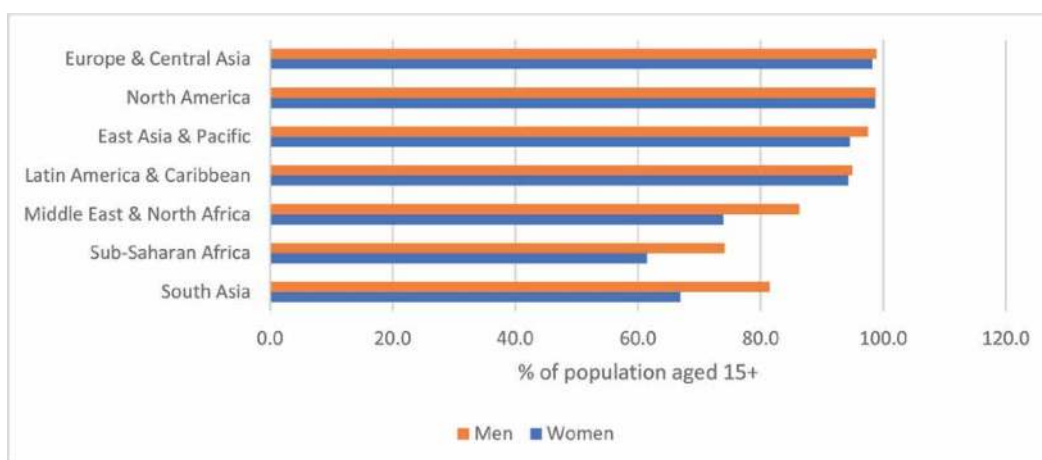
The last decade has delivered considerable improvements in education. Since 2010, the gaps in adult literacy rates closed by two percentage points. The women’s literacy rate increased from 80% in 2010 to 83.8% in 2022, and for men, adult literacy rate increased from 88.4% to 90.3% (**Figure 1**).

While the gaps in literacy are almost closed in Europe and Central Asia, North America and Latin America and Caribbean, they persist in Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia (**Figure 2**).

The gender gaps in access to education have been closed. Girls once have access to schooling have higher rates of completion at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels globally (**Table 1**). Yet in sub-Saharan Africa, only one in every four girls can complete upper secondary schooling and half of the girls in Central and Southern Asia cannot complete secondary school. These two regions are also the ones where girls are less likely to complete upper secondary school as compared to boys.



**Figure 1.** Adult literacy rate by sex, 2010–2022. Source: World Bank [2] Gender statistics.



**Figure 2.** Adult literacy rate by sex and region, 2022. Source: World Bank [2] Gender statistics.

	Primary Completion Rate		Lower Secondary Completion Rate		Upper Secondary Completion Rate	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
World	88	86	78	76	60	57
Sub-Saharan Africa	67	61	45	46	26	29
Northern Africa and Western Asia	89	90	74	71	60	56
Central and Southern Asia	89	88	81	80	52	55
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	98	96	92	85	79	65
Latin America and the Caribbean	95	91	86	80	67	60
Europe and Northern America	100	100	98	98	91	87

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics [3].

**Table 1.** Completion rate by sex and education level, 2022 (%).

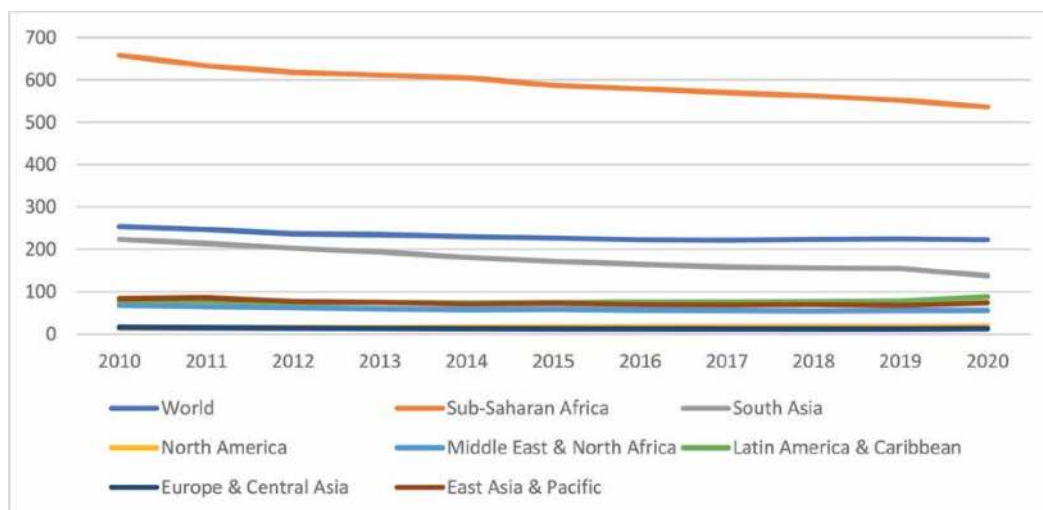
Despite closing gender gaps in formal education, in 2019, there were 257 million boys who were out of school. In addition, in 2022, the proportion of young women (aged 15–24) who were not in school, employment or training was 31.2% as compared to 15.4% among young men, reflecting the uneven chances of young women and men in building their skills. These gaps were highest in Central and Southern Asia (W48.7%, M15.4%), followed by Northern Africa and Western Asia (W40.2%, M17.9%) [4].

### 3. Women's health

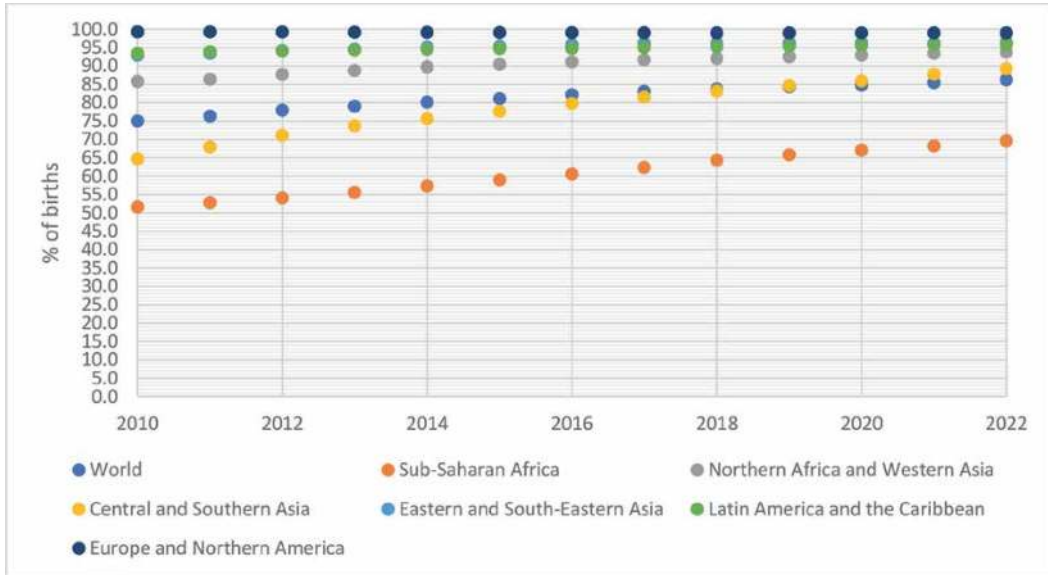
Maternal mortality ratio has declined steadily for two decades from 339 to 223 deaths per 100,000 births between 2000 and 2020. Inadequate health systems, socio-economic inequalities and obstructive gender norms continue to halt the progress in maternal mortality, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where nine out of ten maternal deaths occur. Women in sub-Saharan Africa are 130 more likely to die from complications during pregnancy and childbirth as compared to women in North America or Europe (Figure 3) [5].

The births attended by skilled health personnel indicate the capacity of healthcare systems in providing sufficient care during birth. Globally, almost nine in every ten births (86.2%) were attended by a health personnel in 2022. While most of the regions of the world have reached almost universal skilled care at birth, sub-Saharan Africa, the region with highest maternal mortality ratios, three out of ten women do not have access to skilled personnel during childbirth (Figure 4). Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and South Asia also have the highest rate of pregnant women (aged 15–39) with anaemia by 46.2%.

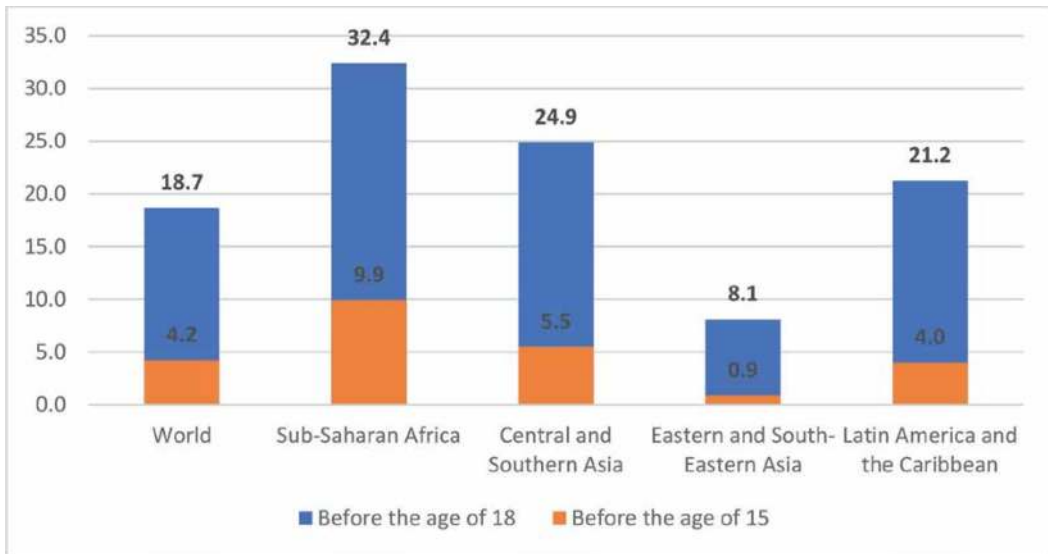
In 2023, 648.2 million girls were married before the age of 18 globally; 18.7% of the women aged 20–24 years were married before the age of 18, and 4.2% married before the age of 15. The child marriages were most common in sub-Saharan Africa (32.4%), followed by Central and Southern Asia (24.9%) (Figure 5). With the current trends, the world is 300 years away from ending child marriages [5].



**Figure 3.** Maternal mortality ratio (modelled estimate, per 100,000 live births). Source: World Bank [2] Gender statistics.



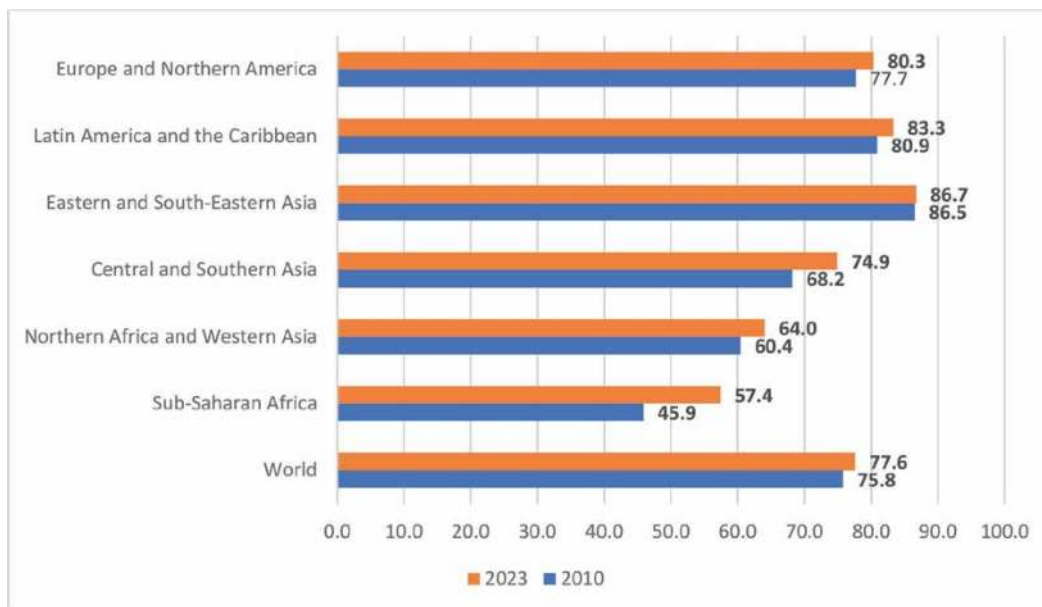
**Figure 4.** Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel %. Source: UNICEF and WHO [6] Joint global database on skilled attendance at birth.



**Figure 5.** Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 and 15 (%). Source: UNICEF [7] The child marriage data portal.

As compared to 2010, more women and girls have access to sexual and reproductive services. Globally, there has been two percentage increase in the proportion of women of reproductive age who have their family planning satisfied with modern methods (Figure 6). Despite a significant leap forward from 45.9% in 2010 to 57.4% in 2023, sub-Saharan Africa remains behind all the other regions





**Figure 6.** Proportion of women of reproductive age who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods (% of women aged 15–49 years). Source: United Nations Population Division [8] Estimates and projections of family planning indicators 2022.

of the world, followed by North Africa and West Asia (64%) and Central and South Asia (75%).

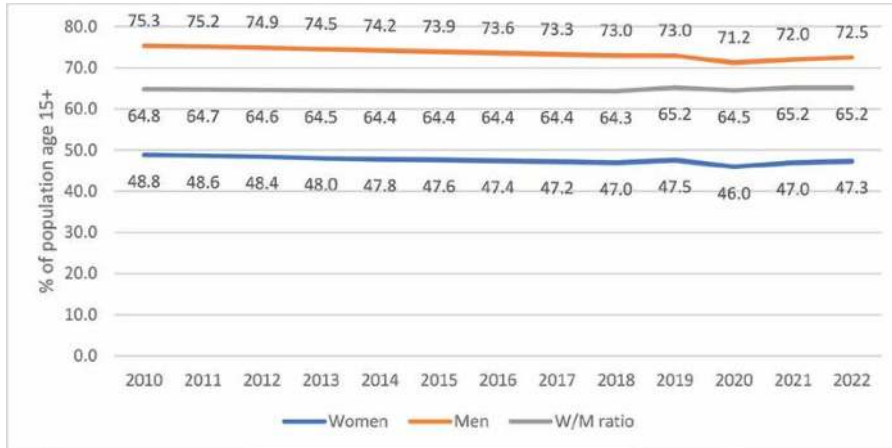
#### 4. Women’s position in the labour market: chronic inequalities and little progress

Attaining gender equality in the labour market remains as the main challenge among all. While women’s position in the labour market varies greatly across the countries and the regions of the world, women continue to remain underrepresented in the labour market in all countries and regions. Compared to men, women are less likely to participate in the labour market, work full-time, more likely to be employed in the informal and lower-paid jobs and less likely to be represented at the higher-level positions, which results in gender pay gaps and higher risks of women to live in poverty. Tackling the inequalities in the labour market, thus is particularly important to improve women’s lives.

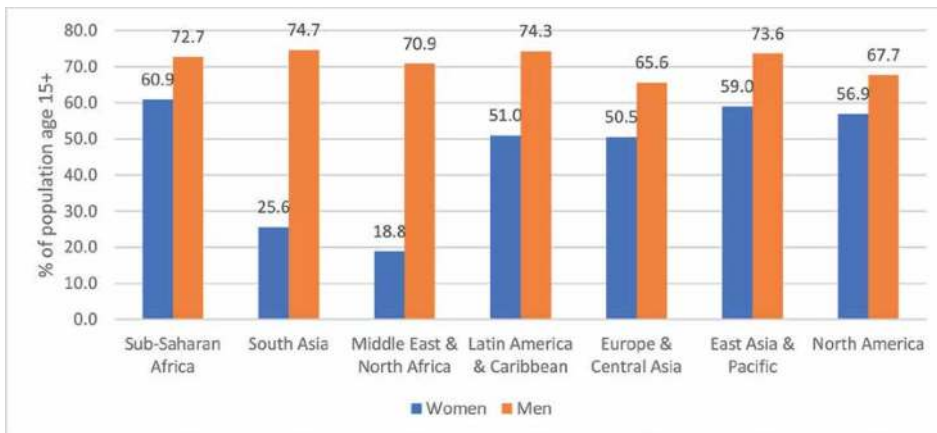
Women’s economic participation, which can be observed through labour force participation rates (LFPR), have been varying between 47 and 49% over the last decade. In 2022, globally the LFPR of women was 47.3% as compared to men 72.5%; there were 65 women participating in the labour market per 100 (Figure 7).

While gender parity was not attained in any of regions of the world, the gender gaps in LFPR were highest in Middle East and North Africa (W18.8%, M70.9%) and South Asia (W25.6%, M74.7%) (Figure 8).

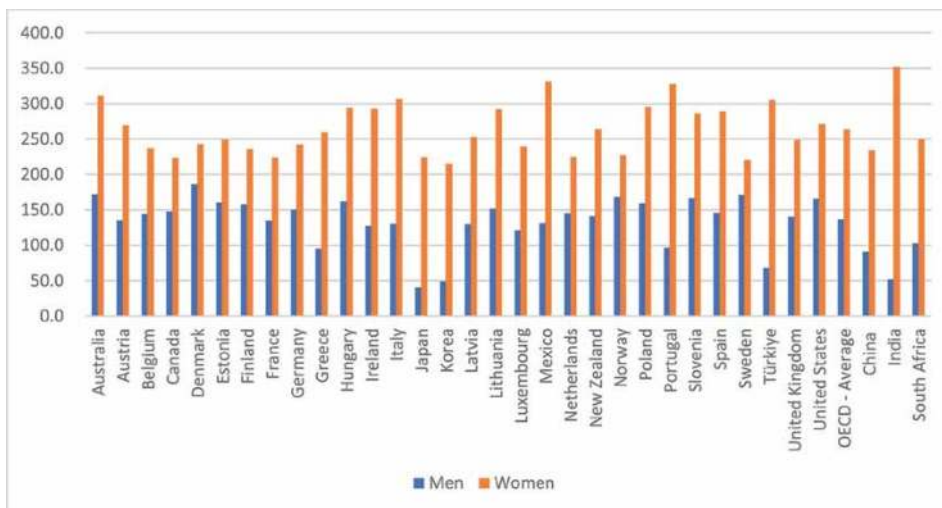
While the variations across regions echo differences in levels of economic and human development, social norms, education levels, fertility rates and access to care



**Figure 7.** Trends in LFR by sex in the world, 2010–2022. Source: World Bank [2] Gender statistics.



**Figure 8.** LFR by sex and region, 2022. Source: World Bank [2] Gender statistics.



**Figure 9.** Time spend on unpaid care work by sex, minutes per day, latest available year. Source: OECD [10] Data explorer.

and other supportive services, the detrimental role of gender differences in unpaid care work and gender role norms cannot be denied.

Gender inequality in unpaid care work, which is also entrenched in the traditional gender norms and stereotypes, has been seen as the missing link for analysing the gender gaps in labour outcomes [9]. Women continue to bear the unequal burden of unpaid care work irrespective of the level of development of their countries. Unequal burden of unpaid care work is one of the manifestations of gender inequalities as well as the causes that perpetuate gender inequalities that result from discriminatory social institutions and gender roles. Globally women spend 2.8 hours more than men on unpaid care and domestic work [5]. In all countries for which the data is available, the unequal burden of unpaid care work is quite noticeable (**Figure 9**).

## 5. Women in decision-making

Women's presence in decision-making positions is a central requirement for achieving gender equality. Women's participation in political decision-making is a means of ensuring better accountability to women that can lead to better gender-responsive reforms and policies. Despite improvements during the last decade, women are still underrepresented in political and economic decision-making positions. On the average women account, only 27% of the national parliaments, and 35% of deliberative bodies of local governments. Similarly, the proportion of women in managerial positions was only 28% in 2021, with almost no improvement for the last decade. The representation of women in political and economic decision-making positions varied significantly across the regions of the world, with moderate improvements (**Table 2**).

	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (% of total number of seats)		Proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government (%)	Proportion of women in managerial positions	
	2010	2023	2023	2010	2021
World	19	27	35	27	28
Sub-Saharan Africa	18	26	25	32	38
Northern Africa and Western Asia	11	18	20	13	15
Central and Southern Asia	19	19	41	13	16
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	19	22	31	28	30
Latin America and the Caribbean	23	36	27	34	37
Europe and Northern America	23	32	37	37	39

Source: UN WOMEN [11].

**Table 2.**  
 Women at decision-making positions by regions.

	Area 1: overarching legal frameworks and public life	Area 2: violence against women	Area 3: employment and economic benefits	Area 4: marriage and family
World	70.2	78.8	76.2	80.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	64.5	71.1	70.5	74.1
Northern Africa and Western Asia	59.1	70.6	61.4	65.4
Central and Southern Asia	68.7	73.6	50.0	77.3
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	64.8	72.8	71.1	81.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	68.4	79.6	75.2	86.2
Europe and Northern America	80.0	86.0	92.8	84.2

*Source: UN WOMEN [11].*

**Table 3.**

*Legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality (percentage of achievement, 0 – 100), 2022.*

## 6. Availability of legal frameworks for gender equality

In order to reach the gender equality, legal frameworks that are in place to enforce gender equality in all countries are vital. **Table 3** shows the extent to which countries have legislative frameworks in place for gender equality in four areas. With some variations across regions, globally the legislation that is in place for gender equality varies between 70.2% in Area 1 to 80% in Area 4. It is estimated that it will take another 286 years to close gaps in legal protection and remove existing discriminatory laws [5].

## 7. Conclusions

This introductory chapter provides a snapshot of gender (in)equalities at global and regional levels and highlights that gender equality remains as an unfinished business across the world. The slow and incremental progress that has been made over the last decade indicates that change is possible. This change would require various but interdependent strategies, including strengthening legal reforms, transformations of traditional gender roles, scaling up gender-responsive public service delivery, quotas for women in representation and other global, national or local level strategies that have the potential to transform the lives of women for the better.

## **Author details**

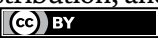
Feyza Bhatti

Faculty of Business, Girne American University Kyrenia, North Cyprus

\*Address all correspondence to: feyzabhatti@gau.edu.tr

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2024 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] World Economic Forum. Global gender gap report 2023. 2023. Available from: [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2023.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf)
- [2] World Bank. Gender statistics. 2024. Available from: <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/gender-statistics>
- [3] UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Data for the sustainable development goals. 2024. Available from: <https://uis.unesco.org/>
- [4] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. SDG global database. 2024. Available from: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>
- [5] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The progress on the sustainable development goals: The gender snapshot 2023. 2023. Available from: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/gender-snapshot/2023/GenderSnapshot.pdf>
- [6] UNICEF and WHO. Joint database on skilled attendant at birth. 2023. Available from: <http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat/en/>
- [7] UNICEF. The child marriage data portal. 2024. Available from: <https://childmarriedata.org/>
- [8] United Nations Population Division. Family planning indicators. 2022. Available from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data/family-planning-indicators>
- [9] Ferrant G, Pesando LM, Nowacka K. Unpaid care work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes. 2014. Available from: [https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid:care\\_work.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid:care_work.pdf)
- [10] OECD. OECD data explorer. 2024. Available from: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org/>
- [11] UN Women. Women count SDG indicator dashboard. 2024. Available from: <https://data.unwomen.org/>

## Chapter 2

# Gender Inequality in South Asia: Tracing Impediments to SDG 5 of UN Sustainable Development Goals

*Ziya Hasan*

### Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) of the United Nations are the blueprints for a prosperous and sustainable future for the whole world. The SDG 5, entitled, ‘to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’, is one of its important goals. In South Asia, women have always been ostracized and remained underprivileged in accessing their rights due to gender inequality. Therefore, the study traces the entrenched problems and impediments to gender equality and explores the extent, range, and accessibility of women’s rights in the South Asian region, which supports the quest for women’s gender equality in achieving the United Nations SDGs. Qualitatively, findings reveal the abysmal position of South Asian region typifying low echelons for gender equality in every sphere. Hence, it focuses on suggesting efficacious measures such as improving the social and political rights of women and their full and effective inclusion in the mainstream that can help in women’s advancement and to curb gender inequalities that give significant impetus for the sustainable development of the region.

**Keywords:** gender inequality, South Asia, sustainable development, SDG 5, women’s rights

### 1. Introduction

Gender inequality is an inexorable problem in many parts of the world, including South Asian region. In South Asia, gender inequality is caustically entrenched in the customs and cultures of the societies that affect all aspects of women’s lives. In many parts of the region, women are sternly subjected to discriminatory practices and norms that limit their access to social life, i.e., education, healthcare, and economic opportunities and including political participation. This has significant repercussions on women’s health, well-being, and decision-making power. According to the Global Gender Gap Index (2022), ‘South Asia ranks the lowest, with only 62.3% of the gender gap closed in 2022. This lack of progress since the last edition extends the wait to close the gender gap to 197 years, due to a broad stagnation in gender parity scores across most countries in

*the region*. [1]: p. 6<sup>1</sup> Despite the significant progress in gender perspectives through equality made in recent years over the world, women in the South Asian region still face significant challenges in accessing their rights and realizing gender equality. In this respect, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) provide a prominent framework to address this issue and promote gender equality globally. SDG 5, in particular, focuses on achieving ‘gender equality and empowering all women and girls’. However, accomplishing this goal requires a deeper understanding of the challenges and impediments women face in the region. This study is a review article based on qualitative method studies to provide an overview of gender inequality in South Asia by reviewing the current status of accessibility of women’s rights through gaging secondary data including existing empirical studies on South Asia. It also seeks to identify strategies for promoting gender equality and providing policymakers with useful information on the key legal gaps and inconsistencies that have undermined efforts to address gender inequality, particularly in light of the constitutional guarantees, for developing efficacious policy measures to reduce gender disparity in achieving SDG 5.

Since the twenty-first century, the notion of ‘gender equality’ is strongly emphasized in the area of development. The process of development of any country cannot be imagined without adopting the principle of gender equality. Ignoring about half of the population in the mainstreaming process is an injustice to them. ‘Gender Equality’ as defined by United Nations Population Fund, is ‘Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents; share responsibility for the home and children and are completely free from coercion, intimidation and gender-based violence both at work and at home’ [2].

Several retrospective studies [3–10] proved gender equality is a key to development. Gender equality and development have a symbiotic bond. If a country improves its gender equality indicator, it progresses in every development sphere. Therefore, it is evident that a constructive relationship between development and gender equality, e.g., reducing poverty, improving access to good health, decision-making, and education, creates enormous opportunities for women. Gender inequality has been regarded as one of the leading barriers to the sustainable development of a society, country, or region at large. Discrimination based on gender can have a negative influence on the health, education, social, and economic prospects of the next generation. When gender norms are first internalized during childhood and adolescence, gender disparity first manifests.

## **2. Gender inequality in South Asia: problems and impediments**

South Asia is strategically a significant geographic unit and sub-region in the Asian continent, covering a land area of about 5.13 million km<sup>2</sup> [11]. It is a region of diverse people, cultures, traditions, beliefs, and religions that results in a complex social structure which further plays a major role in defining women’s roles. It consists

---

<sup>1</sup> The Global Gender Gap Index scales the current state and evolution of gender parity transversely these four key dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.



of eight countries viz.: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. The total population of South Asia is 1.94 billion, with women constituting about 48.8% and males constituting 51% approximately [11]. The Global Gender Gap Index (2022) placed Bangladesh at 71st rank out of 153 countries with an overall score of 0.714 and 1st in the South Asian region, followed by Nepal, which stands at 96th rank with a 0.692 score, Sri Lanka stands at 110th rank with a 0.0670 score, Maldives stands at 117th rank with a 0.648 score, Bhutan stands at 126th with a 0.637 score, India stands at 135th rank with a 0.629, Pakistan stands at 145th rank with a 0.564 score, and Afghanistan stands with 146th rank with 0.435 [1]. The status of women in this region is extremely subordinated to men. Gender inequality remains pervasive in South Asia, with women facing discrimination and exclusion from economic, social, and political opportunities. The root causes of gender inequality impeding equality in the region are complex and multifaceted, including cultural norms, patriarchal attitudes, and social and economic structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and exclusion. Patriarchal social standards make it harder for women, especially adolescent girls, to participate in family and community decision-making. The cultural and social norms often limit women’s mobility and autonomy and restrict their access to decision-making and leadership roles. Their capacity to seek the realization of their rights to health, education, and public and economic participation is diminished as a result. They are extremely dependent on men in all spheres, whether socio-economic or political.

Women in the South Asian region are severely underrepresented in political and public life. As depicted in **Table 1**, only Nepal provides a significant share of women in political participation, whilst India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka show lower participation of women in political sphere. During the previous government in Afghanistan, women’s participation was relatively better, whilst it has now restricted women’s participation in public life. Further, the report ‘Women in Politics: 2023’ [12] explicates dismal political representation, with women holding only 19% of parliamentary seats in South Asia. Only Maldives stands out in the top fifty positions, which ranked 42nd

South Asian Country	Women in National Parliament (2022)	Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 100,000 live births) (2020)	Literacy Rate for Female (age 15 and above) **	Labour Force Participation Rate for women (2022)
Afghanistan	27*	620	17%	19.8%*
Bangladesh	21%	123	72%	32.7%
Bhutan	17%	60	57%	40.6%
India	15%	103	66%	23.5%
Maldives	5%	57	98%	27.4%
Nepal	33%	174	60%	38.1%
Pakistan	20%	154	46%	23.3%
Sri Lanka	5%	29	92%	34.2%

Source: The World Bank, See: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/home>. \*As of year 2021.

\*\*Information is for different years as available on World Bank Data.

**Table 1.**  
 Significant indicators to measure gender inequality in South Asia.

with 33.3% women having cabinet seats with significant participation of women, followed by Nepal at 120th with 15.8% women, Bhutan at 156th with 10% women, Bangladesh at 158th with 10% women, Pakistan at 161st with 9.4% women, India at 171st with 6.7% women, and Sri Lanka at 182nd with 0% women cabinet. The nations are positioned on low ranks, which is a matter of great international concern and can be attributed to gender disparity, due to which women face major challenges and lower levels of political participation. It also reveals no country can be credited for having Women Speaker in Parliament, and only India and Nepal have women as heads of the state in the whole region.

Moreover, women in South Asia face a range of barriers to their rights and high rates of gender-based violence and discrimination in social life. Across South Asia, more than 37% of women have experienced intimate relationship violence during the recent worldwide coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, there are claims of an increase in sexual harassment and assault against women, both online and offline, as well as an increase in girl-child marriage in some cases [13]. In Sri Lanka, where women experience sexual harassment in busses and trains is reportedly 90% [14]. In South Asia, there is massive gender inequality in the home, institutions, and society that affects young girls and women. Unlike Bhutan and Nepal, most nations do not have laws against marital rape.

Further, high adolescent pregnancy rates and poor reproductive health for girls continue to be significant problems in this region, especially in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan, where the need for contraception is frequently unfulfilled. In Afghanistan, Nepal, and Pakistan (**Table 1**), maternal mortality is exceptionally high. Teenage girls are more prone to high maternal mortality in the region. By virtue of having the largest government health spending in the region, Maldives, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka have the good financial protection indicators. In Bhutan and Maldives, government is responsible for providing over 70% and 43% in Sri Lanka of the funding for health care whilst other parts of the region are still burdened with health care spending out-of-pocket or directly paid by households. Afghanistan and Bangladesh have notably high out-of-pocket spending percentages at 77% and 72%, respectively. This demonstrates how expensive health care is for households in these parts due to the inadequate government provision of healthcare services [15]. Evidence suggests that poverty, illiteracy, and social inequity support high rates of poor maternal and child health as vital factors in South Asia [16]. This elucidates the grave condition of maternal and child care in the region, which needs extra attention usually.

In the domain of education, access is frequently hampered by the interaction of gender and class for girls and women. Women and girls frequently experience the negative effects of inequality more acutely than do men and boys. Undeniably, due to lower-income countries, South Asian nations provide less governmental funding for education except for Bhutan, Nepal, and Maldives. According to a report, 3.37% of GDP is typically allocated to education in South Asian nations, the lowest proportion of any region and yet less than the global average of 4.8% [15]. This makes it more difficult for families and students to afford their education. As the facts reveal, females' education is sometimes viewed as a less valuable investment than that of males. The family would lose out financially if girls continued their studies in addition to having to pay school fees and other expenses. This gender disparity is probably caused by significant divergent gender roles that assign men and women to paid and unpaid domestic and care duties, respectively. Women have a greater burden of household chores in the whole region [17]. Some families see girls' education, especially education beyond

high school, as a sunk expense because many girls are expected to marry and prioritize raising children rather than entering the workforce. However, in some nations, e.g., Sri Lanka and Maldives, the gender gap in familial investment is significantly less pronounced. Maldives has some of the best outcomes in the region, with a nearly 100% literacy rate and primary school enrolment. The literacy rate of the South Asian region is 65% for females (age 15 and above) in which Afghanistan is the lowest, standing at 17%, followed by Pakistan with 46%, Bhutan with 57%, Nepal with 60%, India with 66%, Bangladesh with 72%, Sri Lanka with 92%, and Maldives with 98% [18].

Notwithstanding, girls are less likely to get secondary and higher education in the whole region, whilst Afghanistan does not allow girls to get an education after primary level since 2021 under Taliban rule. Hitherto, from 2001 to 2018, girls' enrolment at the primary level improved from zero to four out of ten students, reminiscently, the female literacy rate also increased from 17 to 30% in Afghanistan [19]. This is highly an abysmal situation for women in Afghanistan, where they are banned from getting their basic fundamental right to education.

In the economic sphere, women's labour force participation rates (LFPR) fell from 35 to 30% between 1990 and 2013, creating a gender participation gap in the workforce of 50%. As shown in **Table 1**, Afghanistan, India, Maldives, and Pakistan have lower echelons for LFPR according to recent statistics. South Asia's declining LFPR for women is primarily attributable to decreased participation rates in India as a result of younger women continuing their education and a general lack of employment prospects for women. Further, there is a 33% gender wage discrepancy (compared to a global 24% imbalance). The wage discrepancies between men and women are more extensive in urban than rural areas: urban women made 42% less than men, compared to 28% less in rural areas. Rural areas have lower-than-average incomes for both men and women, and rural women are at the bottom of the earnings scale in absolute terms. In South Asia, agriculture continues to be the primary industry for employment, with 71% of women and 47% of men employed in it. Almost all employment in the agriculture sector is informal. In the whole region, female health and care workers are frequently paid less than the minimum wage or are even hired on a voluntary basis, as is the case with Anganwadi childcare workers in India. Analytically, women in South Asia report doing unpaid care and household work at rates ten times greater than those of men in Pakistan, close to seven times greater in India, and close to three times greater in Bangladesh [20]. In Bhutan, overall unemployment has significantly decreased by 0.2%, whilst women's unemployment has increased by 0.1% during 2021 [21]. Hence, women in South Asia are less likely than men to take part in the labour force, and when they do, they are often relegated to low-paying and insecure jobs.

### **3. Legal rights of women in South Asia**

Constitutionally, South Asian nations follow the principle of equality and non-discrimination<sup>2</sup>. Women are comprehensively provided with several rights to access all spheres of life without being discriminated. The Constitutions of South Asian States explicitly guarantee women's rights as a fundamental right, and reaffirm the

<sup>2</sup> See: Article 7, Constitution of Bhutan, 2008; Article 27, 28, Constitution of Bangladesh 1972; Article 14, 15 The Constitution of India, 1950; Article 16, 20, Constitution of Maldives 2008; Constituent Assembly Secretariat, Preamble, Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article 25 to 27 Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973; Article 12, Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1978.

education, health, employment, equal pay for equal work, right to safe motherhood and reproductive rights, social security and property rights, and the inclusive sharing of women in all walks of life. Unambiguously guaranteeing women equal rights, the Constitutions also give the state the authority to enact effective policies that optimistically empower women in the socio-economic and public spheres<sup>3</sup>.

Undeniably, women are given the right to vote and contest elections at local and national levels to ensure political participation. Bangladesh guarantees 14% of parliamentary seats for women [22, 23]. Pakistan is also one of those nations that have benefitted women by giving certain electoral reservations to women at both local and national parliamentary levels [24, 25]. It provides 17% and 15% of seats to the lower house and Senate to be reserved for women, respectively [23, 25]. The new Constitution of Nepal guarantees imperatively 33% of seats for women at the national and state levels and about 40% at local government, strengthening the reliability of women's political life at all levels of the three-tier government system under Article 176 (9), 215 (4), and 216 (4) of the Constitution of Nepal [23, 26, 27]. Since India has only guaranteed 33% reservation for women at the local level, i.e., Panchayat Raj Institutions through the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act 1993 and also, some Indian states empower women with 50% reservation at the local panchayat level. Lately, on September 29, 2023, the Indian government also assented to the Women Reservation Bill that was pending before the parliament for a prolonged period, which may now grab 33% of reservations for women in parliamentary seats in upcoming elections.

Notwithstanding, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka behold no quota system for women's political representation at any level [23]. Further, in Afghanistan, women had equal rights to men under the Constitution of 2004. Even there was a significant reservation for women in national political representation under Article 84 that ensured reservation of 27% of seats in the Lower House and 50% of seats in the House of Elders for women [23, 28]. However, since August 2021, after seizing power again, the Taliban rule has utterly constricted women from enjoying public life [29].

In addition, several laws, development strategies, plans, and programmes have also been implemented to promote women empowerment and protect women from various kinds of gender-based violence against women in various spheres within the adequate framework of a democratic polity, e.g., National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) 2020 in Bhutan [21], Joyeeta Onneshone Bangladesh in Bangladesh [30], Beti Bachao Beti Padhao in India [31], 2063 Amendment of Muluki Ain in Nepal (Marital rape law) [32], Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Bill in Pakistan [25], National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2023) in Sri Lanka [33], etc. Formally, legislative provisions and policies by abolishing inequalities, prohibiting gender discrimination, and introducing system of reservations for women to some extent, small but gains have been grasped; a slight percentage of women have been benefited from educational opportunities, become wealthier, and risen to high government positions. However, these legal initiatives are not well enough to change society based on a patriarchal structure. Indeed, gender inequality remains a significant challenge in South Asia, and efforts to address this problem require an all-encompassing strategy that considers the intricate social, economic, and cultural factors perpetuating gender-based discrimination and exclusion.

---

<sup>3</sup> See: Article 19, Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972; Article 15, 16, 19, 21, 39(a), 39(d), Constitution of India, 1950; Article 18, 38, 42, Constitution of Nepal, 2015; Article 32, 34 Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973; Article 27, Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1978.

#### **4. SDG 5 of the united nations sustainable development goals**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a 2030 Agenda of the United Nations. It is a crucial step en route for gender equality as the successor of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UN General Assembly approved the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on September 25, 2015, as a further 15 years extension of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000 and came into force on January 1, 2016. The SDGs have 17 goals and 169 targets, with a plan to achieve its aims by 2030. South Asia is a committed member of this comprehensive plan and very firm in accomplishing the objectives mentioned in the 2030 Plan for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goals assimilate 'gender equality and women empowerment' as one of their significant seventeen goals under SDG 5. It is an instrumental goal rather than an intrinsic, peremptorily, without achieving SDG 5 other goals will not be accomplished [31].

Furthermore, SDG 5 aims to realize and ensure the end of 'discrimination' against women and girls universally. Making an end to all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not just a rudimentary step to human rights, instead, it is optimistically necessary for the virtuous future of societies and humanity. Communities in the world will benefit as a whole if half of the humans get access to education, reasonable health care, and active inclusion in the social, economic, and political spheres. Gender equality is ubiquitously important to achieving the Agenda (2030) for Sustainable Development. Therefore, SDG 5 aims to ensure women's inclusion in the mainstream and end all forms of discrimination against women everywhere. It envisions the creation of a world where every single woman and girl could be able to access full enjoyment of their socio-economic and political empowerment and the equality of sex and where the universal respect of human dignity and human rights could be realized, is a great step for the betterment of women development.

Following are the targets implicated under Goal 5:

- Target 1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere;
- Target 2: Eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls in all contexts, both public and private;
- Target 3: Eliminate all harmful practices against females;
- Target 4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work;
- Target 5: Ensure women's full and effective participation in political, economic, and public life;
- Target 6: Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights;
- Target A: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources;
- Target B: Improve ICT (information and communications technology) and other enabling technologies to support women's empowerment.

Country	Rank	SDG index score	SDG 5 status
Afghanistan	147	52.49	Stagnating
Bangladesh	104	64.22	Stagnating
Bhutan	70	70.49	Moderately improving
India	121	60.32	Stagnating
Maldives	67	71.03	Stagnating
Nepal	98	66.18	Moderately improving
Pakistan	125	59.34	Stagnating
Sri Lanka	76	70.03	Stagnating

*Source: Sustainable Development Report 2022. <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/>.*

**Table 2.**  
*Status of South Asia for SDG 5.*

- Target C: Adopt and reinforce sensible laws and policies to promote gender parity and women’s and girls’ empowerment at all levels [34].

With these nine targets, South Asia has also identified vital implied indicators to monitor progress in achieving this goal.

The Sustainable Development Report 2022 [35], which provides countries with progress information towards accomplishing the Agenda 2030 and embosses the conspicuous spheres that need significant attention, has revealed the despondent condition of South Asia concerning SDG 5. Most countries have been stagnant towards Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (2030), which shows their inefficaciousness in making ‘gender equality’ an uppermost priority of the nation’s development. By contrast, Bhutan and Nepal, where the status is improving comparatively to other nations of South Asia, however, have also been facing challenges like women poverty, abuse, violence, trafficking, maternal health, sanitation, and hygiene, women and girls in vulnerable situations, etc., to accomplish the SDGs’ Goal 5. Countries like Maldives and Sri Lanka, as demonstrated in **Table 2**, are far better than others in gaining upper ranks for overall Sustainable Development Goals, notwithstanding lackadaisical in mitigating gender inequality and endeavoring to make women equal and empowered people as guaranteed by the law. Hence, South Asia is still tackling to transpire itself towards gender equality and eradicate the evil social practice of gender inequality entrenched in the roots of South Asian society that has affected all spheres of life of girls and women.

## 5. Conclusion

The Constitutions of South Asian nations outline their aspiration to establish an inclusive and equitable society constructed on the principles of equality and non-discrimination with the exception of the current Afghanistan rule. Recognizing the status and role of women in nation building, South Asian nations have taken several legal and policy measures for gender equality as the underlying cause of women’s rights. South Asia is also a signatory of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979, whose sole purpose of coming into

existence is to 'end discrimination' against women globally. Unequivocally, their commitment to women's rights is enshrined in the laws of the land. The general principles regarding protecting women from all forms of discrimination and promoting their equal participation are notably appraisable in the region. Over the years, there has been a conspicuous development in legal frameworks for women's equal participation in all spheres and their empowerment due to the consistent improvement in pertinent legal and policy backing along with political commitments in the region, however, in actual ground implementation, is inconsequential to accomplish the goal of SDG 5 at global echelons. Hence, gender perspective must be included in every aspect of South Asia's development to advance women's value and empowerment.

Despite making significant contributions to global economies through various activities, women in South Asia remain amongst the world's most economically disadvantaged groups. They are often disproportionately discriminated against in the labour market, contending with low-skilled and informal jobs. They remained outside the ambit of financial inclusion, ensuing in poor access to formal banking systems and credit. Predominantly, women in India and Pakistan who are abridged by social and cultural barriers that force them to bear the brunt of unpaid work, preventing them from investing in their own well-being, and inhibiting their pursuit of economic opportunities, must be given prime importance at ground level. Further, governments must strongly emphasize the topographies of gender equality to escalate pro-poor growth strategies regarding women, as poverty delineates an obstruction to women coming into the mainstream. Women's participation in economic activity should be advanced that generally depends on maintaining education, training, health, and enabling socio-economic environment. South Asia has observed significant but not sufficient changes, such as in Nepal, Maldives, over the years in relation to socio-economic condition of women. Efficacious strategies and efforts are still needed to improve women economic participation in India and Pakistan. Government must include a more effective and inclusive approach whilst adopting economic policies to increase gender parity in economic sphere. Giving women equal rights on land and property, access to technology and internet is also vital to their inclusive development.

Explicitly, women health also needs significant acceleration in efforts to cope with gender inequality in the South Asian region. Moreover, the region is severely prone to women insecurity and gender-based violence that also intersect to other spheres of advancement. Hence women's protection from all kind of insecurity, crimes against women, socially evil practices should be addressed adequately and effectively. To address the discriminatory behavior towards women, accountability in current laws is required for the protection of women's rights. Awareness and encouragement must be given at family level so that they support their girl and women to participate in economic sphere in the whole South Asian region.

India took a long way to guarantee the reservation of one-third of seats for females in legislative assemblies and Lok Sabha due to the apathetic attitude of the major parties represented in the parliament. However, it still failed to provide quota to the women of all marginalised sections in the newly enacted Women Reservation Act 2023, i.e., OBCs and minority women, which has left women of these sections effectively unrepresented in the national politics. In Bhutan and Sri Lanka, there is necessity to minimize the experience of gender inequality that is significantly affecting women's political sharing. Conspicuously, Afghanistan is positioned to the region's and even world's lowest echelon of gender parity, hence, it should scrap

discriminatory provisions against women and adopt women-inclusive legal measures and policies to enhance their participation in the country's development. In addition, civil society organizations in the region must also be given strong support from the governments that can play a critical role in advocating for women's rights and promoting gender equality. South Asia must embrace affirmative and optimistic elements for the mainstreaming of women in all domains, making it more advanced and progressive to fully realize SDG 5.


### **Author details**

Ziya Hasan  
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, UP, India

\*Address all correspondence to: [hasanziya9@gmail.com](mailto:hasanziya9@gmail.com)

### **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 



## References

- [1] World Economic Forum. Global Gender Gap Report 2022. Geneva: WEM; 2020. Available from: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021/in-full/economy-profiles> [Retrieved: June 6, 2023]
- [2] UNFPA. Gender Equality. 2018. Available from: <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-equality#readmore-expand> [Retrieved: April 14, 2023]
- [3] Bhasin K. Understanding Gender. New Delhi: Kali for Women; 2003. pp. 44-45
- [4] Rai SM. Gender and the Political Economy of Development. Cambridge: Polity Press; 2002
- [5] Razavi S. Gendered poverty and well-being: Introduction. In: Gendered Poverty and Well-Being. London: Oxford University Press; 2000. pp. 1-30
- [6] Momsen J. Gender and Development. London: Routledge; 2019
- [7] Quisumbing AR. Household Decisions, Gender, and Development: A Synthesis of Recent Research. Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute; 2003. p. 274
- [8] Kabeer N, Sweetman C. Introduction: Gender and inequalities. *Gender and Development*. 2015;23(2):185-188
- [9] Kabeer N. Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1. *Gender and Development*. 2005;13(1):13-24. DOI: 10.1080/13552070512331332273
- [10] Hashemi SM, Schuler SR, Riley AP. Rural credit programs and women's empowerment in Bangladesh. *World Development*. 1996;24(4):635-653
- [11] The World Bank. 2022. Available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=8S> [Retrieved: April 14, 2023]
- [12] Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women. Women in Politics: 2023. IPU and UN Women; 2023. Available from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digitalibrary/publications/2023/03/women-inpolitics-map-2023#:~:text=Publication%20year%3A%202023&text=Data%20show%20that%20women%20are,cent%20of%20Members%20of%20Parliament>
- [13] UNICEF. Gender Equality. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/gender-equality#:~:text=In%20South%20Asia%2C%20more%20than,lockdown%20and%20social%20isolation%20measures> [Retrieved: April 14, 2023]
- [14] Sri Lanka Brief. 90% of Women have been Subjected to Sexual Harassment on Buses and trains in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka Brief; 2017. Available from: <https://srilankabrief.org/90-of-women-have-beensubjected-to-sexual-harassment-on-buses-andtrains-in-sri-lanka/>
- [15] Bloch C. Social spending in South Asia—an overview of government expenditure on health, education and social assistance. Brasília and Katmandu: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund. Research Report No :43; 2020. pp. 7-9
- [16] Sheikh SM, Loney T. Is educating girls the best investment for South Asia? Association between female education and fertility choices in South Asia: A systematic review of the literature. *Frontiers in Public Health*. 2018;60:172. DOI: 10.3389/fpubh.2018.00172

- [17] United Nations Children's Fund. Gender Counts: A Quantitative Assessment of Gender Inequality and its Impact on Children and Adolescents in South Asia. Bangkok: UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific; 2019
- [18] The World Bank. 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.FE.ZS?locations=8S> [Retrieved: June 5, 2022]
- [19] UNESCO. UNESCO Sounds a Warning on What is at Stake for Education in Afghanistan. 2023. Available from: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-sounds-warning-what-stake-education-afghanistan> [Retrieved: May 14, 2023]
- [20] UN Women. Progress of the World's Women: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights. 2015. Available from: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2015/POWW-2015-FactSheet-SouthAsia-en.pdf> [Retrieved: April 14, 2023]
- [21] Committee on the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. (CEDAW): Tenth Periodic Report Submitted by Bhutan Under Article 18 of the Convention, due in 2020. Report No. CEDAW/C/BTN/10. 2020. file:///C:/Users/Lenovo/Downloads/N2274317.pdf [Retrieved: May 5, 2023]
- [22] UN Women. Women's Effective Participation and Decision making in Public Life, Elimination of Violence, for Achieving Gender Equality, and Empowerment of All Women and Girls. 2021. Available from: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEA/Docs/Publications/2021/12/bd-Advocacy-Brief-s.pdf> [Retrieved: May 5, 2023]
- [23] Jha J. Nepal Leads South Asia in Women's Political Representation, The Diplomat. 2016. Available from: <https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/nepal-leads-south-asia-in-womens-political-representation/> [Retrieved: May 5, 2023]
- [24] Khan FS. Women, politics and opposition. 2021. [www.thenews.com.pk](http://www.thenews.com.pk) [Retrieved: February 4, 2021]
- [25] Abbas A, Muneer L. Women empowerment in South Asia: Role of women in development of Pakistan. International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies. 2019;6(2):42-49
- [26] Mapping Progress on Women's Rights in Nepal. Available from: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEA/Docs/Publications/2020/03/np-Mapping-progress-on-womens-rights.pdf> [Retrieved: May 5, 2023]
- [27] Yadav P. Do political quotas work? Gender quotas and women's political participation in Nepal European Journal of Politics and Gender. 2023; (early view): 1-19. (published online ahead of print 2023). DOI: 10.1332/251510821X16746560835644 [Retrieved June 7, 2023]
- [28] Sultan M. Afghan Constitution a Partial Victory for Women. Women's eNews. 2004. Available from: <https://womensenews.org/2004/01/afghanconstitution-partial-victory-women/> [Retrieved May 5, 2023]
- [29] Jazeera A. Taliban Names Deputy Ministers, Double Down on all-male cabinet. Qatar: Al Jazeera; 21 Sept 2021. Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/21/taliban-name-deputy-ministers-double-down-on-all-male-cabinet> [Retrieved May 30, 2023]

[30] Dhaka Tribune. 29 Women get the Joyeeta Award in Five Districts. Dhaka Tribune; 2018. Available from: <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2018/12/09/29-women-get-the-joyeeta-award-in-five-districts> [Retrieved May 30, 2023]

[31] Hasan Z, Parveen G. Gender equality and empowerment of women in India: Mapping through UN sustainable development goals. *Studies in Indian Place Names*. 2020;**40**(3):1297-1298

[32] Bhattarai AM. *The Landmark Decisions of Supreme Court on NJA-Nepal on Gender Justice*. Nepal: National Judicial Academy; 2010

[33] UNFPA Sri Lanka. *National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. 2023. Available from: <https://srilanka.unfpa.org/en/publications/national-policy-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment#:~:text=Sri%20Lanka%20launched%20its%20%22National,support%20of%20other%20UN%20Agencies> [Retrieved: May 30, 2023]

[34] United Nations. *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. from UN Sustainable Development Goals: Knowledge Platform. 2015. Available from: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> [Retrieved: September 18, 2019]

[35] Jeffrey Sachs J et al. *Sustainable Development Report 2022: From Crisis to Sustainable Development: The SDGs as Roadmap to 2030 and Beyond*. UK: Cambridge University Press, UK; 2022



## Chapter 3

# Whose SDGs and Who's Making Them Happen?: Insights from Women in Uganda

*Shelley Jones*

### Abstract

This Feminist Participatory Action Research project with a cohort of women in Uganda explored how they understood the SDGs in relationship to their lived realities. A postcolonial feminist lens was used to engage with critical ethnographic policy theoretical perspective to consider the research questions: 1) Which SDGs are the most important to you? 2) What do unrealized SDGs look like in your context? 3) What would realize goals look like and what would it take to achieve them?; 4) Who is responsible for achieving the SDGs? Participants had had no prior knowledge of the SDGs but once introduced to them the participants ranked SDG1: No Poverty and SDG4: Quality Education as the highest in importance to them, followed by SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG: 10: Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production. Participants expressed the implications of unrealized SDGs in their lives as well as the transformative change realized SDGs would bring. They also shared their thoughts on how the SDGs could be achieved in their context. The study recommends that those who are meant to benefit most from the SDGs be consulted on how to achieve them.

**Keywords:** sustainable development goals, Uganda, feminist participatory action research, women's empowerment, ethnographic policy research, longitudinal study

### 1. Introduction

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are meant to "...[end] poverty and other deprivations ...[through] strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth" [1]. Presumably, those who are most impacted by poverty, inequality, and injustices should be prioritized within all elements—including development, implementation, accountability, assessment, and revised strategies—of the SDGs. However, are the people whose quality of life and opportunities would be most improved by the SDGs even aware they exist? Have they been consulted on what achievement of the goals might look like for them and how they might be achieved? Have they experienced positive changes they can attribute to the SDGs? What do they perceive as obstacles towards achieving the SDGs?

Drawing upon stages four (2018) and six (2022–2023)—of a longitudinal study (2004) with a cohort of women in Uganda who attended secondary school together,

this chapter discusses which SDGs they believed to be unrealized, what the realization of these goals would look like, what they believe is required to move from unrealized to realized goals, and who they believe is responsible for working towards the realization of the goals. The research questions were: (1) Which SDGs are the most important to you? (2) What do unrealized goals look like in your context? (3) What would realize goals look like and what would it take to achieve them?; (4) Who is responsible for working towards the realization of these goals?

## 2. The SDGs

The SDGs are intended to unite nations of the world in a collaborative undertaking to

*end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. We resolve also to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity, and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities (Agenda 2030, p. 3)*

Given that the goals seek to *achieve* equality, social justice, and a healthy planet, the Agenda is responding to the reality that serious, deprivations and inequalities exist throughout the world.

Many of these deprivations (such as lack of adequate food, shelter, clean water, protection, education, and health care) are not simply “unfortunate circumstances”, but in fact constitute violations of basic human rights. Thus, it would seem to be the priority focus of the goals, demanding prioritized, and collaborative action for their immediate remediation. However, problematically, the SDGs have been conceived as “development goals” as opposed to human rights goals:

*[there is a] deep tension between presenting moral ambitions in the language of (human) rights and presenting them in the language of (development) goals. The development goals discourse invites an incremental approach to overcome deprivations: we have a certain distance to traverse, and so we set off towards our destination and approach it step-by-step. The human rights discourse, by contrast, suggests that deprivations must be ended right away. ([2], p. 2)*

The kind of ambitious transformation necessary to achieve the SDGs and respond to human rights violations would require a radical shift in global power structures – economic and political – and a redistribution of wealth so that the rights of all human beings could be met [3–5]. Yet, consideration and confrontation of historical as well as extant phenomena, practices, and attitudes – such as colonialism, unfair trade, exploitation by multinationals of labour and resources of poorer countries, “tied aid”, problematic and rapacious development programs, and crippling debt-servicing by developing countries – that have contributed to and/or caused extreme poverty, destruction of culture, and desecration of the environment in some countries whilst privileging globally dominant cultures, languages, knowledges, and over others are absent from Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Instead, the “...big countries, international financial institutions, transnational corporations and even international NGOs that

have produced and reproduced inequalities in income, wealth and power at national and global levels [are] cause the very problems the SDGs are trying to solve” ([5], p. 19; see also [6]). As Esquivel [3] states, “...power relations are the big elephant in the room of Agenda 2030” ([3], p. 12).

Furthermore, despite claiming to be a “supremely ambitious and transformational vision” for the world, The Agenda and the SDGs have no teeth. The Agenda is a non-binding intergovernmental agreement reliant upon the voluntary implementation of the SDGs. The “how” and “who” with respect to responsibility for implementation, resourcing, and accountability are glaringly absent [2–5]. Without a clear designation of responsibilities for fulfilling specific actions on the path to achieving the SDGs, they are bound to flounder. Unsurprisingly, the recent assessment of progress towards the SDGs is lamentable, as conveyed by the UN Secretary of State in the SDG Progress Report Special Edition (May 2023):

*It's time to sound the alarm. At the mid-way point on our way to 2030, the SDGs are in deep trouble. A preliminary assessment of the roughly 140 targets with data shows only about 12% are on track; close to half, though showing progress, are moderately or severely off track and some 30% have either seen no movement or regressed below the 2015 baseline ([7], p. 2).*

Lack of accountability suggests that dominant actors within the neoliberal, global capitalist economic system that perpetuate and exacerbate global inequality eschew concessions of their power and privilege that would be necessary in order to realize the vision of Agenda 2030.

Another criticism of the goals is the lack of attention that has been given to gender-specific issues that render women and girls disproportionately disadvantaged, oppressed, and marginalized. The causes, nature of, and consequences of poverty for girls and women and the particular ways in which poverty intersects with opportunities, status, societal participation, education, and power and has been shaped by colonial histories as well as traditional, patriarchal cultures have not been addressed in the SDGs [3, 5]. Although SDG 5: Gender Equality speaks broadly to the need for gender justice, it does not openly articulate ways in which common themes of gender inequality prevalent throughout the world need to be addressed. Furthermore, even though there is a reference to the need for “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” (Target 5.5):

*there is a clear problem with this target which mean it will prove to be empty rhetoric. Women’s full and effective participation and leadership are not only dependent on women’s own effort and interest in coming to the national and international negotiating tables and having equal opportunities to men to participate...but also on access to the resources that act as preconditions for participation (money, time, confidence, and education among them), and on the existence of concrete mechanisms for promoting women’s participation [3, 8].*

### 3. The Ugandan context

Uganda shares a poverty pattern of colonialism, indebtedness to international financial institutions (e.g., the International Monetary Fund (IMF)), Structural Adjustment Programs (conditions placed by IMF and the World Bank on countries

with outstanding loans to liberalize the economy, privatize, and reduce the role of the state in the economy, across sectors, including healthcare and education [9–14]), aid-dependency and “tied aid” which “can increase the costs of a development project by as much as 15 to 30 percent” [15], and multinational “plundering” of resources [16, 17] as well as committing human rights and environmental crimes [18] that are shared by so many other LICs.

Uganda was a British Protectorate from 1894 to 1962. After “gaining independence” in 1962, Uganda accrued enormous debt from loans through the IMF and due to global market upheavals during the 1980s [13] was forced to adhere to spending priorities and cuts (in such areas as health, education, and other social programs) through Structural Adjustment Programs to try and repay them. Although, like many other African and Low-Income Countries (LICs) throughout the world, Uganda is rich in resources such as gold, oil, tungsten, tin, copper, limestone, and iron [19], and it is considered the “bread basket of Africa” because of its fertile lands and good growing climate for crops, yet it remains a LIC and is one of the 39 Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) [20]. As of March 2023, Uganda’s Outstanding Purchases and Loans (SDR) amounted to 812.25 million USD [21]. These globally-centred economic issues as well as state governance issues (ref) have contributed enormously to the persistent poverty experienced by the majority of Uganda’s citizens:

*Poverty is a significant challenge in Uganda, and natural resource use and exploitation has a significant impact on the densely populated country. A majority of the population still face a lack of education, health services, and poor living standards ([22], n.p.)*

Amidst these various challenges and lingering legacies, Uganda adopted the SDGs in 2015 and has purportedly been “steadfast in its efforts to realize the aspirations of her people” [23]. Aligned with the “human rights” foundation of the Agenda, Uganda is a signatory to many international documents committed to upholding human rights such as: The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified in 1987), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified in 1995), and The Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified in 1990). As stated in the Government of Uganda White Paper [24]: “...the provision of shelter, clothing, education, health care, freedom of expression and communication, the citizens’ right to property and to control adequately and benefit from the products of their labour...and rule of law for all citizens” as basic human rights for all Ugandan citizens (p. 6) and in the Uganda Vision 2040: “Ugandans aspire to live and work in a peaceful, secure, harmonious and stable country, and at peace with its neighbors, where the rule of law prevails and respect for fundamental human rights is observed” ([25], p. 9).

As part of its commitment to human rights, Uganda has also made explicit commitments to gender equality: it is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified in 1985), has a Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, and has developed policies such as the National Gender Policy (2007), and the Gender in Education Sector Policy (2016). Yet, gender inequality remains hugely problematic in Uganda in multifarious areas – girls and women suffer from a lack of the same opportunities for education, employment, wages, and freedom of movement, as well as from domestic violence, sexual abuse, child marriage and pregnancy, and poverty. With respect to SDG monitoring processes for SDG 5: Gender Equality, “As of [D]ecember 2020, only 42.6% of



indicators needed to monitor the SDGs from a gender perspective were available, with gaps in key areas..." [26].

As Ugandan economist Dr. John Ddumba-Ssentamu [27] remarked, "One of the more underappreciated aspects of any sustainable development agenda is the nation's collective mindset. It's individuals, communities, and institutions who build the necessary confidence to pursue complex and challenging solutions to their problems" (n.p.).

#### **4. Theoretical framework**

Although Agenda 2030 and the SDGs constitute a "shared blueprint" and "plan of action" [1] and are not policies per se, this study used a postcolonial feminist lens to engage with critical ethnographic policy theoretical perspectives to explore how the participants read and understood the SDGs in relationship to their lived realities. This theoretical approach is germane to understanding the impact of the SDGs and the Agenda with respect to the lives of those who are meant to benefit from them.

Postcolonial feminism acknowledges the diverse, multiple, and heterogeneous contexts and experiences of gender inequality (and all inequality) constructed and situated within cultural, economic, historical and geopolitical realms, and identifies, exposes, and challenges the colonial and patriarchal structures of power and dominance that have caused and perpetuate inequality [5, 28–31]. Postcolonial feminism insists that researchers and scholars – especially white, Western, and feminist researchers and scholars – acknowledge their own relational positionality with respect to intersections of power and privilege and commit to authentic representation of the participants' voices as well as the limitations that arise when representing the voices whose positionalities are fundamentally different – historically, geographically, economically, socially, culturally, and politically – than theirs. With this attention and commitment to positionality, there is the potential to support a global feminist project that unites the interests of feminists worldwide to work towards equality and well-being for all: "Feminist solidarity becomes possible when First World feminists can use the experiences and perspectives of the poorest women in the world to envision, and collaborate with them in producing, a just society" ([31], pp. 235–244).

A critical ethnographic approach to policy research seeks to gain understanding into the intersectional complexities of individuals' lives as well as possible shared experiences and how/if policies effectively respond to them in order to help individuals overcome and remove barriers and expose power differentials that perpetuate injustices: "...[there is] emphasis on relations of power, on cultural practices that affect policy interpretations, and on sustained engagement with residents in a local setting" ([32], p. 175). Ethnographic policy research is also highly participatory and oriented around the lived experiences of individuals [32]: "Ethnography can bring a 'critical' contribution to policy studies, not only by furnishing information that cannot be obtained with other methods, but also by challenging the taken-for-grantedness at work in, and (re)produced by, public policies" ([33], p. 463).

Combined, research that combines postcolonial, feminist and critical ethnographic approaches to policy analysis considers policies (or similar documents/directives) by exploring how they have or have not impacted the lives of those they are primarily intended to benefit and if they have merit and are well-aligned to real situations [33, 34].

## **5. Methodology**

This longitudinal study employs an ethnographical, postcolonial Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) methodological approach. Ethnographic inquiry investigates the complex layers of lived experiences of participants where their contextualized “emic” (insider) knowledge informs that of “etic” (outsider) researcher to inform understanding of relevance, effectiveness, and evaluation of policy [35]. Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) methodology, which is a de-colonizing approach that positions participants as experts of their own contexts and acknowledges their experiences and insights as essential to explore and address the issue under investigation [36–38] and taking action to bring about positive change in their lives [39, 40].

An ethnographic, postcolonial, feminist methodology seeks out and contemplates complex intersections of social, economic, cultural, and political factors and influences – locally, regionally, and globally – both to acknowledge divergent knowledges and experiences as well as to identify patterns and themes that prevail within and across diverse contexts [5]. Aligned with Mohanty’s [41] assertion that there is an “...urgent political necessity of forming strategic coalitions across class, race, and national boundaries” (p. 61), an ethnographical, postcolonial FPAR methodology offers fruitful, respectful, collaborative, and meaningful ways that researchers and participants can work together collaboratively to understand topics under consideration. An ethnographic, postcolonial, FPAR research approach requires, foremost, a relationship of trust and reciprocity and acknowledgement of positionality (and what that means in terms of power, privilege, vulnerability, and incentive). Through reflection and discussion of challenges and injustices, opportunities arise for imagining ways to reconstruct the nature of systemic oppression and inequality and work towards a more just society [42].

## **6. Positionality**

As a white, female researcher from a High-Income Country (Canada), I acknowledge, reflect upon, and seek to understand myriad ways in which neoliberal and colonial systems and ideologies have both benefited me whilst disadvantaging others. Intersections of race (whiteness), privilege, and social location position me with the potential to have more power, voice, influence, and opportunities than women whose positionalities are impacted by intersections of, for example, racialization, extreme poverty, exploitation, discrimination, and oppression. I acknowledge my “etic” position with respect to the Ugandan women with whom I work live within conditions of extreme financial hardship as well as multiple forms of contextual gender-based disadvantage that I have not experienced. I cannot “know” what they know and have experienced; I can only relay as accurately as I can what they have shared with me, so that it can be shared more broadly. Their reflections upon, and insights into the realities of daily life in a low income, previously colonized, aid-dependent country within a neoliberal global economy need to be more broadly understood throughout the world if authentic transformative change, such as achievement of the SDGs., is going to happen. I understand this as my role as a researcher: contributing to a global, postcolonial, feminist project that is concerned with the promotion of global gender justice.

## **6.1 Ethical considerations**

Ethics approval pertaining to the stages of the longitudinal study considered in this chapter was obtained from Royal Roads University in Canada and Makerere University and Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda. Research permits were obtained from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. The study was explained to the participants in both English and Luganda, and the participants were made aware that they were free to decline to participate, and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time. All individuals who were contacted about the study agreed to participate and signed consent forms.

## **6.2 The study**

This chapter reports on findings from stages 4 (2018), 5 (2022), and 6 (2023) of a longitudinal which focuses on education and its impact on the lives of girls and women over time. This longitudinal case study began in 2004 as my doctoral research that examined challenges and opportunities for girls related to secondary schooling in a rural Ugandan context, as well as the ways in which education impacted their emerging identities (AUTHOR). The 15 girls who participated in the study were at that time 15 to 18 years old. The fourth stage of the study, conducted in May 2018, involved 13 of the original 15 participants and explored the participants' perceptions of the role of post-secondary education has played in their lives as well as how they interpreted the SDGs in relation to their lives. The sixth stage of the study (2022–2023) explored their understandings and experiences of, and strategies for resiliency and empowerment, particularly in times of crisis. During this study, we also revisited the SDGs to reflect upon whether, in their opinion, any progress had been made towards achieving them as relevant to their lives.

## **7. Methods**

An ethnographic, multimodal [43, 44] approach was used to generate data that captured multiple facets and complexities of the broad social context, as well as the unique aspects of the participants' lives and provide for triangulated analysis. Ethnographic methods included video-captured Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), participant observation, and multimodal activities. Multimodality conceives of meaning-making through a wide range of semiotic modes such as images, gestures, and sounds [43]. As an approach to research, multimodality enables and encourages participants to share their ideas in creative and interactive ways in response to prompts, such as questions. What is produced – the “signs” – by those communicating meaning- the “sign-makers” – generates opportunities for others to consider and interact with the meaning expressed by the signs [43, 45]. Signs offer communicative opportunities beyond the typically dominant forms of text and speech (especially in formal settings) and thus open up space of discourse to include voices that are often excluded.

## **8. Processes**

In Stage 4 (2018) the participants participated in a two-day workshop, documented through photographs, video-recorded FGDs, and visual representations of responses

to questions. During the first day of the workshop, I introduced the 17 SDGs to the participants. Each participant was provided with the UN SDG poster and we discussed the main targets of each (**Figures 1 and 2**).

Following this, the participants formed three teams (two with four members, and one with five members) and each team determined the three SDGs that were most important to them. The members of each team then collaborated on drawings that depicted: 1) what these goals looked like as unrealized; 2) what a realization of these goals would look like; and 3) what would be necessary to achieve these goals. The teams presented their drawings to each other (**Figures 3 and 4**).

On Day 2 of the workshop, we reviewed the SDGs, as well as the teams' drawings. We then engaged in in-depth discussions about the goals they had selected, which



**Figure 1.**  
*United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs).*



**Figure 2.**  
*Participants discussing SDGs of most importance to them.*



**Figure 3.** Participants' drawings and ideas about, in their context, what unrealized SDGs look like, what participants think it would take to achieve the SDGs, and SDGs realized.



**Figure 4.** Participants' reflections on SDGs.

are reported on in the Findings section below. During Stage 6 of the study, six of the participants from Stage 4 of the study participated in a focus group discussion during which we reviewed the SDGs and discussed additional thoughts they had on them 5 years later. This discussion was videorecorded for transcription purposes.

## 9. Analysis

I approached analysis using interpretive policy analysis [34, 35, 46], constructivist grounded theory [47], and triangulation [48]. The research questions constituted thematic parameters within which data was processed. Data from the workshop – drawings, presentations, and group discussions – were documented through video recordings, photographs, and observational notes and then coded and categorized. Individual interviews and questionnaires were similarly coded and categorized to explore intersections of triangulation. From the coded and categorized data, key themes emerged. The findings were member-checked with the participants as a further element of validation.

## 10. Findings

### 10.1 Stage 4 (2018)

The SDGs that the participants identified as most important to them are depicted in the table below. SDG 1: No Poverty, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, and SDG 4: Quality Education received the most emphasis, followed by SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production (**Table 1**).

I will discuss the three SDGs (1, 3, and 4) selected by two teams in more detail below, and then briefly summarize key points of the 3 SDGs (8, 10, and 12) that were selected once (**Table 2**).

The participants all identified poverty as the key factor that thwarted their aspirations, as well as their ability to simply live their lives without perpetual stress and anxiety about how to meet the basic needs of their families. Eleven of the 14 participants had employment, two were between jobs, and one worked on the family farm. Of the 11 earning incomes, six had formal, four had informal employment, and one had both formal and informal work. The incomes of these 11 participants were in the general range of 200–300 Ugandan shillings per month (approximately \$65–100 US/month). Based on a 40-hour work week (although most worked far more than 40 hours per week), this amounted to about \$.40–.65 US/hour, or about \$3.20–5.20 US/day. Extreme poverty, defined by the World Bank [49], was \$1.90 US per person per day. At first glance, it might seem as if these young women had at least risen above extreme poverty, but considering their various financial outlays and responsibilities, this was generally not the case.

Team	#1 importance	#2 importance	#3 importance
1	1- No poverty	3 – Good health and well-being	8 – Decent work and economic growth
2	4- Quality education	12 - Responsible consumption and production	10 – Reduced inequalities
3	1 – No poverty	4- Quality education	3 - Good health and well-being

**Table 1.**  
SDGs of importance to participants.

Unrealized	Realized	How to get there
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient food, water</li> <li>• Lack of decent shelter</li> <li>• Lack of money for education, hospitals, medical care</li> <li>• Lack of decent employment opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient food, water</li> <li>• Nice home, car</li> <li>• Ability to afford quality education for children</li> <li>• Access to good and affordable medical care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To get good hospitals</li> <li>• To get better schools</li> <li>• To get better markets for our products</li> <li>• To bridge up the gap between the rich and the poor</li> <li>• To reduce on taxes</li> <li>• To invest money in agriculture</li> </ul>

**Table 2.**  
SDG 1: No poverty.

Twelve of the 13 participants were mothers, with numbers of children ranging from one to four, ages infant to 10 years old. Eight of the 14 women were sole heads of households, seven of them single mothers; five received no financial support at all from the children's fathers, and two received very minimal (and erratic) support. The women were thus responsible for meeting all, or almost all, of the financial demands related to their children. One income of approximately \$3–10 US/day, divided among one participant and two dependent children would equal \$1–3.35 US/day per person, and with three dependents would equal \$.75–2.50 US/day each. As such, the participants lacked financial resources for adequate and nutritious food, clean water, adequate medical treatment, rent; and other basic necessities such as clothing, firewood (for cooking), and school-related costs.

The participants envisioned the achieved goal of SDG 1 as having sufficient food and water, a nice home (and even a car), free/affordable quality education for their children, and free/affordable quality medical care. The thought SDG 1 could be achieved by investment in the government in education, medical care, better markets for their products (for those who had shops or sold food grown on their land), lessening of the extreme financial divide between the rich and poor in Uganda, decreased taxes (for the few who had formal employment with taxes deducted from their pay), and more investment in agriculture. Contributing factors to poverty for the participants included: lack of reasonable employment income; lack of child support from absentee fathers; school fees and related expenses for their children; and expensive transportation (**Table 3**).

The participants shared many thoughts about the importance of SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. As per the discussion of SDG 1: No Poverty, they conveyed their frustration with the lack of free/affordable, quality medical care and their unaffordability of medication for themselves and/or their children. They also stated that they self-diagnosed and purchased drugs (that would require a prescription in, for example, North America) over the counter for themselves and their children. They talked about the fact that there was inadequate ante- and post-natal care and

Unrealized	Realized	How to get there
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to afford good medical attention or medication for themselves or their children (often self-diagnose and purchase drugs over the counter)</li> <li>• Women at risk ante- and post-natal</li> <li>• Poor sanitation, contaminated water</li> <li>• Weakness, hunger, prone to sickness and even early death</li> <li>• Fatigue because of poor infrastructure (e.g., long walks for water, or to market, or to school because of lack of transportation, poor roads)</li> <li>• Mental health problems: stress, depression, loneliness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical treatment and medicine accessible when needed</li> <li>• Sufficient, nutritious food and clean water to sustain healthy bodies</li> <li>• Strong infrastructure that eases access to schools, hospitals, etc.</li> <li>• Good mental health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Money (by getting jobs)</li> <li>• Health facilities – clinics and hospitals</li> <li>• Balanced diets</li> <li>• Rest, relax, having some fun</li> <li>• Need clean water in terms of hygiene</li> <li>• Make new friends</li> <li>• Good infrastructures, that's hospitals and roads</li> <li>• To have enough food where people can eat a balanced diet</li> <li>• To have jobs where people can earn money and look after their family</li> <li>• To have clean water and better sanitation</li> </ul>

**Table 3.**  
 SDG 3: Good health and well-being.



women were still at high risk during pregnancy and childbirth, and some relayed difficult experiences of miscarriages, traumatic births and post-natal complications, and inadequate medical attention. They also had to pay for medicine and treatment, which was costly. Tracy, for example, discussed the expense of providing specialized food for her disabled child:

*Tracy: I pay for his medication. He has a special formula for food cuz he's not able to chew ...it is so expensive...80,000 for only one week.*

*Shelley: So, you spend about 80,000 on food? And then you have medicine. How much does medicine cost?*

*Tracy: It depends on which condition [he] has.....For example, if he has malaria, it depends on the dose the doctors give him. So, you can find yourself you bought a dose of 100,000 per month.*

Poor sanitation was another major concern for the participants. None had indoor plumbing in their homes; they and their families used outdoor latrines, which they did not consider to be sanitary. Diseases related to poor sanitation include cholera and dysentery, as well as typhoid, intestinal worm infections, and polio, and these are common in Uganda (ref). Neither did any of the participants have running water easily accessible; most had to walk a distance to collect water in jerry cans to take back to their homes for cooking, drinking, washing clothes, and cleaning. Often the sources of water were contaminated or at risk of being so, and many Ugandans suffer from related diseases including cholera, diarrhea, dysentery, hepatitis A, typhoid, and polio [50].

The participants also experienced the affliction of hunger and inability to access a healthy diet. The participants, especially the single mothers, said that they did not have the money they required to buy sources of protein, dairy, or even fresh vegetables, and often their meals consisted primarily of posho (a maize flour porridge) which has little nutritious content, but it is filling. As a result, they and their children often suffer from hunger/nutrient deficiency diseases and conditions such as extreme fatigue, compromised immune systems, susceptibility to colds and flus, and heightened susceptibility to malaria and anemia all of which are a heavy burden on the country's medical system. Many children in Uganda die of hunger/malnutrition [51]. The participants also discussed the problem of intense and sustained fatigue. In addition to employment (or farming), caring for children and often parents and younger siblings, cooking and cleaning, they had to make long and arduous walks to collect water, firewood, and access markets because they could not afford to hire a boda-boda (motorcycle) to take them and there is no public transportation outside of the major cities and towns. In addition, the roads in the village areas are generally in poor condition, unpaved, and they are hard and dangerous to negotiate because of the traffic as well as the slippery conditions when it rains.

Aside from these many challenges to the participants and their children's physical health, these hardships took a severe toll on their mental health. They shared feelings of perpetual stress about whether or not they would be able to afford school fees for their children for the coming term; stress about accessing medical care for their children and themselves, and often their parents and siblings, as well; the anxiety that came with caring for sick – and in one case severely disabled – children; the constant pressure to provide sufficient food for their families. They felt that there was seldom any reprieve



from the demands on them to provide the basic survival necessities for their households, caring for children and family (and community) members, paid work, domestic work, and myriad other obligations. Several of the participants expressed feeling depressed because there did not seem to be a way out of poverty and exhaustion.

The participants also expressed feelings of loneliness. Even though they all experienced deep and unrelenting stress related to poverty (including the physical health of their children, themselves, and other family members) in the group discussion on Day 2, they said that they did not talk much about their feelings, except with their friends in the research group. For example, Tracy discussed not telling most people in the community about the existence of her severely disabled child because of the stigma and discrimination that they – and her other child – could face but feeling comfortable and supported when confiding with the other participants. They had little, if any access to mental health services (e.g., counseling) even during times of intense crisis. Tracy discussed the birth of her severely disabled child and the “counseling” with which she was provided before being discharged to go home and learn how to care for the child on her own:

*Tracy: It is a hard thing to give birth to a kid with cerebral palsy...The husband said “I don't want that kid”...so he went away...I was in the hospital... I was still on oxygen. I didn't have a normal birth. It was surgery...I was weak. My husband had left. The kid is weak.*

When I asked Tracy about any counseling or support that she may have received before returning home with her severely disabled newborn, she relayed that a nurse had spoken to her for a few minutes about the need to be strong because the child would require a great deal of care. And then she and her baby were sent home. Subsequently, she occasionally was able to talk with “those people who counsel people with HIV AIDS...So I kept going there for counseling, going there for information”. After a few months, however, that ceased: “...they thought that maybe it was time that I can do that alone, that it was okay, ...And I am strong... [crying]”.

With respect to reaching SDG 3, the participants stated that they needed access to decent, quality employment that paid them enough to buy nutritious food, shelter, and medical care and reduce the perpetual stress related to worrying about their ability to pay for their children's school fees. Access to quality free/affordable health facilities – clinics and hospitals – as well as medical care (especially for individuals with complex and expensive health care requirements) were also deemed necessary. The participants also noted the importance of good roads and means of transport to access medical care when necessary. Also deemed of enormous importance was infrastructure that supported good sanitation (e.g., sewage systems) and easy access to clean water. The participants also noted that for their improved socioemotional well-being they needed an easing of burdens in order to have sufficient rest, to be able to relax and “have some fun”. In addition, they believed that it was important to have opportunities to make new friends, as well as spend quality time with existing friends. Several times the participants stated that this research group had helped them to share their feelings and that they had learned from, listened to, encouraged, and supported each other (**Table 4**).

The participants identified many issues related to SDG 4: Quality Education as unrealized. They were unwaveringly committed to ensuring their children received a reasonable education and school fees and related expenses generally constituted the highest household expense, up to two-thirds of their income [52]. Although Uganda has government schools that offer “free” education (although in practice they still

Unrealized	Realized	How to get there
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adults with lack of knowledge of and/or ability to take care of themselves</li> <li>• Adults with lack of opportunities to earn decent incomes</li> <li>• Lack of schools, lack of resources</li> <li>• Unqualified teachers</li> <li>• Teacher absenteeism</li> <li>• High costs for school requirements</li> <li>• Need to send children to private schools for education – high school fees, requirements, and other expenses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient number of schools, with proper classrooms, learning and teaching resources</li> <li>• No “extra” or “hidden” fees</li> <li>• Cap of number of children per class</li> <li>• Qualified teachers</li> <li>• Accountability of teachers and administrators</li> <li>• Equal treatment of girls and boys in school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality schools, i.e., good buildings</li> <li>• Quality teachers</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Free schooling</li> <li>• Books, pens, science lab, library</li> </ul>

**Table 4.**  
*SDG 4: Quality education.*

solicit funds from parents for maintenance, new buildings, furniture, and school supplies and equipment), these schools are plagued by issues such as untenably large class sizes (often with hundreds of children), lack of classrooms and furniture, teacher absenteeism, lack of textbooks and other school materials, and poor teaching and learning outcomes [53–55]. The participants stated that only “desperate” parents, or parents who “did not care about their children’s education” sent their children to government schools. Even so, the private schools their children attended were often only of marginally better quality than the government schools: class sizes were often large, many teachers were not fully qualified, and the schools were severely under-resourced with respect to textbooks and other educational materials. In addition, the schools were often a long distance from the participants’ homes, so their children required fees for room and board, as well as school uniforms and other supplies. Depending on the boarding fees, children often lacked satisfactorily nutritious meals.

Participants described SDG 4 would be realized if there were a sufficient number of schools with proper classrooms; adequate teaching and learning resources; no “extra” or “hidden” fees; a cap on a number of children per class; qualified teachers; accountability of teachers and administrators; and equal treatment of girls and boys. To move from unrealized to realized, participants identified the following: investing in well-constructed schools with adequate furniture; ensuring teachers were qualified; free education; and providing notebooks, pencils, and other necessary supplies for all children.

The three additional SDGs identified by the participants in their “top 3” were SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 12: Responsible Production and Consumption. With respect to SDG 8, participants associated this goal unrealized with informal labour, undignified work, poor incomes, and no benefits. Further discussion around this topic exposed additional concerns such as the precarious nature of employment, poor working conditions, lack of consistency with work hours (and pay), lack of benefits, and lack of recourse for bullying, intimidation, sexual harassment, aggression, and assault. Furthermore, there was little, if any, support from employers for mothers who were forced to miss

work to tend to their children when they were severely ill. Formal employment, with good working conditions, “liveable wage”, benefits, and being treated with “dignity” were all markers of SDG 8 achieved. The participants believed that in order to go from unrealized to realized required quality education so that workers would be prepared to undertake decent work opportunities, for workers to “work harder to improve our daily lives”, “proper health so we can improve on our income”, and “proper savings [groups] so we can improve on our income”.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities was also selected by one team as one of their top 3 SDGs. They described SDG 10 unrealized as characterized by: “extreme rich refus[ing] to help extreme poor”; unfair taxation, where high-income earners were not proportionately taxed to support infrastructure to benefit society at large; discrimination against the “weak, vulnerable, and disabled” especially with respect to education and employment; and gender discrimination “girls/women not treated equally to boys/men.” The participants’ vision of SDG 10 achieved included: decent homes for all families; free, accessible, and quality for all children; “good infrastructure for everyone – including electricity and running water”; families have sufficient, nutritious food (including their own gardens and livestock); and families have access to good transportation. The participants believed that moving from unrealized to realized would require: adult education (to compensate for education that individuals may not have had as children, as well as upgrading of skills and knowledge and qualifications); “work so hard”; “make good friends” (i.e., friends who are influential and able to support others financially or otherwise); “make women’s groups/savings”; “good policies”; “investments”; and “being creative and innovative”.

SDG 12: Responsible Production and Consumption was chosen by one group to be one of their top three SDGs. They characterized SDG 12 unrealized as only a small segment of the population – the wealthy – as engaging in lavish and excessive consumption while most people lived in crowded homes, and lacked basic needs such as adequate food, clothing, clean water, electricity, transportation, and sanitation. SDG 12 realized would involve *all* people having access to adequate food, housing, clothing, transportation, medical care, and sanitation.

## 10.2 Stage 6 (2023)

In the FGD during Stage 6 of the longitudinal study, 5 years after Stage 4, five of the women discussed their thoughts on the SDGs. SDG 1: No Poverty, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, and SDG 5: Gender Equality (which had not been identified as a top-three priority for any of the groups in Stage 4), and SDG 4: Quality Education. The participants felt that very little, if any, progress has been made towards the achievement of these goals.

With respect to SDG 1: No Poverty, the participants stated that – in their experience – poverty levels were even worse than 5 years before (Stage 4 of the research), as inflation had made many basic necessities unaffordable. The COVID-19 pandemic created a crisis situation for several participants and their families who experienced extreme food shortages. One of the participants who had long-term, formal employment at a local clothing manufacturing company had been terminated because she had to care for her seriously ill child, which made it almost impossible for her to fund the tests for diagnosis – sickle cell disease – and the treatment child required. Two others who worked at the same company were living in fear of losing their jobs because the company was much less profitable post-pandemic; they were already experiencing greatly reduced work hours and had to find ways to supplement their

incomes. One of the participants who had her own business in selling matooke (plantain) wholesale, said her sales had dropped dramatically, and additionally, she had been defrauded of an enormous amount of money by another wholesaler. When asked who they thought was responsible for fulfilling SDG 1, Doreen said, – “The Ugandan government is responsible...[it should be]...managing inflation”. When asked if anyone else was responsible, Doreen suggested, “Even me”.

With respect to SDG 4: Quality Education, the participants believed that the situation same, in some ways even worse because as children grew older, they required more funding for education. In addition, during the pandemic, Uganda had one of the strictest lock-down policies in the world and children missed two full years of schooling. The divide between the rich and poor was exacerbated as families with higher incomes were able to afford technology that enabled their children to continue learning, whilst those with minimal incomes could not afford to do so.

There was consensus among the participants that no progress had been made towards SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being. If anything, health care seemed to be worse. Tracy continued to struggle to provide the highly specialized treatment required for her disabled son and was anxious about an operation he required which would cost three and a half million Ugandan shillings (close to 1000 USD), which would be impossible for her to save. Even unexceptional medical treatment was hard to access and expensive, as is evident in this exchange between Tracy and Gelly:

*Tracy: We can go to health centres and reach there and not even get paracetamol.*

*Gelly: You can't get anything. Even if you need the injection, you have to go outside [the government hospital] and buy the syringe. When you do not buy, they will not care for you.*

*Tracy: Sometimes you go to the hospital because they tell you need to get medicine and you find that there is no medicine.*

*Gelly: From what I see. In the hospitals, the medicine reaches there, but those doctors, just pick them and put them aside. So, when you go there, there are some people, they have money and some who do not have it. When you go there, they say the medicine is not around. But if you bring someone aside and say you have [money] immediately they bring the medicine. Which means the medicine is there. They just hide it.*

SDG 5: Gender Equality, emerged as an identified priority in Stage 6, where it had not in Stage 4. Interestingly, the participants connect gender inequality with poverty. Tracy remarked, “There are few people on the ground who do not know about gender equality, but because of poverty there is little done about it”. When asked to elaborate on the connection between poverty and gender inequality, Gelly said: “...up to this time there is the men who do not allow the women to go to work...[and] if she is not working, she cannot avoid poverty”. Tracy also added that poverty curtailed opportunities for justice that might ameliorate poverty, such as demanding child support from absentee fathers: “You can take a gender-related case to the police and because you do not have money, your case is not considered”. Ireen also discussed how in cases of theft, for example, legal processes weighed against poor women as it had in her case when another, wealthier, businesswoman stole a significant amount of money from her: “As an example, the lady who stole my money, she was in jail, she was in prison, but the moment I left the place, the lady gave them [police] money. And she was out of jail...” Ireen claimed that the

money the woman had stolen from Ireen had likely been used to bribe the police and Ireen was convinced that she would not receive the legal support to recover her money or to ensure that the culprit was appropriately charged, tried, and sentenced for her crime. Additionally, Yudaya discussed how she had been severely bullied at work (a job she had had for 9 years) by a new male supervisor, to the point that she felt she could no longer endure working at the company. Yudaya had since opened a small retail shop in the trading centre after leaving the company, but it provides precarious and minimal income.

Not only had Yudaya's financial stability been decimated by bullying from a male co-worker, but her socioemotional well-being had been deeply impacted:

*My love [for the company] was so strong, we've [the company] come very far together and I never thought such thing would ever happen, but I was totally wrong and that one month I worked with him...made me think and decided to leave the company I love. It was very painful and difficult but for the good of my future plans and life I had to strongly decide and move on even though am still hunting for a job but I don't regret my resignation coz now I feel like I'm out of bars. It's unbelievable!*

Gelly had also experienced more overt and violent threats to her health and well-being. Gelly's ex-husband, who had been an absentee father for 5 years and had provided no child support for their children, had threatened to take the children unless she paid him money as he claimed she had been preventing him from seeing the children (which she had not).

*He said he was going to put a fire on the house where I sleep with the kids...from there he went to Airtel and blocked my account...I was washing clothes and [someone] came to tell me that the chairman [of the village] was calling for me...I went there and found that man [the ex-husband] with the papers to arrest me from the police...*

Ultimately, the chairman heard both sides of the complaint (from Gelly's ex-husband) and sided with Gelly, and a male friend was able to accompany Gelly to the police station to report the situation. The police did not pursue charges against the ex-husband's threats, but they did warn the man that he was in arrears with child support payments, and thus the situation subsided. However, Gelly did not receive any financial support from the father of the children.

During Stage 6, I posed a question that was not asked in Stage 4: Who do you think is responsible for fulfilling the SDGs? Interestingly, the participants looked first at themselves. For example, Linda said, "We, as human beings...Even me". Secondly, they noted the Ugandan government. Tracy said, "It starts with me and then I go to the government". When asked if they thought there was any responsibility beyond the Ugandan government, they had no response. I pushed the question a bit further: "But the SDGs are a United Nations commitment. The UN is saying we as a world need to eliminate poverty throughout the whole world...If all the countries in the world say we are going to get rid of poverty, everywhere, who is responsible for doing that"? Again, there was silence. Eventually, Tracy ventured a response:

*Tracy: It's possible that Uganda is party to other countries, but the help is minimal.*

*Shelley: But this is United Nations – the UN is saying we need to eliminate poverty throughout the whole world...If all the countries the world say we are going to get rid of poverty, everywhere, who is responsible for doing that?*

*Tracy: Once they have made the goals, they [looking and raising her hands up to the ceiling] have to make a plan. They up there. They must come down with not only goals, but actions. And those actions should come down to me. I'm looking at myself as the last person.*

## **11. Discussion**

Unsurprising, but profoundly discouraging and unsatisfactory, is the fact that none of the participants had ever heard of the SDGs prior to this study. When introduced to the SDGs, the women seemed to regard them as a “wish list” [4] rather than goals that had any likelihood of being achieved, at least for them in their contexts. When asked about responsibility for fulfilling the SDGs they looked first to themselves, then to the Ugandan government: it did not occur to them that this responsibility may rest with the world as a whole that has signed onto them as a UN initiative. Tracy’s comment “... those actions should come down to me. I’m looking at myself as the last person” speaks volumes to the fact in order to achieve “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” (Target 5.5) barriers must be identified and removed to provide women with “...access to the resources that act as preconditions for participation (money, time, confidence, and education among them), and on the existence of concrete mechanisms for promoting women’s participation [56]” [3]. The participants had no difficulty identifying and depicting what both unrealized and realized SDGs would be for them as well as suggesting ways by which the SDGs could be achieved. Yet, there is little evidence that voices like theirs have been included in formal deliberations about the SDGs.

Poverty was the central and intersecting factor for the lack of achievement, or even progress towards the SDGs. Lack of education and medical care that was affordable and free, or at least affordable, access to reasonable sanitation, and the inability to be able to provide adequately nutritious food for their families (particularly during times of crisis, such as the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic) can and should be considered human rights violations [57]. These things are not “nice to have” but most fundamental requirements to meet the basic criteria for well-being: “When engaging the issue of poverty...there are two rights of particular importance...the right to life, and freedom from discrimination. When speaking of the former, the concern should not merely be with the fact that the individual is alive as opposed to dead. It is also related to the status or condition of that individual’s life” ([57], p. 26). As commented by Pogge and Sengupta [4] “When severe deprivations constitute unfulfilled human rights – and, given their social origins, even human rights violations – then they categorically require immediate and top-priority remedial attention. We must spare no effort to realize human rights as fast and fully as we can” (p. 2).

Additionally, the particular ways in which poverty impacts women must be acknowledged ([57], p. 27). The participants’ experiences of inadequate wages and working conditions, lack of enforcement of child support, gender violence, failure of public services and infrastructure, lack of leisure time, and overburden of work and care for others all speak to this gendered face of poverty. The participants did not seem to think that their rights should be available to them as a matter of course. Instead, as Gelly stated, “We have to fight hard for our rights, ...fight for your voice, this is key”. Why, in addition to all the other demands made upon them, should these women (like so many other women in the world) also be expected to “fight for” what are, according to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (Preamble),

are “equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” to which they belong? As long as there is little accountability and responsibility for fulfilling the SDGs, and as long as the “hegemonic project” [58] of neoliberalism continues unabated in its “shift of power and wealth back to the already rich and powerful ([58], p. 721), and as long a human rights violations are not acted upon, the SDGs would be more aptly described as the “Sustainable Development Wishes” [59]. And women will continue to suffer disproportionately.

However, this study did reveal a glimmer of hope beyond a wish with respect to the participants’ growing awareness of their rights and the global commitments embedded in the SDGs, meant to realize and uphold them. The participants’ critical consideration of the SDGs, through critical ethnographic policy analysis approach, elicited some revelatory discussions in which they voiced frustrations with systems and institutions – legal, medical, educational, political, economic, and social – that failed them. They communicated how the discussions we had during this study had expanded their awareness of these issues and, importantly, enabled them to connect their personal experiences with broader patterns and shared realities of other women. Some of their comments included: “I learned [that we can] advise and learn from each other”; “I learned not to hide my own problems but stand up and push forward”; “As women, we need to stand firm, participate in politics, and not stay back, and when you try to go through and represent others...”; “we are able to be here, we are able to talk, we are able to come together”. This is arguably the most critical element in bringing about women’s empowerment. Women need to know about their rights and the commitments – such as the SDGs - made to uphold them, and then demand that responsibility be delegated, and accountability be undertaken to ensure this happens: “New forms of consciousness arise out of women’s newly acquired access to the intangible resources of analytical skills, social networks, organizational strength, solidarity and sense of not being alone” ([60], p. 246).

## 12. Conclusion

Increasingly, global pathways of connection are multiplying and tightening, providing rich opportunities for global movements and solidarity to challenge and overcome oppressive systems that perpetuate inequalities, social injustices, and human rights violations, prioritizing the world’s most oppressed, vulnerable, disadvantaged, disempowered, and marginalized, such as women living in poverty in LICs.

The SDGs, although laudably aspirational, and purportedly constituting a “supremely ambitious and transformational vision” for the world are “severely off track” [7] and even regressing especially with respect to the basic fulfillment of human rights, a universal reasonable standard of well-being, as well as participatory privilege and opportunities for empowerment. This study indicates that the needs of those the SDGs are meant to impact the most – such as women living in poverty in LICs – are not being met, even at a basic human rights level. Far from being included in, or involved in any discussions about (aside from this study) “this supremely ambitious and transformative vision”, the participants had never even heard of the SDGs. Clearly, the SDGs had not heard from them either. Where are their voices? Who is listening? For truly transformative change to transpire, much greater attention to the voices and lived experiences of women who are so often excluded from the very policies, initiatives, and programs meant to benefit them is essential, as is knowing who is responsible for fulfilling them. At present, this is not the case and as such, the SDGs remain mere “wishes”.

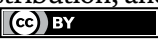
## **Author details**

Shelley Jones  
Royal Roads University, Victoria, BC, Canada

\*Address all correspondence to: shelly.12jones@royalroads.ca

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 



## References

- [1] United Nations. The 17 Goals. United Nations; n.d.. Available from: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- [2] Pogge T, Sengupta M. Assessing the sustainable development goals from a human rights perspective. *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*. 2016;**32**(2):83-97
- [3] Esquivel V. Power and the sustainable development goals: A feminist analysis. *Gender and Development*. 2016;**24**(1):9-23
- [4] Pogge T, Sengupta M. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) as drafted: Nice idea, poor execution. *Washington International Law Journal*. 2015;**24**:571
- [5] Struckmann C. A postcolonial feminist critique of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development: A south African application. *Agenda*. 2018;**32**(1):12-24
- [6] Esquivel V, Sweetman C. Gender and the sustainable development goals. *Gender and Development*. 2016;**24**(1):1-8
- [7] United Nations. *SDG Progress Report Special Edition*. United Nations; 2023. Available from: <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/SDG%20Progress%20Report%20Special%20Edition.pdf>
- [8] Goetz AM, Jenkins R. *Feminist Activism and the Politics of Reform*. United Nations Research Centre for Social Development; 2016
- [9] London L, Kisting S. Worker health and safety: International issues. In: *International Encyclopedia of Public Health*. 2nd ed. Academic Press; 2017. pp. 444-452
- [10] Mohan G. Structural adjustment. In: *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Elsevier; 2009. pp. 1-9. Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/structural-adjustment-program>
- [11] Oponong NY. Failure of structural adjustment programmes in sub-Saharan Africa: Policy design or policy implementation? *Journal of Empirical Economics*. 2014;**3**(5):321-331
- [12] Simon D. Debt. In: Thrift N, Kitchin R, editors. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Amsterdam: Elsevier; 2009. pp. 16-22. DOI: 10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00083-3. Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/structural-adjustment-program>
- [13] Thomson M, Kentikelenis A, Stubbs T. Structural adjustment programmes adversely affect vulnerable populations: A systematic-narrative review of their effect on child and maternal health. *Public Health Reviews*. 2017;**38**:13. DOI: 10.1186/s40985-017-0059-2
- [14] Williams G. Governance, good. In: Thrift N, Kitchin R, editors. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Amsterdam: Elsevier; 2009. pp. 606-614
- [15] OECD. *Untied Aid*. OECD; 2023. Available from: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/untied-aid.htm>
- [16] McVeigh K. World is plundering Africa's wealth of 'billions of dollars a year'. In: *World Is Plundering Africa's Wealth of 'billions of Dollars a Year*. The Guardian; 2017

- [17] Smith D. Africa ‘Ripped off Big Time’ by Foreign Resource Firms, Says Bank Chief. *The Guardian*; 2013. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/jun/18/africa-ripped-off-foreign-resource-firms>
- [18] Ruhweza DR, Stephen KJ. A case for additional crimes triable before the international criminal court: The African context. *Journal of Global Justice & Public Policy*. 2021;7:21
- [19] Butagira T. Study shows Uganda’s vast mineral riches. *Kampala: Daily Monitor*; 2012
- [20] Nuwaha E. A Snapshot of Uganda’s Debt Profile and its Implications on Economic Growth. *Public Debt*; 2022, 15. \_A1.pdf (acode-u.org)
- [21] International Monetary Fund. *Uganda: At a Glance. Uganda and the IMF: IMF*; 2023
- [22] Impact. *Impact in Uganda. Impact*; 2023. Available from: <https://impacttransform.org/en/countries/uganda/>
- [23] SDG Knowledge Platform. *Uganda. SDG Knowledge Platform*; 2020. Available from: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/uganda>
- [24] Government of Uganda. *White Paper. Government of Uganda*; 1992
- [25] Uganda National Planning Authority. *Vision 2040. Uganda National Planning Authority*; 2013. Available from: <http://www.npa.go.ug/uganda-vision-2040/>
- [26] UN Women. 2023. Available from: <https://data.unwomen.org/country/uganda>
- [27] Ddumba-Ssentamu J. *Uganda Needs a Mind Shift to Address Poor Growth and Persistent Inequality. The Conversation*; 2022. Available from: <https://theconversation.com/uganda-needs-a-mind-shift-to-address-poor-growth-and-persistent-inequality-169469>
- [28] Al-Wazedi U. *Postcolonial feminism. In: Companion to Feminist Studies. Wiley*; 2020. pp. 155-173
- [29] Mohanty CT. ‘Under Western eyes’ revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles. *Signs*. 2003;28(2):499-535
- [30] Mohanty CT, Russo A, Torres L. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press*; 1991
- [31] Mohanty CT, Russo A, Torres L. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing SDG Theory, Practicing Solidarity. Durham: Duke University Press*; 2003
- [32] Vavrus F. *Adjusting inequality: Education and structural adjustment policies in Tanzania. Harvard Educational Review*. 2005;75(2):174-201
- [33] Dubois V. *Critical policy ethnography. In: Handbook of Critical Policy Studies. Edward Elgar Publishing*; 2015. pp. 462-480
- [34] Yanow D. *Qualitative-interpretive methods in policy research. In: Fischer F, Miller GJ, editors. Handbook of Public Policy Analysis, International Encyclopedia of Human Geography. Routledge*; 2017. Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/structural-adjustment-program>
- [35] Sadovnik AR. *Qualitative research and public policy. In: Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics, and Methods. Vol. 125. Taylor & Francis*. 2007. pp. 417-427
- [36] Chilisa B, Ntseane G. *Resisting Dominant Discourses: Implications of*

Indigenous. African Feminist Theory. Routledge; 2010

[37] Godden NJ, Macnish P, Chakma T, Naidu K. Feminist participatory action research as a tool for climate justice. *Gender and Development*. 2020;**28**(3):593-615. DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2020.1842040

[38] Lather P. Critical inquiry in qualitative research: Feminist and poststructural perspectives: Science “after truth”. In: *Foundations for Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences*. Routledge; 2004. pp. 203-215

[39] Adriany V, Yulindrasari H, Safrina R. Doing feminist participatory action research for disrupting traditional gender discourses with Indonesian Muslim kindergarten teachers. *Action Research*. 2021

[40] Reid C, Tom A, Frisby W. Finding the ‘action’ in feminist participatory action research. *Action Research*. 2006;**4**(3):315-332

[41] Mohanty CT. Locating the politics of experience. In: *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford Academic; 1998. p. 254

[42] Kikooma J. Gender and entrepreneurship in Uganda: Women manoeuvring economic space. In: *Entrepreneurship-Gender, Geographies and Social Context*. London, UK: IntechOpen; 2012

[43] Jewitt C. Multimodality and literacy in school classrooms. *Review of Research in Education*. 2008;**32**(1):241-267

[44] Kress G. ‘Partnerships in research’: Multimodality and ethnography. *Qualitative Research*. 2011;**11**(3):239-260

[45] Cope B, Kalantzis M, editors. *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and*

*the Design of Social Futures*. Psychology Press; 2000

[46] Wagenaar H. Interpretation and intention in policy analysis. In: *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis*. Routledge; 2017. pp. 455-468

[47] Charmaz K. Grounded theory as an emergent method. In: *Handbook of Emergent Methods*. Vol. 155. Guilford Press; 2008. p. 172

[48] Cresswell JW. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson; 2008

[49] World Bank. *Poverty: Overview*. World Bank; 2016. Available from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>

[50] UNICEF. *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH): Increasing Access to Safe Drinking Water, Improved Sanitation and Hygiene Practices*. UNICEF; 2023. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/what-we-do/wash>

[51] Maniragaba VN, Atuhaire LK, Rutayisire PC. Undernutrition among the children below five years of age in Uganda: A spatial analysis approach. *BMC Public Health*. 2023;**23**:390. DOI: 10.1186/s12889-023-15214-9

[52] Jones S, Ahimbisibwe D. Troubling the education= employment= empowerment narrative: Exploring the lived experiences of women in Uganda. *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development*. 2023;**12**(2):187-213

[53] Cilliers J, Kasirye I, Leaver C, Serneels P, Zeitlin A. Improving Teacher Attendance Using a Locally Managed Monitoring Scheme: Evidence from

Ugandan Primary Schools. Rapid response paper for International Growth Centre; 2013

[54] UNICEF Uganda. The Situation. UNICEF Uganda; 2016. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/what-we-do/education>

[55] Wilke AM, Green DP, Tan B. Encouraging community action against teacher absenteeism: A mass media experiment in rural Uganda. *Journal of Development Studies*. 2022;58(5):915-930

[56] Goetz AM, Jenkins R. Agency and accountability: Promoting women's participation in peacebuilding. *Feminist Economics*. 2016a;22(1):211-236

[57] Oloka-Onyango J. Human Rights and Sustainable Development in Contemporary Africa: A New Dawn, or Retreating Horizons? Human Development Report 2000, Background Paper. New York: United Nations Development Programme; 2000. Available from: [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

[58] Hall S. The neo-liberal revolution. *Cultural Studies*. 2011;25:6705-6728. DOI: 10.1080/09502386.2011.61988

[59] Pogge T. The Sustainable Development Goals: Brilliant Propaganda?. *Analele Universității din București. Seria Științe Politice*. 2015;17(2):25-46

[60] Kabeer N. *Reversed Realities*. London: Verso; 1994

## Chapter 4

# Getting There with Gender Equality in the Namibian Enterprises, but Questioning Empowerment

*Adalbertus Fortunatus Kamanzi and Judith Namabira*

### Abstract

The chapter examines gender equality in Namibian enterprises. Using the secondary data of the World Bank Namibia Enterprise Data Survey of 2014/2015, the study measures equality due to women empowerment initiatives in access to land and finances, ICT use, and corruption exposure. With the chi-square test of independence, the findings reveal that of the 24 variables examined, only three show significant differences between female and male-led business organizations, leading to a conclusion that there is equality in the business organizations. Nonetheless, with the contestation of the gender equality concept, the study proposes the decoloniality of the women empowerment idea to get to gender empowerment based on *Ubuntu* thinking (the African concept of humanness or what it means to be human).

**Keywords:** empowerment, equality, land, finance, ICT, corruption, coloniality, decoloniality, women empowerment, gender empowerment, *Ubuntu*

### 1. Introduction

This chapter is about the examination of gender equality in Namibian enterprises. The examination is based on two premises. The first premise is that due to the women empowerment efforts that began before Namibia's independence in 1990, there should already be elements of equality in the society. The second premise is that due to the decoloniality perspective in knowledge generation, *Ubuntu* thinking addresses the issue of contested gender equality. The study is premised on the business sector, one of the most masculinized social spaces, and hence is suitable for examining this issue of equality.

The study is in Namibia, a country in the Southwest of Africa. It has a population of about 2.6 million people. In 2021, Namibia's GDP was N\$181.9 billion, and the GDP per capita was N\$71,341. In the December 2022 economic outlook, however, the GDP was foreseen to grow by 3.9% in 2022, 2.7% in 2023, and 2.4% in 2024 [1]. Namibia is a lower-middle-income country, and yet one with the most unequal income distributions with a Gini coefficient of 0.63. The Namibian economy

comprises a modern market sector based on capital-intensive industry and farming and a traditional subsistence farming sector. Exports and imports equate to more than 90% of GDP, with most raw material commodities exported unprocessed or semi-processed form and many consumer goods imported. Agriculture, which contributes around 5% to the GDP, employs about 30% of the total labor force, with the most significant contribution from large commercial farms; traditional subsistence farming supports about 70% of the population [2]. Business development is one of Namibia's pillars of the Strategic Plan (2017-2022) of the Ministry of Industrialization, Trade, and SME Development [3]. One of the missions of this strategic plan is business development: "to create and sustain a conducive business environment through value addition, market access, enterprise development, and investment promotion for the benefit of all." Vision 2030, Namibia's major development plan argues that "the government regards the development of small businesses as holding the key to employment and the economic empowerment of a large section of the population" [4]. An estimated 33,700 SMEs provide some form of employment and income to 160,000 Namibian citizens, about one-third of the nation's labor force [5].

This chapter is organized in the following way. Section 2 presents gender equality and women empowerment in Namibia, and Section 3 is a literature review on the issues of access to land and finances, use of ICT, and exposure to corruption in the businesses of Namibia. Section 4 presents the central issue to be addressed in this chapter and the methodological underpinnings. Section 5 presents the empirical findings, Section 6 deals with the discussion, and Section 7 presents the conclusion and proposition.

## **2. Gender equality and women empowerment in Namibia**

Gender equality is kaleidoscopic because of its many dimensions linked to the many causes and manifestations of inequality, which arise from interactions between values, actions, and circumstances at individual, family, workplace, and societal scales [6] and also because of the shrinking and bending of it for policy purposes [7]. A much more comprehensive definition, whose operationalization is socially popular, refers to gender equality as a social condition, whereby women and men share equal rights and a balance of power, status, opportunities, and rewards; it means men and women have (a) equitable access and use of resources, (b) equitable participation in relationships, the household, the community, and political arenas, and (c) safety or freedom from violence [8].

Nonetheless, the concept of equality is not without contestation. In contesting this concept, it is shown how gender equality has a diversity of meanings across Europe not only based on the existence of different visions of gender equality (such as the visions of inclusion, reversal, and displacement) but also based on the geographical contexts in which the visions are located [9]. In a critique of Western norm entrepreneurs in constructing and promoting new norms to passive, generally non-western, norm takers, the contestation of the gender equality concept is shown by revealing the crucial role of women's organizations in subverting global gender equality norms and in promoting a local norm of gender justice as an alternative [10].

The contestation of gender equality in Africa is built upon the decoloniality ethos to deconstruct Western feminism. Decoloniality has to do with the practice of resistance and the intentional undoing of particularly Western-centric knowledge

and persistent positive action to create and build alternative spaces, networks, and ways of knowing [11] based on local practices and contextual epistemologies [12]; it is about deprovincializing Africa and provincializing Europe to gain epistemic freedom by reversing Africa's underrepresentation and Europe's dominance in knowledge production [13]. To decolonialize means rethinking thinking and unlearning learning, a struggle to reach epistemic freedom, dismantling power hierarchies in knowledge production, unlearning the colonial designs, and relearning by learning from those excluded [14]. With feminism, the decoloniality ethos deconstructs Western feminism and constructs African feminisms, including *Ubuntu* feminism [15].

*Ubuntu*, the African concept of humanness or what it means to be human, predates most indigenous African knowledge [16]. As a principle, *Ubuntu* is humanity to others or faith in a universal sharing bond that links all humanity; an individual's existence is merged in the "we" based on a proper self-assurance of belonging to others and others belonging in an individual [17]; it is the relational rationality at the base of regulating interactions at different levels of society [18]. The Zulu adage, *Umuntu ngomuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person because of other persons), captures this idea of relational rationality. *Ubuntu* has core values of compassion, forgiveness, responsibility, honesty, self-control, caring, love, and perseverance [16]. *Ubuntu* has relational rationality with human beings depending and interdepending on each other to attain the fullest humanness, which is the existential precondition of bondedness with others [19]. *Ubuntu's* three key dimensions include an autonomous human practice through which humans engender sharing, the human act of co-belonging without any preconditions of belonging, which leads to cooperation because they are attached, and a deliberative practice, whereby humans identify and address major societal issues and examine their implications with openness, acknowledgment of others, and engagement without being impeded by others' competencies [20]. Thus, according to *Ubuntu*, humans need to share, cooperate, and participate for the sole purpose of promoting harmony in society; nobody should have while others have (sharing), none should work alone because each extends to the others through generosity, hospitality, caring and compassionate action (cooperation), and nobody should be left out in providing a solution to the societal problems (participation). In the search for harmony, *Ubuntu* results in such practices as social responsibility, deliberative engagement, and attentiveness to others and otherness [21]. With *Ubuntu* thinking, therefore, "gender inequality and inequitable status of existence cannot be part of *Ubuntu*, as 'I am, because you are' or the meaning of *Ubuntu* cannot be fully experienced in such unbalanced circumstances." ([22], p. 1).

Gender equality has guided Namibian policies; the Constitution articles 10 and 23 ensure that "...all the people shall be equal before the law, and no persons may be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, color, ethnic group, creed, and social or economic status." Overall, there has been greater attention towards achieving "formal" gender equality, as also indicated by the implementation of the 50/50 gender representation and zebra-style project leading to an increase in the number of women occupying strategic positions in parliament, ministries, and other leadership positions in the country. As a result of the apparent attention to gender equality, Namibia's Global Gender Gap Index in 2018 was equal to 0.789, ranking Namibia 10th in the world [23]. However, the index does not focus on women's empowerment since it looks more at reducing gender-based gaps in access to resources and opportunities rather than the actual levels of the available resources and opportunities in

the country, and hence at women's empowerment. Gender equality in Namibia is a function of the empowerment initiatives over time.

From the 1990s onwards, power became a key analytical concept to explain the socioeconomic development dynamics in developing countries. The thrust was to address the power asymmetrical positions in society, particularly empowering the powerless beneficiaries of development. Powerlessness meant lack of power with, power within, and the power to, as a result of the dominant categories of people having the power over to use Rowland's [24] facets of power. Empowerment meant, and it still means, a process of challenging existing power relations and gaining greater control over the sources of power [25], people becoming conscious of their situation, and organizing themselves collectively to gain greater access to public services or the benefits of economic growth [26]. According to the Powercube [27], empowerment is about people participating in their development trajectories at all levels (local, national, and global), moving through the different spaces (closed, invited, and claimed), with all the forms of power (hidden, invisible, and visible). From the gender perspective, empowerment initiatives aimed at striking equality between men and women through the conscientization of women in the aspects of their self-worth and agency.

The empowerment efforts in Namibia are formidably enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia. The Constitution explicitly forbids discrimination on the grounds of sex. It authorizes the establishment of affirmative action "with regard to the fact that women in Namibia have traditionally suffered special discrimination and that they need to be encouraged and enabled to play a full, equal and effective role in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the nation." Additionally, the Constitution guarantees that men and women of full age "shall be entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage, and at its dissolution." It is also important to note that much as the customary law continues to be recognized it is only to the extent to which it does not violate the Constitution.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia has been doing much to empower women. A Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) was established in the President's Office to facilitate liaison between women and the government and help identify action priorities. The DWA is essential as the government's commitment to gender issues. The DWA and the government's National Planning Commission also established an intermenstrual gender network to monitor gender issues in government policy. There have been efforts for affirmative action to improve women's presence in government, political positions, and education.

### **3. Namibian businesses and (in)equalities**

There are two types of landholdings in Namibia: freehold and communal land. There is 42% commercial freehold tenure, 35% communal land, and 23% state-owned land [28]. Much as there has been the adoption of institutional frameworks that aim to promote gender equality [29], most women in Namibia have been disadvantaged in terms of land ownership and use, even if they make up slightly more than half of the country's population, with over 40% of rural households being headed by women [30]. Few women own farms, as such [31]. Women being in a more disadvantaged position compared to men in land access can be accounted for by the history of customary discriminatory practices against women in accessing land, rights



over land, and security of land tenure [32]. The question is the extent to which this inequality is institutionalized in the businesses in Namibia.

The financial system of Namibia rotates around five leading commercial banks, three of which are South African, one is Namibian, and one is a majority government-owned SME Bank. These commercial banks hold more than 95% of assets and deposits. To address the financial gaps in consumer financial literacy and protection and access to financial services and products by SMEs, the government adopted a “Namibia Financial Sector Strategy 2011-2021: Toward Achieving Vision 2030”. In 2014, 58% of Namibians had bank accounts, with 57% of women having one. Much as most loans come from Namibian commercial banks, most Namibians (57%) prefer to borrow from family and friends (57%) or someone in the community (10%) rather than banks (4%) because of lack of skills and systems to generate appropriate data and business plans, along with the lack of collateral and credit history [33]. There is almost no literature on gender and financial inclusion concerning male and female-led business organizations. Literature commonly states that women-owned enterprises suffer from inadequate access to financial services. For example, it is said that over 70% of female-owned small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have inadequate or no access to financial services [34]. Literature also asserts that equality in financial inclusion in enterprises leads to unlocking the potential for enterprises to grow, reducing exposure to income shocks, dynamizing growth, and promoting sustainable and equitable development [35]. So, if Namibia’s small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have high business discontinuation of four times higher than the rate of established business activity [36], could it be because of the financial exclusion issues? Namibia has 38% female-led business organizations [37].

Gender-equitable access to ICTs is central to sustainable development goal 4 (SDG4) by 2030 and Namibia’s Vision 2030. In Namibia, 59% of the population has access to the Internet and mostly in urban areas, with rural communities left mainly behind [38]. Only 47% of Namibian women have access to the Internet. It is known that digital services have the potential to improve businesses’ access to broader markets and increase their competitiveness; nonetheless, many businesses are not able to use digital services due to a lack of awareness of digital services, electricity, skills to navigate smart devices, high cost of both devices and mobile Internet and cybercrime [39]. Furthermore, when it comes to ICT education, there needs to be more training in ICT pedagogy, technical know-how in ICT applications, technical support, time to learn and incorporate ICT skills and tools into lessons, and insufficient budget allocation [40]. Not only is the literature on gender and ICT for Namibia very scarce but also there is a paucity of data on the question of the gender digital divide, making it difficult and impossible to make a case for the inclusion of gender issues in ICT policies, plans, and strategies to policymakers [41]. So, is there a significant difference between female and male-led business organizations using ICTs?

The definition of corruption is an illegal activity in terms of bribery, fraud, financial crimes, abuse, falsification, favoritism, nepotism, manipulation, and misrepresentation by public or private officials, domestically or internationally, in a social, business, or governmental context conducted through misuse of authority or power by government or firms officeholders for personal gain and benefit, financial or otherwise [42], seems to be comprehensive, touching upon the three characteristics of illegal activity, misuse of power or authority, and personal benefits, which most definitions refer to. Corruption happens in enterprises, but enterprises also play a

crucial role in much of the corruption that occurs in society, and they are also essential contexts for corruption themselves [43]. Some studies have linked gender and corruption, for instance, the perceptions about corruption by the female managers and owners of firms [44], the impact of corruption on applying for credit between female and male entrepreneurs [45], gender differences in enterprise-level bribery [46], women's moral standards and bribing [47], corruption in family SMEs and non-family SMEs [48], corrupt institutional environment and public subsidies for credit access by SMEs helmed by female entrepreneurs [49], the gendered effects of corruption on credit access and credit constraints [47], and gender and bribe paying [50]. As women form a considerable proportion of the informal sector, which is highly contaminated by corruption, there is a greater likelihood that they are under constant pressure to yield to corruption [51]. To what extent is it true that women are more exposed to corruption than men, particularly if female-led business organizations are more exposed to corruption than those led by males?

## **4. The issue and methodology**

### **4.1 The issue**

Joan [52, 53] argued for the gendered organizations in favor of men despite the closing gender gaps in educational attainment and workplace seniority; the persistence is built upon the preference to hire people with few distractions outside work, and hence excluding many women because of the likelihood that they hold primary care responsibilities for family members, and incidentally having a man as an ideal worker. Much as workplaces are still gendered in favor of men, do we still have pronounced inequalities despite the empowerment efforts and the women themselves who are an expression of empowered women in management and leadership positions? There is reason to doubt the presence of pronounced inequalities at this moment, even in masculinized entities, such as businesses.

In its examination of inequality, the study deals with the aspects of access to resources (land and finances), use of ICT, and exposure to corruption. Access refers to having or getting the opportunity to use the resource [54]. In the access model [55], every social entity and every member has a specific access profile to resources and tangible assets, depending on one's rights by tradition or law. The access profile differs per individual and entity and may also change over time. Women's access profile has been undermined because they are depicted as unable to manage property adequately, supposedly frail and weak, more vulnerable to the environment, and easily duped in transactions involving land [56].

On the other hand, it has been argued that due to the unequal gender relations in society, women are more exposed to corruption and its consequences [51]. Hence, there is a greater likelihood that they are under constant pressure to yield to corruption. So, is there still inequality in access and use of resources and the exposure to corruption in businesses?

### **4.2 Methodology**

In order to test if there are still inequalities, a study was conducted on the business organizations in Namibia using the Namibian enterprise dataset. The World Bank

collected this dataset between 2014 and 2015.<sup>1</sup> The Namibia enterprise survey is a firm-level survey of a representative sample of Namibia's private sector. Like other such surveys elsewhere, the survey aims to obtain feedback from enterprises on the state of the private sector, as well as to help in building a panel of enterprise data that makes it possible to track changes in the business environment over time, thus allowing, for example, impact assessments of reforms. The survey assesses the constraints to private sector growth and creates statistically significant business environment indicators.

The study population comprised businesses in the nonagricultural private economy, namely the manufacturing, construction, services, transport, storage, and communications sectors. The financial intermediation, real estate and renting activities, IT, the public or utilities sectors, and companies with 100% government ownership were excluded. The sample of the respondents was selected using stratified random sampling. Two levels of stratification were used, namely industry and region. The industry was stratified into manufacturing and two services sectors (retail and other services). Regional stratification was defined in the three regions of Windhoek\Okahandja, Walvis Bay\Swakopmund, and Oshakati\Ongwediva. A sample frame was built using data compiled from local and municipal business registries. The target sample size was 600 establishments, and 580 were reached.

The data were collected using face-to-face interviews. The World Bank used their manufacturing and services module questionnaires to gather data regarding the firm characteristics, gender participation, access to finance, annual sales, costs of inputs and labor, workforce composition, bribery, licensing, infrastructure, trade, crime, competition, capacity utilization, land and permits, taxation, informality, business-government relations, innovation and technology, performance measures, and opinions on the obstacles to the business growth and performance.

The variables of interest concerning access to land and finance, use of ICTs, and exposure to corruption were identified. A comparison was made between female-led and male-led business organizations, with a null hypothesis that there is no difference between the female and male-led business organizations in the access to resources' use of ICTs and exposure to corruption. The chi-square test is performed, and the results are presented by reading the p-value at an alpha level of 0.05. A p-value smaller or equal to 0.05 leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis [57].

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Gender equality and access to land

Concerning the extent to which inequality is institutionalized in the businesses in Namibia, testing the hypothesis that there are no differences between female and male-led business organizations in accessing land yields the following results, as summarized in **Table 1**.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dataset downloaded from <https://login.enterprisesurveys.org/content/sites/financeandprivatesector/en/library/library-detail.html/content/dam/wbgassetshare/enterprisesurveys/economy/namibia/Namibia-2014-full-data.dta> [29th July 2021].

Variable	Observations	Mean
Percent of land owned	359	58.00836
Percent of land rented	359	41.43454
How much of an obstacle is access to land?	359	2.005571
Total annual expenditure to purchase land	131	124,000,000.00 N\$
Value of land and buildings	148	19,400,000.00 N\$
Cost to repurchase all the land and buildings	148	3,140,000,000.00 N\$

**Table 1.**  
*Descriptive statistics of the variables of access to land.*

H <sub>0</sub> : There is no difference between female and male-led business organizations on ...	Observations	P-value	Reject/Accept H <sub>0</sub>
The per cent of land owned	359	0.267	Accept
The per cent of land rented	359	0.355	Accept
How much of an obstacle access to land is	359	0.185	Accept
The total annual expenditure to purchase land	131	0.431	Accept
The value of land and buildings	148	0.948	Accept
The cost to repurchase all the land and buildings	148	0.493	Accept

**Table 2.**  
*Results of the chi-square test on access to land.*

**Table 1** shows the means of the different variables of access to land. Expenditure, the value of land and buildings, and the cost to repurchase the land and buildings are in Namibian Dollars (N\$). **Table 2** presents the results of the chi-square test to see if there is a significant difference between female and male-led business organizations in the different aspects of access to land.

From the results of the chi-square test, as presented in **Table 2**, it is concluded that there is no significant difference between female and male-led business organizations in accessing land.

## 5.2 Gender equality and access to finance

Testing the hypothesis that there are no differences between female and male-led business organizations in accessing finances yields the results summarized in **Table 3**.

**Table 4** reports the results of the chi-square test. For all the variables, except the percentage of working capital financed from external sources, no significant difference exists in the access to finances.

## 5.3 Gender equality and use of ICTs

**Table 5** shows the descriptive statistics of the variables of the use of ICTs by business organizations.

**Table 6** presents the chi-square test results to see if there is a significant difference between female and male-led business organizations using ICTs.

	N	Mean
How much of an obstacle is access to finance?	255	2.168627
% of working capital financed from internal funds	255	71.4902
% of working capital financed from external sources	255	4.729412
Have a line of credit or loan	255	1.733333
% of working capital borrowed from banks	255	4.647059
% of working capital borrowed from nonbanks	255	1.811765
Have a checking and/or saving account	255	1.231373

**Table 3.**  
 Descriptive statistics of the variables of access to finance.

H <sub>0</sub> : There is no difference between female and male-led business organizations on ...	Observation	P-value	Reject/Accept H <sub>0</sub>
How much of an obstacle access to finance is	255	0.227	Accept
The % of working capital financed from internal funds	255	0.202	Accept
The % of working capital financed from external sources	255	0.05	Reject
Having a line of credit or loan	255	0.751	Accept
The % of working capital borrowed from banks	255	0.858	Accept
The % of working capital borrowed from nonbanks	255	0.77	Accept
Having a checking or saving account	255	0.373	Accept

**Table 4.**  
 Results of a chi-square test on access to finance.

	Observations	Mean
Communicate with emails	251	1.59761
How much of an obstacle is telecommunication?	251	1.76494
Have website	251	1.645418

**Table 5.**  
 Descriptive statistics on the variables of the use of ICTs.

Female and male-led business organizations are the same in communicating with emails and use of websites. However, there is a significant difference between female and male-led business organizations on how much telecommunications are an obstacle.

#### 5.4 Gender equality and exposure to corruption

To what extent is it true that women are more exposed to corruption than men, mainly if female-led business organizations are more exposed to corruption than those led by males? **Table 7** presents the descriptive statistics of the variables used for exposure to corruption.

<b>H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between female and male-led business organizations on ...</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Reject/Accept H<sub>0</sub></b>
Communication with emails	254	0.686	Accept
How much of an obstacle telecommunication is	251	0.000	Reject
Having websites	251	0.498	Accept

**Table 6.**  
*Results of a chi-square test on the use of ICTs.*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Mean</b>
How much is corruption an obstacle?	238	2.042017
Bribe expected or requested for electrical connection	15	1.666667
Bribe expected or requested for inspections	169	1.745562
Bribe expected or requested to secure a contract	9	0.444444
Bribe expected or requested when applied for import license	48	1.958333
Bribe expected or requested when applying for an operating license	22	1.909091
Bribe expected or requested for a construction-related permit	13	1.692308

**Table 7.**  
*Descriptive statistics of the variables used for exposure to corruption.*

<b>H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference between female and male-led business organizations on ...</b>	<b>Df.</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Reject/Accept H<sub>0</sub></b>
How much corruption is an obstacle	238	0.121	Accept
The bribe expected or requested for electrical connection	17	0.938	Accept
The bribe expected or requested for inspections	171	0.831	Accept
The bribe expected or requested to secure a contract	9	0.140	Accept
The bribe expected or requested when applying for an import license	48	0.009	Reject
The bribe expected or requested when applying for an operating license	22	0.639	Accept
The bribe expected or requested for a construction-related permit	13	0.109	Accept

**Table 8.**  
*Chi-square test results on exposure to corruption.*

As per the results in **Table 7**, it is essential to note that corruption is not an obstacle, with a mean of 2.04. **Table 8** shows the results after the chi-square test. As seen in **Table 8**, there is no significant difference between the female and male-led business organizations on all the aspects of exposure to corruption, except a bribe being expected or requested when applying for an import license.

## 6. Discussion of the findings

The empowerment initiatives are at the core of the equality achieved, built on the prototype of a *homo competitus*, a competing human being. Reacting to the interpretation of social organization as patriarchal, and hence the social male dominance, a mode of thinking and practice evolved to dislodge such dominance through Western feminism [15]. Theorization, policy implications, and implementation addressed the power of the males over everything, including the females. Empowerment, therefore, became a zero-sum game “with politically weak winners and powerful losers” ([58], p. 17). This realization does not align with the GAD principles of including and speaking of both genders [59]. Among the impact of this male-female competition is the disempowerment of the males that have come to the point of silently submitting to different types of violence in the private, as well as the public; any talk about the policies and practices about the men’s empowerment or the plight of a boy child risks the interpretation of being a misogynist agenda and the distraction from the universalized agenda of the severity of disempowered women [60].

The women empowerment initiatives in Namibia are a function of coloniality, that is, the “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” [61] by purpose, motivation, leadership, and idealized woman. The initiatives aimed to insert a woman in modern society as viewed from a Western episteme; they enrolled women into the modern sociopolitical and economic women’s rights regime. The initiatives were motivated by the Beijing Conference of 1985 and intensified with the armed struggle for liberation through the independence to the postindependence period [62]. The empowerment initiatives were and still are spearheaded by the elite who belonged to the national organizations, such as the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) Women’s Council and the South West Africa National Union (SWANU) aimed at primarily mobilizing the women to support the armed struggle, and the local organizations, such as the Women’s desk of the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), and the Namibia Women’s Voice (NWV). In this promotion of an empowered woman, there was no theorization for knowledge generation whatsoever regarding the African gender dynamics, characterized by the complex processes towards marriage, in marriage itself, and after marriage. All that was done was value judgment of the existing gender dynamics, branding them as traditional or primitive and hence deserving abandonment.

## 7. Conclusion and proposition

The chapter aimed to examine gender equality in Namibian enterprises. The findings reveal that there is more equality in the business organizations regarding access to land and finances, use of ICTs, and exposure to corruption. Of the 24 variables that were examined, there are only three variables that show significant differences between female and male-led business organizations. The equality seen in this sector is a general reflection of the gains in equality elsewhere in the promotion of the livelihoods of the African people. Nonetheless, the gender equality achieved is a point of contestation because of the coloniality embedded in the competition-based idea of women’s empowerment that was a frame to promote it.

We propose decoloniality of the women empowerment idea based on *Ubuntu*. The women empowerment idea is epistemologically Western-centric in its origin. Furthermore, we use *Ubuntu* because it is African. We do not suggest pouring the clean baby and dirty water out of the basin. We acknowledge the women empowerment initiatives and the resulting gender equality. Nonetheless, we argue that the initiatives are misplaced in the African context; they are based on competition between males and females, and this competition has resulted in contested gender equality. Instead, the empowerment initiatives are based on the search for harmony, a fundamental African trait based on *Ubuntu* thinking.

There has been an attempt to give steps to decolonialize. In a paper that suggested decolonializing livelihood research, three steps are suggested. The first step is a personal engagement to decolonialize knowledge; the personal engagement unleashes personal efforts to move towards encountering others' knowledge. The second step concerns the participatory engagements with the communities to generate decolonialized knowledge. The last step is to practice decolonialized knowledge by engaging in actions of resistance, intentional undoing, and positive action to create and build alternative spaces and ways of knowing [14]. This is a three-step itinerary engagement with the self, community, and making use of decolonialized knowledge. We suggest following these steps.

In the first step, which is about a personal engagement to decolonialize knowledge, we suggest changing the wording from women empowerment to gender empowerment. This step uses the *Ubuntu* principle of a bond that links all humanity because we depend and interdepend on each other. Changing the wording affirms the centrality of all genders, rather than only the women and men; each other's gender is merged in one's gender based on a self-assurance of belonging to others and others belonging to an individual. In the second step, which is about participatory engagements with the communities for decolonialized knowledge, *Ubuntu's* first and second dimensions are critical. These dimensions are about sharing and cooperation. In this second step, let the communities share their knowledge regarding gender empowerment and cooperate to bring out gender empowerment perspectives from the segments of their community. In the third step, where decolonialized knowledge is to be put into practice, the deliberative dimension of *Ubuntu* is critical; let the communities identify their gender empowerment issues and suggest how they can address them with openness, acknowledgment of others' opinions, and engagement without being impeded by others' competencies.

## **Acknowledgements**

We acknowledge the instrumental and valuable inputs from Professor Leo de Haan (International Institute of Social Studies, The Netherlands), Professor Robert Esuruku (Makerere University of Kampala, Uganda), Professor Emmanuel Nyankweli (Open University of Tanzania, Tanzania), and Dr. Josua Matati (UNAM, Namibia).

## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.



## **Author details**

Adalbertus Fortunatus Kamanzi<sup>1\*</sup> and Judith Namabira<sup>2</sup>


1 Independent Researcher, Oshakati, Namibia

2 Independent Researcher, Dodoma, Tanzania

\*Address all correspondence to: [akamanzi@unam.na](mailto:akamanzi@unam.na)

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] IPPR. Namibia Quarterly Economic Report Q4. Windhoek: IPPR; 2022
- [2] Humavindu M, Stage J. Key sectors of the Namibian economy. *Journal of Economic Structures*. 2013;2(1):1-15
- [3] Republic of Namibia. Strategic Plan 2017-2022. Windhoek: Ministry of Industrialization, Trade and SME Development; 2017
- [4] Republic of Namibia. Namibia Vision 2030: Policy Framework for Long-Term National Development (Main Document). Windhoek: Office of the President; 2004
- [5] Randa I, Atiku S. SME financial inclusivity for sustainable entrepreneurship in Namibia during COVID-19. In: *Handbook of Research on Sustaining SMEs and Entrepreneurial Innovation in the Post-COVID-19 Era*. IGI Global; 2021. pp. 373-396
- [6] O'Brien KR, Holmgren M, Fitzsimmons T, Crane ME, Maxwell P, Head B. What is gender equality in science? *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*. 2019;34(5):395-399
- [7] Aberi GE. The discursive politics of gender equality. Stretching, bending and policy-making. *Gender and Language*. 2016;10(2):295-298
- [8] Rolleri L. *Gender-Related Definitions*. New York: Engender Health; 2012
- [9] Verloo M, Lombardo E. Contested gender equality and policy variety in Europe: Introducing a critical frame analysis approach. In: Verloo M, editor. *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality. A Critical Frame Analysis of Gender Policies in Europe*. Budapest - New York: CPS Books, Central European University Press; 2007. pp. 21-47
- [10] Bodur ÜM. Contesting global gender equality norms: The case of Turkey. *Review of International Studies*. 2019;45(5):828-847
- [11] Kessi S, Marks Z, Ramugondo E. Decolonizing African studies. *Critical African Studies*. 2020;12(3):271-282
- [12] Foley E. Sacramentality, chaos theory and decoloniality. *Religions*. 2019;10(7):418
- [13] Ndlovu-Gatsheni S. *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*. Abingdon: Routledge; 2018
- [14] Kamanzi A, Lakwo L, de Haan LJ. To do livelihoods research now is to recognize coloniality and to decolonize. van Meijl T, Wijsen, F, editors. *Engaged Scholarship and the Goal of Emancipation. Essays about 75 Years of Cultural Anthropology and Development Studies at Radboud University, Nijmegen*, Radboud University Press, 2023:124-130
- [15] Cornell D, Van Marle K. Ubuntu feminism: Tentative reflections. *Verbum et Ecclesia*. 2015;36(2):1-8
- [16] Mangaroo-Pillay M, Coetzee R. A systematic literature review (SLR) comparing Japanese lean philosophy and the south African Ubuntu philosophy. *International Journal of Lean Six Sigma*. 2022;13(1):118-135
- [17] Chowdhury JS, Abd Wahab H, Saad MRM, Roy PK, Hamidi M, Ahmad MM. *Ubuntu Philosophy: 'I Am Because We Are'—A Road to*

- 'Individualism' to Global Solidarity. Handbook of Research on the Impact of COVID-19 on Populations and Support for the Future. IGI Global; 2021. pp. 361-381
- [18] Wadada ND. Ubuntu philosophy: Memory and reconciliation. Texas Scholar Works
- [19] Murove MF. Ubuntu. *Diogenes*. 2012;**59**(3-4):36-47
- [20] Waghid Y. Towards an Ubuntu philosophy of higher education in Africa. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. 2020;**39**(3):299-308
- [21] Chigangaidze RK, Matanga AA, Katsuro TR. Ubuntu philosophy as a humanistic–existential framework for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. 2022;**62**(3):319-333
- [22] Abraham L, Prabha K. The angst of the dehumanized: Ubuntu for solidarity. *Journal of International Women's Studies*. 2022;**24**(4):7-20
- [23] World Economic Forum. 2018
- [24] Rowlands J. A word of the times, but what does it mean? Empowerment in the discourse and practice of development. In: Afshar H, editor. *Women and Empowerment. Illustration from the Third World*. London: Macmillan; 1998. pp. 11-34
- [25] Batliwala S. Defining women's empowerment: A conceptual framework. In: Position Paper for the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing. New Delhi: Education for Women's Empowerment; 1995
- [26] ODA. Stakeholder Participation in Aid Activities. London: ODA; 1994
- [27] Gaventa J, Pettit J, Cornish L. *Power Pack: Understanding Power for Social Change*. Sussex, UK: Institute for Developmental Studies; 2011
- [28] Hausmann R, Santos M, Barrios D, Taniparti N, Pye J, Muci J, et al. *A Growth Diagnostic of Namibia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University; 2022
- [29] De Villiers S, Christensen A, Tjipetekera C, Delgado G, Mwando S, Nghitevelekwa R, et al. Land governance in Namibia. In: 2019 Land Governance in Southern Africa Symposium. Windhoek, Namibia: NUST-NELGA; 3-4 September, 2019
- [30] Angus L. Women and land issues. *Sister Namibia*. 2018;**30**(4):4-5
- [31] Shoko M. Towards a women-centric land redistribution model for Namibia. *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*. 2021;**29**:85-105
- [32] Nakanyete N, Nghitevelekwa R, Matsa M, Mendelsohn J, Lendelvo S, Shikale F. Communal land tenure security for widows in the Eenhana Constituency of the Ohangwena Region, Namibia. *Journal of International Women's Studies*. 2020;**21**(1):131-147
- [33] Legal Assistance Center. *Namibia Gender Analysis*. Windhoek: Legal Assistance Center; 2017
- [34] Koch K, Stupnytska A, MacBeath A, Lawson S, Matsui K. *Giving Credit Where it Is Due; How Closing the Credit Gap for Women-Owned SMEs Can Drive Global Growth*. New York: Goldman Sachs Global Markets Institute; 2014
- [35] Arnold J, Gammage S. Gender and financial inclusion: The critical role for holistic programming. *Development in Practice*. 2019;**29**(8):965-973

- [36] Mukata C, Swanepoel E. Development support for small and medium enterprises in the financially constrained north-eastern regions of Namibia. *Southern African Business Review*. 2017;**21**:198-221
- [37] Kamanzi A. Does gender matter in the adoption of emails in the Namibian enterprises? *Texila International Journal of Academic Research*. 2022;**9**:1-9
- [38] Republic of Namibia. In: Digital Paper No.4. Digital Technologies. Windhoek: National and Regional Consultations on Transforming Education in Namibia; 2022
- [39] Kamutuezu E, Winschiers-Theophilus H, Peters A. An exploration of factors influencing the adoption of ICT-enabled entrepreneurship applications in Namibian rural communities. arXiv preprint, Vols. arXiv-2108.09789. 2021
- [40] Kazondovi C. An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policy for Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Namibia. Windhoek: University of Namibia; 2018
- [41] Hafkin N, Huyer S. Women and gender in ICT statistics and indicators for development. *Information Technologies & International Development*. 2007;**4**(2):25
- [42] Bahoo S, Alon I, Paltrinieri A. Corruption in international business: A review and research agenda. *International Business Review*. 2020;**29**(4):101660
- [43] Castro A, Phillips N, Ansari S. Corporate corruption: A review and agenda for future research. *Academy of Management Annals*. 2020;**14**(2):935-968
- [44] Goel R, Nelson M. Corruption beyond the glass ceiling: Do women entrepreneurs perceive corruption differently? CESifo Working Paper No. 7606. 2019
- [45] Statnik J, Vu T, Weill L. Does corruption discourage more female entrepreneurs from applying for credit? *Comparative Economic Studies*. 2022;**65**(1):1-28
- [46] Nguyen L, Nguyen H, Pham M. Bribe or die: Gender differences in entrepreneurship in emerging markets. *Applied Economics*. 2021;**53**(19):2170-2191
- [47] Wellalage N, Fernandez V, Thrikawala S. Corruption and innovation in private firms: Does gender matter? *International Review of Financial Analysis*. 2020;**70**:101500, 1-14
- [48] Tran N, Nguyen T, Vu A, Phan T, Do N. Female managers and corruption in SMEs: A comparison between family and non-family SMEs in Vietnam. *SAGE Open*. 2022;**12**(1):21582440221082131
- [49] Bonanno G, Fiorino N, Garzarelli G, Rossi S. Public guarantee schemes, corruption and gender: A European SME-level analysis. *Applied Economics*. 2020;**52**(60):6498-6513
- [50] Peiffer C, Rose R. Why do some Africans pay bribes while other Africans don't? Afrobarometer Working Paper Series No. 148. 2014
- [51] SIDA. Gender and Corruption. Gender Toolbox (Brief). Stockholm, Sweden: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA); 2015
- [52] Joan A. Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*. 1990;**4**:139-158

[53] Joan W. *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do about it*. New York: Oxford University Press; 2001

[54] De Haan LJ. *Livelihood, Locality and Globalisation*. KUN: CIDIN; 2000

[55] Blaikie P, Cannon T, Davis I, Wisner B. *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*. London: Routledge; 1994

[56] Wanyeki M. *Women and Land in Africa: Culture Religion and Realising Women's Rights*. New York and London: Sage; 2003

[57] Kim H. Statistical notes for clinical researchers: Chi-squared test and Fisher's exact test. *Restorative Dentistry and Endodontics*. 2017;42(2):152-155

[58] Kabeer N. *Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of women's Empowerment. Discussing women's Empowerment—Theory and Practice*. Stockholm: Sida; 2001. pp. 17-57

[59] Cornwall A. *Missing men? Reflections on men, masculinities and gender in GAD*. *IDS Bulletin*. 2000;31(2):18-27

[60] Mukulu B. *Assessment of Masculinity Expectations as Determinant of Silence about Gender-Based Violence against Men in Outapi Town, Namibia*. Windhoek: UNAM; 2023

[61] Maldonado-Torres N. *On the coloniality of being*. *Cultural Studies*. 2007;21(2-3):240-270

[62] Hubbard D, Solomon C. *The women's Movement in Namibia: History, Constraints and Potential*. Boulder, CO: Westview Publishers; 1995



---

Section 2

# Opportunities and Challenges

---





# Walking through the Leaky Academic Pipeline in STEM: Equity Not Equality Needed for Women and under Represented Minorities (URMs)

*Dwight Figueiredo*

## Abstract

Previous studies have shown STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines to have low representation by women and certain minorities (i.e. gender, race and ethnic minorities). Higher up the academic ladder, the higher the gap in parity between the majority and minority groups in STEM suggesting a leaky pipeline caused due to higher attrition of women and minorities. Prevailing conscious as well as subconscious gender-science stereotypes, lack of sense of belonging towards male-dominated STEM disciplines, hostile campus environments and negative student-faculty interactions, lack of diversity in the academic hiring process and in journal editorial committees and understanding of academic metrics are to be considered when hiring minorities play a role in establishing and maintaining the leaky academic pipeline. Women & URMs tend to possess significant homophily in academic networks and collaborations impacting scientific productivity and quality recently exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 lead to lower initiation of new projects—particularly faced by minorities groups in STEM—thereby possibly impacting productivity for years to come. Proposals for making STEM education and jobs more equitable need to be formulated and taken up as a priority if science and its wide-reaching impacts have to truly serve all people.

**Keywords:** gender equity, racial equity, diversity, URMs, inclusivity, STEM, homophily, science-gender stereotypes

## 1. Introduction

There is growing evidence that women and minorities are underrepresented in various STEM educational fields and in the STEM related workforce [1–3]. However, all STEM disciplines are not equivalent in terms of gender and minority representation, with some being at parity while some being highly underrepresented- for e.g. gender representation in the Health and Life Sciences disciplines are at parity

compared to representation in physical sciences, mathematics, computer sciences & engineering having high gender gaps [3–5].

These differences are even more pronounced when we consider senior jobs/positions higher up the academic ladder in STEM fields- posts of associate professor, professor, dean, and departmental chair in various departments and research intensive institutes [6, 7]. The reasons for the surprisingly low numbers of women and minorities in these positions of scientific credibility and stature are being investigated, given that there is a relatively higher percentage of women and minorities that graduate and enter into junior academic ranks/posts (i.e. research associate, assistant professors etc.) in those very same disciplines. Many studies have proposed a leaky pipeline model suggesting that there are many points along the academic tenure track route at which women and minorities drop out of STEM fields [8]. Interestingly, many studies have cited possible explanations for such high attrition rates out of academia, and some have even called for change at the institutional policy and government and international scientific governing body level [9–13]. However, the practicality and feasibility of implementing these strategies in the current male indoctrinated scientific environment remains to be understood.

The good part is that scientists, scientific governing bodies, academic teaching and research institutions/organizations, publishing houses and scientific review boards are starting to recognize such disparities and implement policy changes at different levels to mitigate such systemic bias against minorities [14–18]. Online social media campaigns such as ‘Black in Neuro’ and ‘Black in Immunology’ week have made people aware of the minority black community within their fraternity [19–23]. These campaigns also serve to highlight contributions made in the field that often go unrecognized, and to encourage providing more favorable space for such isolated voiceless communities in scientific workspaces.

Given that such recognition is happening at various levels, it is important for decision making administrative bodies to make sustainable decisions in every sphere based on rigorous high quality data. This will ensure a slow sustainable change that will rout out systemic racism but at the same time will also maintain and facilitate high quality and innovative cutting-edge research. Keeping this in mind, in this book chapter, we plan to review studies that have focused their questions on minority representation in STEM education, research, related jobs in academia, productivity, and various systemic barriers and possible facilitators that affect minority groups in STEM. Portraying such data in an unbiased and accurate manner would help tackle the issues at the roots of such problems keeping away unnecessary favoritism that could ruin the competitive streak existing in STEM.

## **2. Selection of studies**

The following search terms were used in different combinations in ‘Google scholar’, Pubmed (Medline), preprints and grey literature sources to identify articles related to the topic: Gender Inequality, Gender Inequity, Gender Equity, Racial Inequity, Under Represented Minorities (URMs), STEM, Science Technology Engineering and Maths, Gender bias, Women in STEM, Pay Gap, Leaky Pipeline in STEM, Racial Discrimination, Ethnic Minorities, COVID-19, Homophily, Sense of Belonging, and Gender-Science Stereotypes. Studies were identified based on search strings generated from different combination of search terms pertaining to each of

the following areas: Inequalities in STEM education: Gender and Ethnicity (Gender Science Stereotypes: Implicit and Explicit perception, Retention in STEM: Sense of belonging); STEM workplaces & education: A hostile climate for minorities (Racial Microaggressions (RMAs), Student-faculty relationships: Race and gender differences); Recruitment to academic positions: Minorities underrepresented; Gap in pay for equal work: Minorities bear the brunt; Need for diversity at the top: highlighting the need for editorial board diversity; Women and URMs at the top- winds of change; Homophily among collaborative networks: A barrier to impact, diversity and productivity; Covid-19: its impact on the productivity and attrition rates in STEM- Analysis of the groups most affected; and Suggestions to encourage women and minority groups to access STEM education and remain in the academic pipeline. Documents were screened using abstracts and primary studies (studies that collected and analyzed data) pertaining to the above headings ((abstracts were screened) were included in the review. No reviews (qualitative or quantitative meta-analysis) were considered for analysis, however back-referencing of reviews were carried out to further identify articles pertaining to the 10 included domains.

### **3. Inequalities in STEM education: gender and ethnicity**

#### **3.1 Gender science stereotypes: implicit and explicit perception**

Many large scale bibliometric studies have shown that there are gaps in numbers as well as highlighted the possible mechanisms responsible for such gaps in many fields in STEM education that persist until today. These differences could be attributed to varying underlying factors which could be location and context specific. A cross sectional study of 4, 93,495 students (2 major international datasets- 2003 trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, and the Programme for International Student Assessment) analyzing gender differences in mathematics achievements, attitudes and affect revealed that boys have a more positive attitude and affect towards mathematics but there is no significant difference between mathematical achievement scores between sexes (Mean effect sizes  $d < 0.15$ ). High country wise variability in this study could be attributed to powerful predictors of cross-national variability in gender gaps in math such as equity in school enrollment, women's parliamentary representation, and women's share of research jobs [24]. Similarly, a study of 35,000 participants in 66 nations (involving the same data sets as the study above [24]) provided evidence that increased female enrollment in tertiary science education was related to weaker (implicit and explicit) national gender science stereotypes. Increased women's employment in the research workforce leads to weaker explicit but not implicit gender stereotypes. Interestingly, implicit gender science stereotypes persisted in college educated participants [25]. A cross-sectional study among 1364 Swiss students investigating the masculinity image of chemistry, physics and mathematics has revealed that these subjects have a predominant masculinity attribution, both among female as well as male secondary school students. Interestingly, students who were studying in non-STEM subjects showed greater masculinity attribution to these science subjects. Moreover, these attributions as male dominated subjects have potential impacts on STEM major career aspirations among these students- the more pronounced the masculine image attributed to a subject; the less likely would be the aspirations to major in that subject, particularly among female students [26].

### **3.2 Retention in STEM: sense of belonging**

Sense of belonging is also a crucial aspect that has been shown to influence decision making with regards to choosing STEM subjects as a major in college. Evidence pointed out that women of color were the least likely to experience this sense of belonging in STEM disciplines, with sub-discipline representation having an impact. This study reported that sense of belonging was significantly influenced by personal interest, science identity, interpersonal relationships, and perceived competence [27]. Studies in Computer Science revealed that sense of belonging affected minority students' interest to pursue CS courses and negative correlated with regards to course outcomes in terms of pass rates and course performance. These studies are of relevance for informing the necessary changes for addressing self identified minority students with a lower sense of belonging [28–30]. Another study using visual narratives and item response theory to quantify sense of belonging in a research-focused STEM department further provided evidence that graduate students and postdoctoral researchers who identify as underrepresented were less likely to experience a sense of belonging [31].

In conclusion these studies point to the fact that girls/women in particular have preconceived notions regarding choice of subjects and career aspirations in STEM based on prevailing cultural-gender stereotypes. Ironically these cultural-gender stereotypes have been built in by society and are not based on intellectual ability, capability, suitability or productivity which has been shown to be not significantly different in a number of studies. However, these science gender stereotypes are hard-wired and culturally ingrained, leading to its implicit as well as explicit expression within the community, which would require persistent systemic and individual efforts to undermine it.

## **4. STEM workplaces and education: a hostile climate for minorities**

Studies have shown that sexual harassment, discrimination, and micro-aggressions in women and minority groups are prevalent and reported with high level of variability among different minority STEM student populations [32–35]. In recent years much attention has been drawn towards sexual harassment and misconduct particularly on college campuses leading to deterrent policies being implemented at all levels. However, recent evidence points to the fact that women, and particularly minorities (intersection between race, gender, and orientation-i.e. black women, lesbians and bisexual women of colour) are most susceptible to subtle forms of discrimination at different academic related settings. Of note, students who identified themselves as part of the sexual minority population on campus (for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer) had a 7% lower likelihood of persisting after four years in major STEM fields. This longitudinal study was conducted among 4162 STEM-aspiring college students across 78 institutions providing STEM majors in the fourth year of college. Interestingly, the authors observed that gender minority students were more likely to participate in undergraduate research programs, and the conventional gender disparity in STEM retention (i.e more males versus female retention) was reversed among STEM sexual women minority groups. However, overall, this study showed that minority men persisting in STEM fields were higher than that for minority women [36].

Such feelings of isolation among minority groups on campus for both genders are no different than at STEM workplaces. In a study examining the experiences faced by the LGBTQ community in STEM—representative survey data from 21 STEM

professional societies– showed that LGBTQ STEM professionals experienced harassment, career limitations, and professional devaluation as compared to their non-LGBTQ peers after controlling for demographic, discipline, and job factors (LGBTQ sample = 25,324; NLGBTQ = 1006). The authors highlight that despite LGBTQ professionals having equal commitment, work ethic and academic qualifications, they were more likely to have health issues while at work, and were more likely to intend to quit STEM than their non-LGBTQ peers. These results persisted across STEM disciplines and employment sectors thereby leading the authors to conclude that the LGBTQ status is a clear axis of inequality in STEM [37].

#### **4.1 Racial micro-aggressions (RMAs)**

Given the high prevalence of attitudes towards attrition both on campus and in the professional space, few studies have investigated potential mechanisms leading to such isolated hopeless feelings. Some studies on college campuses have suggested that minorities in many STEM fields are subject to subtle micro-aggression imposed by the majority- either implicitly or explicitly. Conclusions drawn from an online survey of more than 4800 students of colour attending university show that Racial MicroAggressions (RMAs) are frequently experienced by students of color, particularly black students at all levels- environment on campus, interactions in academic classroom environments, and interaction with peers. The authors suggest that an implicit ingrained campus culture of exclusion is responsible for increased frequency of micro-aggressions against students of colour. The authors provide evidence for continued and persistent presence of anti-Black racism in higher education and suggest the need for an inclusive environment at all levels on campus. They propose the need for faculty members, academic professionals, and students to collaboratively work together to address racism at the academic, peer, and campus levels [38]. Similar, a study identifying micro-aggressions in ‘Sexual and Gender Minority’ (SGM) individuals (interviews with 29 SGM STEM undergraduates to assess campus micro-climate) reported that students with gender minority identities experience a higher frequency and a more severe form of micro-aggressions compared to students with sexual minority identities. Likewise, the study shows that students with a racial minority status have additional compounding issues related to identity. Interestingly, SGM students with social capital or a better network of people to turn to for advice seem to believe that they are a better fit in STEM as opposed to those who are not buffered by such social capital. Active strategies taken by students to defend themselves against hostile micro-aggressions such as behavioral changes in the way they present themselves in certain contexts and surrounding themselves with accepting colleagues were very effective for persistence in STEM. These key findings reveal strategies by which SGM individuals can find a better fit in STEM- both at the individual interaction level as well as at the institutional level [39].

#### **4.2 Student-faculty relationships: race and gender differences**

A study of 3864 students from 28 selective institutions (National Longitudinal Study of Freshmen (NLSF)- multi-wave longitudinal survey) between 2000 to 2004 provided evidence that discrimination from faculty directly impacted recipient students’ GPA scores in a negatively manner ( $\beta = -.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ) whereas academic satisfaction had a direct positive effect ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The population studied was balanced for gender, and roughly had equal amounts of Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian American

Students. A negative indirect effect of being Black on college GPA was observed mediated by greater feelings of discrimination from faculty and lower academic satisfaction. Key findings revealed differential effects of student-faculty interaction on GPA, with Black STEM students being more prone to experience discrimination in student-faculty interactions than other races. In conclusion, this study shows that faculty-student interactions benefit certain races and ethnicities to a great extent with minorities, particularly black women, experiencing negative impacts of faculty-student interactions on resultant GPA [40]. At higher academic level, studies trying to analyze student-advisor gender and race couples (Ph.D.s in STEM in South-Africa graduating between 2000 and 2014)- on productivity in academia showed that females have a 10% lower productivity than their male colleagues; however, this holds true for female graduate students working with male advisors and not female advisors. These results were more pronounced given the joint effect of gender and race. When controlled for productivity, low or high productivity female students with women advisors were as productive as low or high productivity male students with male advisors. This study suggests that female students are not fairly treated compared to their male counterparts when guided by male faculty, when controlled for other aspects [41].

In another large scale study (58,281 students participating in the 2006 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) analyzing student-faculty interactions in research universities showed that along with gender and race, social class and first generational status among students have a major role to play in governing the frequency and outcomes of such interactions. For example, male students were more likely to assist faculty in research as volunteers or for pay while women tended to research more towards attaining course credits. Student-Faculty interactions by racial groups showed that Afro-Americans interacted most with faculty but spent lowest amounts of time assisting faculty with research for pay or course credit. Interaction satisfaction for the Afro-American race was the poorest, with white male students having high rates of satisfactions with such interactions. Research related student-faculty interactions were associated positively with GPA for all races but particularly evident for the Afro-American race; however course-related faculty interactions had no effect on GPA, degree aspirations, critical thinking and communication. This study demonstrates that the outcomes and perceptions of student-faculty interactions are governed by student gender, ethnicity, socio-cultural traits, and experiences [42].

## **5. Recruitment to academic positions: minorities underrepresented**

In a randomized double blind study assessing subtle implicit gender bias of faculty in recruitment for a lab managers' post, the participating male and female faculty were more likely to choose a male applicant over a female applicant. The faculty participating rated the male applicants as more competent and hireable than the identical female applicants, besides selecting a higher starting salary and giving them more mentoring support. Mediation analyses revealed that female students were perceived as less competent with the faculty's preexisting subtle bias (measured using a standardized instrument) against female students playing a moderating role. This study concludes that there needs to be interventions that remove such implicit gender bias in the recruitment process so that more women are given an opportunity in academia [43]. In keeping with the above study, a study focusing on scientific employment trends suggested that male faculty members heading biology laboratories in leading academic institutions in the United States employed fewer female graduate students

and postdoctoral researchers (post-doctorates) than their female counterparts. Interestingly, this study provided evidence that HHMI funded elite biology scientists elected to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), some of whom have won major career awards, tend to train significantly fewer women than other male faculty members [44]. A cascading effect of such findings was revealed in the number of new assistant professors at the institutions surveyed in the study. The high-profile laboratories that flirted with gender bias in terms of recruitment (i.e. more male doctoral and postdoctoral students) were predominantly the laboratories that gave rise to assistant professors. In keeping with prestige hiring, a recent study has highlighted that a handful of universities supply majority of the tenure track faculty across disciplines. Moreover, gains in women's representation among faculty were shown to be mainly due to demographic turnover and earlier structural changes to the hiring process, and such changes would unlikely lead to parity in the near future for most disciplines [45]. A study relating to gender bias in letters of recommendation showed that biased letters of recruitment seemed to be unlikely in causing lower recruitment of women- women candidates were characterized as brilliant three times more as compared to men in analyzed recommendation letters however an open-ended search for gendered language revealed disparities favoring men in Physics [46]. Stemming this leaky pipeline in biomedical research would be important going forward by helping top-notch elite male scientists be more aware of implicit gender bias that may be a chronic problem in the hiring process [For example, see (44)]. In a study on recruitment of Assistant Professors (n = 207) and senior researchers (n = 153) into Swedish medical university (KI) Karolinska Institute between 2014 and 2017 showed that external peer reviewer scores for women applicants were less than men per unit of academic productivity (academic productivity was scored by a composite bibliometric score computed based on seven academic productivity parameter ratings). Based on the (non-KI) reviewer score, women received only 32 or 92% of the score men received per unit increase of composite productivity score for assistant professors and senior researchers respectively. Interestingly, as productivity increases, the differences in the subjectively reviewed peer scores increase. Thus, this study shows that gender bias is quantifiable and majorly affects highly productive candidates- the pool from which recruitment to posts takes place suggesting a need for adoption of computed track records to mitigate such biases [47].

However important game changing studies have countered the argument that selection committees in academic institutions are biased towards men. A study by William Ceci provided data to show that gender bias in faculty recruitment is not the case and in fact their groups staged experiments showed that there is a 2:1 faculty preference for women on STEM tenure track (873 tenure-track faculty (439 male, 434 female) surveyed at 371 universities/colleges from 50 US states). The results from the main experiment- 363 faculty members evaluating narrative summaries describing hypothetical male and female applicants for tenure-track assistant professorships- as well as the follow up studies showed that women are preferred for assistant professor tenure track positions, irrespective of whether they were divorced or took pregnancy related breaks. Furthermore, validation based experiments with full CVs showed that the result was real, suggesting a propitious time for women to launch a career in STEM [48]. However, a number of commentaries and viewpoints have repudiated the results of this study citing improper experimental design and poorly conducted research. In keeping with this narrative, some studies have revealed no such gender related hiring bias but have pointed to positive and negative biases at play in the recruitment process. In a study among data from Italian universities and research

institutes, no gender related differences were seen among candidates subject to a positive bias in terms of recruitment. Interestingly, those candidates affected by negative bias were more men than women. Focusing on the factors determining success in recruitment drives across Italian universities, number of years of the applicant in the same university and the male gender of the committee chair served as positive factors with greater weight for males applicants whereas the presence of a full tenure track women professor in the same university with the same family name as the candidate showed greater weight for female applicants [49]. Another key study aiming to analyze the impact of more diverse recruitment committees (in terms of women and underrepresented minorities URMs) revealed that the higher the diversity the higher the number of women and minority applicants in the selected applicant pools (100% more URM applicants for a URM chair and 23% more women applicants in selected pools with a woman chair- an analysis of recruitment data of 13,750 job applications). This study suggests that women and URMs actively reach out to a more diverse set of applicants lending weight to the homophily theory in increasing the representation of women and URM in the workforce [50]. Previous studies have proposed using composite bibliometric indicators for assessing applicants to academic positions as modeling reveals surprisingly good predictive power which can help peer reviewers in non-prejudiced assessment of candidates [51].

### **5.1 Gap in pay for equal work: minorities bear the brunt**

Not only problems with recruitment need to be fixed but also problems associated with pay gaps between majority and minority groups in STEM disciplines. A study focusing on the gender gap in pay in chemistry by determining the effects of human capital, labor market structure, and employer discrimination showed that 17% of the pay gap could be attributed to discrimination or unaccounted factors. Results from this study revealed that male chemists earned 30 percent more than female chemists in 2000 (Data obtained from the American Chemical Society (ACS) 2000 census- (N = 22,081)). Decomposition modeling of factors related to earning disparities between gender can be explained by differences in productivity characteristics, educational attainment, levels of experience, work function (i.e. senior versus junior posts) and employer [52].

A study of 13,855 male chemists working full-time in industry (American Chemical Society (ACS) 2005) census showed that there was a significant racial wage gap with minority chemists receiving lower wages than white chemists. Further exponential modeling analysis of different factors attributing to salaries revealed that Asian and Black chemists have wage differentials largely due to discrimination while the pay gap for Hispanic chemists are due to the lower educational attainment and experience. Minority Women were not included in the analysis as they were very low in numbers and therefore considered to be insignificant for such an analysis [53].

However, even though individual characteristics and discipline do account for pay disparities; these disparities can differ based on individual Institutional context -organizational mission, resources, and power influence [54]. A study investigating whether academic field and educational attainment played an impact on pay gaps revealed that these two factors could account for 13 to 23 percent of the racial pay gaps. However, these factors could not account for the gender pay gaps. Black women's earnings are lower compared to all other groups studied and were in a disadvantageous position both due to lower attainment and lower returns to education.



Moreover, this study showed that the pay gap between races could be reduced by equalizing educational attainment whereas normalizing wage returns would help reduce gender pay disparities [55]. An interesting longitudinal study (1999–2008) analyzing postdoctoral salaries (N = 10,000) identified women to suffer from pay gaps irrespective of race. Asian postdoctoral candidates bagged the greatest share of returns irrespective of gender and minority males had better returns as compared to their predominantly white colleagues subject to marriage as a personal trait. This data points to the fact that many factors such as educational attainment, work experience, working roles, positions of power, organization and employment sector affect salary attainment universally across the board; however, race and gender are important factors furthering pay disparities in many instances [56].

## **5.2 Need for diversity at the top: highlighting the need for editorial board diversity**

Studies of 43,000 reviewers and 9000 editors from the Frontiers series of journals show that women are underrepresented in the peer-review process, and male and female editors operate differently with same-gender preference (homophily) with gender specific mechanisms of homophily. Forecasting data shows that gender homophily will persist even if gender parity is achieved in most disciplines [57]. In terms of understanding whether the gender gap in publication rates is associated with biased peer review and editorial processes, a study of 740,000 referees and 7 million authors for 145 journals in various fields of research was carried out. Surprisingly, this study showed that publications with women first authors are treated even more favorably by editors and referees, and therefore women authors or co-authors are not penalized in the peer review process based on gender. However, this study points that more is needed to be done to achieve gender homogeneity in editor and reviewer pools [58]. A study of 180,000 papers between 2004 and 2010 by the Italian Research Assessment of Universities and Research Centers shows that characteristics of referees, researchers' observable characteristics, and evaluation method has an impact on research evaluation between the sexes. Controlling for these factors reduces the gender gap in research evaluation with childbearing and maternity having no major impact on research evaluation. In terms of the evaluation method, bibliometrics was a better tool to evaluate women as opposed to peer review assessment [59]. A cross-sectional study of the Proportion of women as editors in chief in top-ranked medical journals of different specialties revealed that less than 1 in 5 editors in chief were women- in 27 of the 41 categories studied. However the study noted high variability between medical disciplines (0 to 82% across medical specialties), with certain disciplines (psychiatry; anesthesiology; dentistry, oral surgery and medicine; allergy; and ophthalmology) having no women editor-in-Chief's to disciplines having an overrepresentation of women editors in chief (three categories-genetics and heredity, primary health care, and microbiology) [60]. Other fields like mathematics have an even more skewed gender distribution within editorial boards. A study of 435 journals in the mathematical sciences showed that 8.9% of the 13,067 editorships were held by women. Of these 435 journals, 51 have no editorships held by women, with 7.6% women as the median among journal boards. A deeper analysis by subfield reveals further variations with a median of 7.3% editorships held by women among publishers (SIAM publications being the highest-19.1%); and 7.3% editorships held by women among countries with high editorial strength (Canada (12.2%), France (11.7%), Australia (11.4%), and Italy (11.1%) have the greatest representation of

women) [61]. A similar study carried out with data from 1985 to 2013, focusing on plant sciences, natural resource management, and environmental biology (10 highly regarded journals in these areas) showed that only 16% of subject editors were women [62]. Recent studies focusing on women from varying geographical regions and income groups of the country of affiliation for editorial leadership positions across 113 rehabilitation and sports science journals revealed that 24.7% were women (1792 out of 7248 editors (35.7% leadership and 64.3% advisors). In terms of the editorial hierarchy 10.4% of women were editors-in-chiefs, 24.5% were in editorial leadership positions and 24.8% played advisory roles. Editors affiliated with institutions from high-income countries were overwhelmingly represented- editors from institutions in North America occupied almost half of all editorial roles (93.5% of leadership roles and 93.1% of advisory positions) with editors affiliated with institutions from developing countries having insignificant representation [63]. An analysis of 53 subscription or open access geology journals in 2022 included in the Web of Science Core Collection™ showed that 85% of editor(s)-in-chief's positions are occupied by a man or a group of men. The makeup of editorial boards in these sets of journals is 1:4 (Female: Male) [64]. Similar studies conducted in the sports and veterinary sciences field showed equivalent results in which women were outnumbered on high positions such as Editor-in-Chief and editorial boards of journals [65, 66]. However, some studies have recently shown an improvement in the number of females in editorial boards due to more appointments by Editors-in-Chief [67].

### **5.3 Women and URM's at the top-winds of change**

A study surveying women holding top positions in academia regarding structural and policy changes needed for URM's in STEM revealed interesting perspectives. Women administrators endorse strategies to attract and retain women in STEM, irrespective of their effectiveness- 474 administrators (provosts, deans, associate deans, and department chairs across the US at 96 public and private research universities) data, of which 334 contained complete numerical data used in the analyses. Women administrators believed that the 44 listed strategies for better women representation and retention in STEM in this study were of higher quality overall but not higher in terms of feasibility. Interestingly some of the strategies were perceived differently by administrators of different genders- 9 out of the 44 strategies. Women administrators gave higher quality rating to policies and strategies increasing the value of teaching, administrative experience, and service in consideration for tenure track position attainment; conducting gender-equity research; supporting shared tenure lines; and increasing flexibility of federal-grant funding to accommodate mothers [68].

## **6. Homophily among collaborative networks: a barrier to impact, diversity and productivity**

Some scientometric studies have called into question the use of citations as an established metric when it comes to evaluation of the impact of an author's work, particularly minority ethnic authors. The reason is the biased manner in which certain papers are cited more often- not solely due to impact or scientific merit- than should be due to various social factors. A study of 7,011,369 articles published in Web of Science between 2008 and 2016, showed that there is a major preferential biased

pattern in citing papers, with male authors tending to self cite as well as cite their male counterparts more often, possibly neglecting the work of their female peers- Matilda effect in science. Male self citations contributed significantly to homophily in all fields. Women also tended to cite their female counterparts approx. 30% more in similar areas. This homophily citation tendency persisted across fields-social sciences and humanities (SSH), biomedical sciences (BM), and in Natural Sciences and Engineering (NSE) [69]. In an analysis of 2116 journals, 825 showed statistically significant evidence that authors tend to co-publish with same gender colleagues more often than by chance ( $\alpha > 0$ ) after false discovery rate correction, and that this trend has no relation with gender ratio in certain fields (equal or women dominated streams in fact seemed to show as high or higher homophily), and it is more prominent now than it was 10 years ago. Interestingly, this large scale study pointed to the fact that journals with higher impact factor had weaker homophily (a negative correlation-  $R^2 = 0.043$ , Spearman correlation =  $-0.19$ ) [70]. Other large scale studies (over 9 million papers and 6 million scientists) have shown that significant homophily exists in ethnicity, gender and affiliation. Of note, this highlights the fact that ethnic diversity among co-authors on scientific manuscripts had the strongest correlation with scientific impact, which persisted after using randomized baseline models and coarsened exact matching. In keeping, ethnic diversity resulted in an impact gain of 47.67% for scientists and 10.63% for papers [71]. Similar results have been highlighted in a study on 2.5 million research papers between 1985 and 2008 in 11 scientific fields wherein papers with higher homophily between authors tend to be less impactful in their respective domains (lower citations and impact factor of journals in which the studies were published in). These observations persisted after controlling for numbers of authors per publication and for factors such as an ethnic groups' population density. Some cited reasons were that scientists with lower productivity levels in terms of publications had a restricted pool of collaborators and homophily is greater between such authors; however, comparing within a pool of authors with comparable productivities showed that homophily within this pool lead to publications with lower impact compared to much more diverse author lists [72]. However, a recent study highlights a weak positive relationship between ethnic diversity and scientific impact, with a mediator analysis revealing a stronger effect for audience diversity rather than novelty in this relationship. This leads these authors to argue that ethnic diversity in author pools may lead to temporary but not lasting effects on scientific impact of manuscripts [73]. It is interesting to note that not all studies subscribe to the fact that authors spontaneously tend to form gender homophily groups among scientists, and that there are some crucial factors like geographical location, topic area, discipline and academic status that could also play a role in research cooperation, research support and social acquaintance networks. The results above were showcased in a study on principal investigators of two institutions from the German Excellence Initiative by applying a QAP network correlation analysis [74].

Studies focusing on key aspects of gender networks and how they compare provided evidence that women tended to have smaller networks than men, with size directly proportional to productivity. Furthermore, not just size but also network structure (women with closer links to focal authors tend to better leverage this advantage over their male counterparts) and composition does matter (women tended to be advantaged by advice networks with men being advantaged by instrumental networks and may be associated with productivity) [75]. Women tended to have fewer cosmopolitan prestigious international collaborative networks, but have greater propensity for interdisciplinary collaborations. Studies have also shown that women

feel less integrated into informal networks, and gain less overall benefit from such informal networks as compared to their male counterparts [76].

## **7. COVID-19: its impact on the productivity and attrition rates in STEM-analysis of the groups most affected**

As expected due to lockdowns and social isolation, scientific productivity would naturally take a hit during the Covid19 pandemic (2020). However, paradoxically, data suggests an increase in productivity during the year 2022; however, this growth was not evenly balanced in terms of research topics. A meta-analysis study of 22,525 publications between January 01, 2019 and January 01, 2021 in 10 high-impact scientific journals showed that non-Covid19 related research suffered with the gaps in productivity being filled in by a spurt of Covid19 related research- 2, 00,000 COVID-19 publications by December 2020. Fast paced peer review (approx. 30 days), and new larger collaborative groups (a median of 9.0 authors per publication) ensured that Covid19 related publications filled in at the expense of non-Covid19 publications [77]. These findings were echoed by a difference-in-differences analysis of 3,638,584 publications from January 2019 to December 2020 in Life Science wherein non-Covid19 related publications took a hit (10 to 12% decrease in non-COVID-19 related publications [78]. Another study focussing on biomedical publication pattern changes due to COVID-19 has highlighted similar trends- increased scientific productivity majorly due to a spurt of COVID-19 related publications, faster time to acceptance of COVID-19 versus non- COVID-19 manuscripts, and a drop in international scientific collaborations [79].

A study focusing on how COVID-19 has increased the gender gap in STEM has revealed that the number of female first authors (21%), the share of female authorships (5%), the share of publications by mixed gender collaborations (6.8%), and the exacerbation of lower citations counts in literature in which females played a key role were more evident during the pandemic as opposed to pre-pandemic times [80]. This study used the difference in differences methods to highlight these changes before, during, and post the initial wave of the pandemic in different countries. However, one caveat affecting results could be the selection of papers from the COVID-19 Open Research Dataset (CORD) during the pandemic which could have its independent effects on female engagement as opposed to including all published literature [80]. A similar study comparing the proportions of male and female corresponding authors before and during the COVID-19 pandemic focusing on studies deposited in preprint servers bioRxiv and medRxiv, revealed an increase in the gender productivity gap post February 2020 in medRxiv as compared to previous months. There was no change in terms of gender gap in the bioRxiv preprint database. The studies highlight that even though there is an advantage of using preprint services to study real-time academic productivity trends, future studies are needed to understand whether such trends translate into concrete academic achievements [81]. More studies focusing on peer reviewing activities and submitted manuscripts in 2329 Elsevier journals (over 5 million authors and referees- between February and May 2018–2020) have further highlighted the gender disparity in the rates of publishing between genders during the first wave of Covid19 suggesting that work from home could impact women scientific productivity due to competing demands for familial duties. The disparity was less in terms of peer-review commitments between sexes [82].

A study conducting two surveys amongst principal investigators (between April 2020 and January 2021) showed a visible reduction in scientists' research time which recovered from April 2020 (2.2 h per week) to January 2021 (7.1 h per week). An interesting finding in this article is the rate of initiation of new projects during the pandemic decreased sharply. Compared to 2019 levels of new project initiation (9%), there was a threefold jump in the number of scientists asserting that no new project was started in their lab in 2020. The authors' analysis of the major predictive factors of this "no new research" situation using the Least Absolute Shrinkage and Selection Operator (LASSO) regression showed that being female; having children below the age of five, and the research not being Covid19 related were significant. In terms of disciplines the fields of biochemistry, cellular and molecular biology was the most predictive field contributing to the "no new research" situation- a field which contains a heavy weightage of female scientists [83]. Another study examining how gender, race and parenthood impacts academic productivity among 3345 Brazilian academics from various research institutions and knowledge areas showed similar conclusions with the productivity of women being suppressed, with black women being and mothers being the most hard hit in terms of productivity. Men without children seemed the least affected [84].

A bibliometric analysis of publications authored by Filipinos showed an upward trend until COVID-19 hit, beyond which the percentage rate of increase witnessed a sharp decline. The charting of Scopus based publications showed a count of 1381 in 2010, with a yearly increase of 17.8% until 2019 (total publication count 5808); however post COVID-19 (i.e. 2020–2021) this growth rate slowed significantly to 5.5%. This data fore- boards a dark spell for scientific productivity in Asia, particularly the Southeast Asian region. It might take significant policy shifts and supportive assistance to scientists to get scientific productivity back on track in some of these developing countries.

## **8. Suggestions to encourage women and minority groups to access STEM education and remain in the academic pipeline**

There are many important suggestions put forth to encourage more women to major in STEM fields, particularly engineering, mathematics and computer sciences. Encouraging young girls to take up majors in engineering and mathematics by dispelling biased gender stereotypes of there being no space for women in such male dominated environments is essential. This can be done by encouraging girls' participation in computer science, engineering, and mathematics projects, workshops, conferences and seminars at graduate and undergraduate levels [85]. Scholarships, fellowships, and awards should be made available to girls and minorities at undergraduate and graduate school to encourage them to enroll and register for higher studies in these male dominated spheres [86–89].

In higher education, women and minorities in doctoral and post-doctoral programs should be encouraged by providing stimulating campus environments and supportive peer interactions free from implicit or explicit micro aggressions by dominant groups [90, 91]. Besides providing such a productive campus environment for minorities, women should have advisory committees that have adequate women representation and if possible a mentor/role models/advisors from the same or similar ethnicity [92–95]. Furthermore, faster feedback and redressal mechanisms need to be installed at all levels to tackle systemic implicit and explicit systemic racism [96–98].

It is important that gender, ethnic/cultural, and socio-economic inclusivity be taught as a core generic course on campus to all students, particularly in male dominated streams in STEM [99, 100].

To keep women & other minorities in academic posts for longer periods of time, particularly junior posts- assistant professor posts, they should be encouraged with start-up resources both in terms of money as well as productive collaborators (opportunities for building long lasting strong academic collaborations) [101, 102]. Such resources should be made available at the institutional level which can be allocated for all incoming faculty, with a particular emphasis on minorities. Flexibility in terms of career growth is essential for women and minorities to remain in academia. Maternal leave and child care leave should be factored into tenure track assessments with the tenure clock being stopped for these periods [103]. Junior minority Principle Investigators (PIs) should be effectively tied up with experienced faculty on campus as well as with external collaborations so that academic work as well as productivity does not take a severe hit when they are on such unavoidable leave [104]. Project student sharing between PIs (one junior and one established) can be one such mechanism that could ensure sustenance of work and publication productivity during these stretches [105–107]. Women and URM's should be well-acknowledged for their contributions to scientific manuscripts and given priority when authorship for such manuscripts is decided [108]. More weightage should be given to productivity (this has to be decided by tenure track committees on a one-to-one basis) coming in from minority PIs; traditional parameters of productivity like h-index, number of citations, total number and impact of publications might not be fair indexes due to engrained disparities [109]. Rather the impact should be decided on the available resources that the laboratories or PIs had to begin with more scores being given to quality publications in terms of scientific contribution from under-resourced labs.

In terms of grant funding there can be many policy changes that can be implemented to ensure minority underrepresented PIs are taken care of: 1. More flexible grant cycles and submission patterns for underrepresented PIs (more calls for extra- as well as intramural funding) [110]; 2. Fixed number of grants to be allocated to minority scientists, institutions, and laboratories from low resource settings and low income countries [111]; 3. Rotation implementation on grants of equal or near equal merit to make sure that grant money is not being disproportionately allocated to one area or institution or lab 4. Scrap the new randomization grant allocation policy for grants of equal merit and lay more emphasis on allocating grants to groups consisting of racial and ethnic diversity; low resource areas or labs; or PIs that train and educate a diverse set of student trainees such as PhDs, Post-doctoral students [112, 113]; and 5. Encourage applications that are interdisciplinary in nature lead by diverse scientifically sound collaborative networks.

For increasing academic productivity the following steps can be taken: 1. Encourage strong academic productivity by building links between under-represented PIs and publication houses/Editors-in-Chief's so that quality work never goes unnoticed 2. More representation and incentives for minorities to travel and establish collaborations at International and National scientific conferences must be made available; this will ensure network building leading to strong scientific collaborations, and reduce these minority groups' feelings of isolation and despair. This will also ensure that minority PIs in competitive fields are able to gain access to high profile scientific networks and engage them towards writing up joint publications with improved quality as well as impact. 3. Institutions that house such PIs should allocate budgets to establish more visibility of the scientist's work on and off campus (by sending them for academic talks to other institutions and likewise inviting more

under represented PIs for talks); this would be essential to attracting talented students for projects on campus as well as outside campus plus give the PIs much need visibility to strengthen academic collaboration. 4. Publication houses need to be more aware in relation to establishing editorial boards with representation from minority groups but at the same time ensuring rigorous peer review quality is maintained (having co-Editor-in-Chiefs; with one representing an existing minority group can be an effective way to start) [110].

For increasing the impact of their work and publications, PIs (particularly minority PIs) as well as institutions and organizations should have their media teams capture such work and post such work on social media. PIs can also use preprints to disseminate their work much earlier to a larger group of people potentially inviting more visibility and therefore more leverage for academic collaboration [114].

Such discussions have started in academic circles but more needs to be done to make sure those minority talented young minds are not suppressed due to discrimination, and can work effectively and more vibrantly in such evenly established academic ecosystems [115].

## **9. Conclusion**

The entire leaky pipeline from enrolment of women and minority students into STEM disciplines, their retention, and issues related to representation of minorities at top academic jobs have been considered. Certain policies and practices that increase minority representation at all stages in STEM ought to be implemented such as: 1. More opportunities in terms of scholarships and fellowships need to be in place to help the socio-economically disadvantaged minorities; 2. Raising awareness regarding the negative culturally engrained gender and minority biased stereotypic views hindering participation in STEM; 3. Identifying and building crucial support systems for minority groups to reduce the impact of explicit or implicit racism in and out of the classrooms and increase their self-belonging and self-esteem in STEM with the ultimate goal of building safe and conducive niches where minorities can deliver their best in terms of productivity; 4. Inviting and recruiting academically accomplished minorities to the policy and decision making groups in academic institutes, and government science bodies to ensure inclusive policies towards recruitment and sustenance of minority academics in STEM (making the career path to tenure track (permanent positions) more accessible and flexible to deserving faculty with a proven track record of academic productivity); 5. Research institutions should be encouraged to provide additional support in terms of funding and collaborative opportunities to minorities but at the same time ensure that such opportunities are utilized effectively by measuring outcomes; and 6. Creating incentives for diversifying research collaborative clusters to include academics of different races and ethnicities with the aim that their inputs strengthen the quality and impact of the proposed science. Even though some of the statistics are clear with regards to the problems areas associated with the leaky STEM pipeline for women and minorities; more research is needed to identify and understand the specific barriers to minority participation in STEM in each contextual setting- there might not be a one fits-all solution but rather local solutions to local identified problems might be the way forward. Therefore, a particular emphasis towards the awareness & perception of minorities towards STEM, the gaps in local socio-cultural frameworks promoting diversity in STEM, and the existing scientific policies hindering equity for minorities in STEM need further investigation.

## **Acknowledgements**

I acknowledge Dr. Srujana Medithi from the Nutrition and Dietetics Department, Symbiosis Institute of Health Sciences, SIU for perusing through the manuscript and providing valuable suggestions to enrich this book chapter. Dr. Arti Muley from Symbiosis Institute of Technology, Symbiosis International University (SIU) for introducing us to scientometrics through a well designed workshop.

## **Conflict of interest**

“The authors declare no conflict of interest.”

## **Notes/thanks/other declarations**

The authors thank Symbiosis International (Deemed University) for giving us a worthy platform for publishing such scientific content.


## **Author details**

Dwight Figueiredo  
Department of Medical Technology, Symbiosis Institute of Health Sciences,  
Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune, India

\*Address all correspondence to: drdwight@sihspune.org

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 



## References

- [1] Cygan E. Female underrepresentation in STEM. Audre Lorde Writing Prize. 2018. Available from: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/wollstonecraftaward/28>
- [2] Martinez A, Christnacht C. Women making gains in stem occupations but still underrepresented [Internet]. The United States Census Bureau. 2021. Available from: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/01/women-making-gains-in-stem-occupations-but-still-underrepresented.html>
- [3] Fry R, Kennedy B, Funk C. STEM jobs see uneven progress in increasing gender, racial and ethnic diversity. Pew Research Center [Internet]. 2021 Apr 1; Available from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2021/04/01/stem-jobs-see-uneven-progress-in-increasing-gender-racial-and-ethnic-diversity/>
- [4] American Association of University Women. The STEM Gap: Women and Girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math – AAUW: Empowering Women since 1881 [Internet]. AAUW: Empowering Women since 1881. 2020. Available from: <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/the-stem-gap/>
- [5] Cheryan S, Ziegler SA, Montoya AK, Jiang L. Why are some STEM fields more gender balanced than others? *Psychological Bulletin*. 2017;**143**(1):1-35
- [6] Few women on top: Time to STEM the gender gap [Internet]. *Hindustan Times*. 2021 [cited 2022 Sep 27]. Available from: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/few-women-on-top-time-to-stem-the-gender-gap-101626634461832.html>
- [7] Faculty, students reflect on STEM faculty gender gap [Internet]. *The Brown Daily Herald*. [cited 2022 Sep 27]. Available from: <https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2022/04/faculty-students-reflect-on-stem-faculty-gender-gap>
- [8] Rosenzweig EQ, Hecht CA, Priniski SJ, Canning EA, Asher MW, Tibbetts Y, et al. Inside the STEM pipeline: Changes in students' biomedical career plans across the college years. *Science Advances* [Internet]. 2021;**7**(18):eabe0985. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8087406/>
- [9] Adamowicz EM. Why aren't women choosing STEM academic jobs? Observations from a small-group discussion at the 2016 American Society for Microbiology annual meeting. *FEMS Microbiology Letters*. 2017;**364**(6):fnx057
- [10] The leaky pipeline of women in STEAM. A confidence gap? [Internet]. Gearing roles. 2019. Available from: <https://gearingroles.eu/the-leaky-pipeline-of-women-in-steam-a-confidence-gap/>
- [11] Resmini M. The 'Leaky Pipeline' Chemistry - *A European Journal*. 2016;**22**(11):3533-3534
- [12] Leaky Pipelines or Broken Scaffolding? Supporting Women's Leadership in STEM (SSIR) [Internet]. *ssir.org*. 2022. Available from: [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/leaky\\_pipelines\\_or\\_broken\\_scaffolding\\_supporting\\_womens\\_leadership\\_in\\_stem](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/leaky_pipelines_or_broken_scaffolding_supporting_womens_leadership_in_stem)
- [13] Hinton AO, Termini CM, Spencer EC, Rutaganira FUN, Chery D, Roby R, et al. Patching the leaks: Revitalizing and reimagining the STEM pipeline. *Cell*. 2020;**183**(3):568-575

- [14] U.S. Department of Education. Science, Technology, Engineering and Math: Education for Global Leadership | U.S. Department of Education [Internet]. Ed.gov. 2000. Available from: <https://www.ed.gov/Stem>
- [15] Best practices for diversity and inclusion in stem education and research: A guide by and for federal agencies a report by the interagency working group on inclusion in stem federal coordination in stem education subcommittee committee on stem education of the national science and technology council [Internet]. 2021. Available from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/091621-Best-Practices-for-Diversity-Inclusion-in-STEM.pdf>
- [16] Spellman Z. Expanding underrepresented minority participation: America's science and technology talent at the crossroads. *Journal of Technology Education*. 2016;**28**(1):71-76. DOI: 10.21061/jte.v28i1.a.5
- [17] STEM for All [Internet]. whitehouse.gov. Whitehouse; 2016. Available from: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/02/11/stem-all>
- [18] State Department plans on policy changes to woo international STEM students [Internet]. PBS NewsHour. 2022 [cited 2022 Sep 29]. Available from: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/state-department-plans-on-policy-changes-to-woo-international-stem-students>
- [19] Black In Neuro [Internet]. Black In Neuro. [cited 2022 Sep 29]. Available from: <https://blackinneuro.com/>
- [20] Available from: <https://twitter.com/blackinneuro> [Internet]. Twitter. [cited 2022 Sep 29]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/blackinneuro>
- [21] Kouame E, Noel JC, Wane M, Babdor J, Caslin HL, Fan A, et al. Black in immuno week: Who we are, what we did, and why it matters. *The Journal of Immunology*. 2021;**207**(8):1941-1947
- [22] Babdor J, Fan AC, Wane M, Mbiribindi B, Mobley AS, Noel JC, et al. Black in immuno: Harnessing social media and digital platforms to connect the dots. *Nature Reviews Immunology*. 2021;**21**(12):756-757
- [23] Subbaraman N. How #Black in the ivory put a spotlight on racism in academia. *Nature*. 2020;**582**:327. DOI: 10.1038/d41586-020-01741-7
- [24] Else-Quest NM, Hyde JS, Linn MC. Cross-national patterns of gender differences in mathematics: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*. 2010;**136**(1):103-127
- [25] Miller DI, Eagly AH, Linn MC. Women's representation in science predicts national gender-science stereotypes: Evidence from 66 nations. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 2015;**107**(3):631-644
- [26] Makarova E, Aeschlimann B, Herzog W. The gender gap in STEM fields: The impact of the gender stereotype of math and science on secondary students' career aspirations. *Frontiers in Education* [Internet]. 2019;**4**:60. DOI: 10.3389/feduc.2019. Available from: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2019.00060/full>
- [27] Rainey K, Dancy M, Mickelson R, Stearns E, Moller S. Race and gender differences in how sense of belonging influences decisions to major in STEM. *International Journal of STEM Education*. 2018;**5**(1):10. DOI: 10.1186/s40594-018-0115-6
- [28] Krause-Levy S, Griswold WG, Porter L, Alvarado C. The relationship between sense of belonging and student

- outcomes in CS1 and beyond. In: Proceedings of the 17th ACM Conference on International Computing Education Research (ICER 2021). New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery. 16 Aug 2021. p. 29-41. DOI: 10.1145/3446871.3469748
- [29] Moudgalya SK, Mayfield C, Yadav A, Hu HH, Kussmaul C. Measuring students' sense of belonging in introductory CS courses. In: Proceedings of the 52nd ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education (SIGCSE '21). New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery. 3 Mar 2021. p. 445-451. DOI: 10.1145/3408877.3432425
- [30] Mooney C, Becker BA. Sense of Belonging: The intersectionality of self-identified minority status and gender in undergraduate computer science students. In: United Kingdom & Ireland Computing Education Research Conference (UKICER '20). New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery; 2020 Aug 25. p. 24-30. DOI: 10.1145/3416465.3416476
- [31] Stachl CN, Baranger AM. Sense of belonging within the graduate community of a research-focused STEM department: Quantitative assessment using a visual narrative and item response theory. *PLoS One*. 2020;15(5):e0233431
- [32] Bondestam F, Lundqvist M. Sexual harassment in higher education – a systematic review. *European Journal of Higher Education* [Internet]. 2020;10(4):1-23 Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1568235.2020.1729833>
- [33] Fnais N, Soobiah C, Chen MH, Lillie E, Perrier L, Tashkhandi M, et al. Harassment and discrimination in medical training. *Academic Medicine*. 2014;89(5):817-827
- [34] Fedina L, Holmes JL, Backes BL. Campus sexual assault: A systematic review of prevalence research from 2000 to 2015. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* [Internet]. 2018;19(1):76-93 Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26906086>
- [35] ONG M. Body projects of young women of color in physics: Intersections of gender, race, and science. *Social Problems*. 2005;52(4):593-617
- [36] Hughes BE. Coming out in STEM: Factors affecting retention of sexual minority STEM students. *Science Advances*. 2018;4(3):eaao6373
- [37] Cech EA, Waidzunas TJ. Systemic inequalities for LGBTQ professionals in STEM. *Science Advances* [Internet]. 2021;7(3):eabe0933 Available from: <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/7/3/eabe0933>
- [38] Lee MJ, Collins JD, Harwood SA, Mendenhall R, Hunt MB. “If you aren't White, Asian or Indian, you aren't an engineer”: Racial microaggressions in STEM education. *International Journal of STEM Education*. 2020;7(1):48. DOI: 10.1186/s40594-020-00241-4
- [39] Campbell-Montalvo R, Malaykhan M, Smith CAS, Hughes Miller M, Puccia E, Mayberry M, et al. Sexual and gender minority undergraduates' relationships and strategies for managing fit in STEM. *PLoS One*. 2022;17(3):e0263561
- [40] Park JJ, Kim YK, Salazar C, Hayes S. Student–faculty interaction and discrimination from faculty in STEM: The link with retention. *Research in Higher Education* [Internet]. 2019 Jun 10; Available from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11162-019-09564-w>
- [41] Rossello G, Robin C, Jacques M. Ph.D. research output in STEM: the role of

- gender and race in supervision. MERIT Working Papers 2020-021, United Nations University - Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (MERIT). 2020
- [42] Kim YK, Sax LJ. Student–faculty interaction in research universities: Differences by student gender, race, social class, and first-generation status. *Research in Higher Education*. 2009;**50**(5):437-459
- [43] Moss-Racusin CA, Dovidio JF, Brescoll VL, Graham MJ, Handelsman J. Science faculty’s subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 2012;**109**(41):16474-16479
- [44] Sheltzer JM, Smith JC. Elite male faculty in the life sciences employ fewer women. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences [Internet]*. 2014;**111**(28):10107-10112 Available from: <https://www.pnas.org/content/111/28/10107>
- [45] Wapman KH, Zhang S, Clauset A, Larremore DB. Quantifying hierarchy and dynamics in US faculty hiring and retention. *Nature*. 2022;**610**:120-127. DOI: 10.1038/s41586-022-05222-x
- [46] Bernstein RH, Macy MW, Williams WM, Cameron CJ, Williams-Ceci SC, Ceci SJ. Assessing gender bias in particle physics and social science recommendations for academic jobs. *Social Sciences*. 2022;**11**(2):74
- [47] Andersson ER, Hagberg CE, Hägg S. Gender bias impacts top-merited candidates. *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics*. 2021;**6**:594424. DOI: 10.3389/frma.2021.594424
- [48] Williams WM, Ceci SJ. National hiring experiments reveal 2:1 faculty preference for women on STEM tenure track. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 2015;**112**(17):5360-5365
- [49] Abramo G, D’Angelo CA, Rosati F. Gender bias in academic recruitment. *Scientometrics*. 2015;**106**(1):119-141
- [50] Kazmi MA, Spitzmueller C, Yu J, Madera JM, Tsao AS, Dawson JF, et al. Search committee diversity and applicant pool representation of women and underrepresented minorities: A quasi-experimental field study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 2022;**107**(8):1414-1427. DOI: 10.1037/apl0000725
- [51] Vieira ES, Cabral JAS, Gomes JANF. Definition of a model based on bibliometric indicators for assessing applicants to academic positions. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*. 2014;**65**(3):560-577
- [52] Broyles P. The gender pay gap of STEM professions in the United States. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. 2009;**29**(5/6):214-226
- [53] Broyles P, Fenner W. Race, human capital, and wage discrimination in STEM professions in the United States. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. 2010;**30**(5/6):251-266
- [54] Gehl SB. Pay for performance, position, or place: The effect of institutions on salary equity for women and minority faculty in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Dissertation, Georgia State University. 2016. DOI: 10.57709/8900621
- [55] Budig MJ, Lim M, Hodges MJ. Racial and gender pay disparities: The role of education. *Social Science Research*. Aug 2021;**98**:102580. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2021.102580. Epub 2021 May 16. PMID: 34247725
- [56] Webber KL, Canché MG. Not equal for all: gender and race differences in

salary for doctoral degree recipients. *Research in Higher Education*. 2015;**56**(7):645-672

[57] Helmer M, Schottdorf M, Neef A, Battaglia D. Gender bias in scholarly peer review. *eLife* [Internet]. 2017;**6**:e21718. DOI: 10.7554/eLife.21718. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5360442/>

[58] Squazzoni F, Bravo G, Farjam M, Marusic A, Mehmani B, Willis M, et al. Peer review and gender bias: A study on 145 scholarly journals. *Science Advances*. 2021;**7**(2):eabd0299

[59] Jappelli T, Nappi CA, Torrini R. Gender effects in research evaluation. *Research Policy*. 2017;**46**(5):911-924

[60] Pinho-Gomes A-C, Vassallo A, Thompson K, Womersley K, Norton R, Woodward M. Representation of women among editors in chief of leading medical journals. *JAMA Network Open* [Internet]. 2021;**4**(9):e2123026-e2123026 Available from: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2784023#:~:text=This%20study%20found%20that%20women%20are%20significantly%20underrepresented%20as%20editors>

[61] Topaz CM, Sen S. Gender representation on journal editorial boards in the mathematical sciences. *PLoS One*. 2016;**11**(8):e0161357

[62] Cho AH, Johnson SA, Schuman CE, Adler JM, Gonzalez O, Graves SJ, et al. Women are underrepresented on the editorial boards of journals in environmental biology and natural resource management. *PeerJ* [Internet]. 2014;**2**:e542 Available from: <https://peerj.com/articles/542/>

[63] Memon AR, Ahmed I, Ghaffar N, Ahmed K, Sadiq I. Where are female editors from low-income

and middle-income countries? A comprehensive assessment of gender, geographical distribution and country's income group of editorial boards of top-ranked rehabilitation and sports science journals. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. 2022;**56**(8):458-468. DOI: 10.1136/bjsports-2021-105042. Epub 2022 Jan 24. PMID: 35074786

[64] Henriques MH, Garcia LF. Women underrepresentation in editorial boards of geology journals and the Utopia of gender equality. *Frontiers in Earth Science*. 2022;**10**:803900. DOI: 10.3389/feart.2022.803900

[65] Pastor-Cisneros R, Castro IT, Adsuar-Sala JC, Bautista-Bárcena L. Analysis of gender on editorial boards of sport sciences journals. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*. 2022;**2022**:1-12

[66] Wang A, Dunlop R, Allavena R, Palmieri C. Gender representation on journal editorial boards in the field of veterinary sciences. *Research in Veterinary Science*. 2022;**148**:21-26

[67] Zehetbauer R, von Haugwitz F, Seifert R. Gender-specific analysis of the authors and the editorial board of Naunyn-Schmiedeberg's archives of pharmacology from 2000 to 2020. *Naunyn-Schmiedeberg's Archives of Pharmacology*. 2021;**395**(1):39-50

[68] Williams WM, Mahajan A, Thoemmes F, Barnett SM, Vermeulen F, Cash BM, et al. Does gender of administrator matter? National study explores U.S. University Administrators' attitudes about retaining women professors in STEM. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2017;**8**:700. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00700

[69] Ghiasi G, Mongeon P, Sugimoto C, Larivière V. Gender Homophily in citations. In: Article in Monograph or in

Proceedings Leiden University Scholarly Publications. 2018

[70] Holman L, Morandin C. Researchers collaborate with same-gendered colleagues more often than expected across the life sciences. *PLoS One*. 2019;**14**(4):e0216128

[71] AlShebli BK, Rahwan T, Woon WL. The preeminence of ethnic diversity in scientific collaboration. *Nature Communications*. 2018;**9**(1):5163. DOI: 10.1038/s41467-018-07634-8

[72] Freeman RB, Huang W. Collaboration: Strength in diversity. *Nature*. 2014;**513**(7518):305-305

[73] Ding J, Shen Z, Ahlgren P, Jeppsson T, Minguillo D, Lyhagen J. The link between ethnic diversity and scientific impact: The mediating effect of novelty and audience diversity. *Scientometrics*. 2021;**126**(9):7759-7810

[74] Kegen NV. Science networks in cutting-edge research institutions: Gender Homophily and embeddedness in formal and informal networks. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 2013;**79**:62-81

[75] Gaughan M, Melkers J, Welch E. Differential social network effects on scholarly productivity. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*. 2017;**43**(3):570-599

[76] Abramo G, D'Angelo CA, Murgia G. Gender differences in research collaboration. *Journal of Informetrics*. 2013;**7**(4):811-822

[77] Raynaud M, Goutaudier V, Louis K, Al-Awadhi S, Dubourg Q, Truchot A, et al. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on publication dynamics and non-COVID-19 research production. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. 2021;**21**(1):255. DOI: 10.1186/s12874-021-01404-9

[78] Riccaboni M, Verginer L. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on scientific research in the life sciences. *PLoS One*. 2022;**17**(2):e0263001

[79] Aviv-Reuven S, Rosenfeld A. Publication patterns' changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic: a longitudinal and short-term scientometric analysis. *Scientometrics*. 2021;**126**(8):6761-6784

[80] Liu M, Zhang N, Hu X, Jaiswal A, Xu J, Chen H, et al. Further divided gender gaps in research productivity and collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from coronavirus-related literature. *Journal of Informetrics*. 2022;**16**(2):101295

[81] Spector ND, Overholser B. COVID-19 and the slide backward for women in academic medicine. *JAMA Network Open*. 2020;**3**(9):e2021061

[82] Squazzoni F, Bravo G, Grimaldo F, García-Costa D, Farjam M, Mehmani B. Gender gap in journal submissions and peer review during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. A study on 2329 Elsevier journals. *PLoS One*. 2021;**16**(10):e0257919

[83] Gao J, Yin Y, Myers K, Lakhani KR, Wang D. Loss of new ideas: Potentially long-lasting effects of the pandemic on scientists. *Nature Communications*. 2021;**12**:6188. DOI: 10.1038/s41467-021-26428-z

[84] Staniscuaski F, Kmetzsch L, Soletti RC, Reichert F, Zandonà E, Ludwig ZMC, et al. Gender, race and parenthood impact academic productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic: From survey to action. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2021;**12**:663252. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.663252

[85] Hunt PK, Dong M, Miller CM. A multi-year science research or

engineering experience in high school gives women confidence to continue in the STEM pipeline or seek advancement in other fields: A 20-year longitudinal study. *PLoS One*. 2021;**16**(11):e0258717

[86] Scholarships for minorities in STEM [Internet]. ZDNET. [cited 2022 Oct 3]. Available from: <https://www.zdnet.com/education/minorities-in-stem-scholarships/>

[87] STEM Funding for Minority Students [Internet]. [www.pathwaystoscience.org](http://www.pathwaystoscience.org). [cited 2022 Oct 3]. Available from: <https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/urm.aspx>

[88] Scholarships and fellowships for underrepresented minorities [Internet]. [www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu](http://www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu). [cited 2022 Oct 3]. Available from: <https://www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/academics/regulatoryscience/scholarships-and-fellowships-for-underrepresented-minorities/>

[89] Maton KI, Pollard SA, McDougall Weise TV, Hrabowski FA. Meyerhoff scholars program: A strengths-based, institution-wide approach to increasing diversity in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine: A Journal of Translational and Personalized Medicine*. 2012;**79**(5):610-623

[90] Ogunyemi D, Clare C, Astudillo YM, Marseille M, Manu E, Kim S. Microaggressions in the learning environment: A systematic review. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. 2020;**13**(2):97-119

[91] Estrada M Burnett M, Campbell AG, Campbell PB, Denetclaw WF, Gutiérrez CG, et al. Improving underrepresented minority student persistence in STEM. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*. 2016;**15**(3):es5

[92] Fisher AJ, Mendoza-Denton R, Patt C, Young I, Eppig A, Garrell RL, et al. Structure and belonging: Pathways to success for underrepresented minority and women PhD students in STEM fields. *PLoS ONE* [Internet]. 2019;**14**(1):e0209279. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0209279. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6326412/>

[93] Brown WC, Magaña L, Crespo CJ, White WB. Mentoring underrepresented minoritized students for success. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*. 2021;**7**(1\_suppl):20S22S

[94] Beech BM, Calles-Escandon J, Hairston KG, Langdon SE, Latham-Sadler BA, Bell RA. Mentoring programs for underrepresented minority faculty in academic medical centers. *Academic Medicine* [Internet]. 2013;**88**(4):541-549 Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3835658/>

[95] Edwards KJ, Akam E, Ijoma JN, Mack KN, Pereira PMR, Dhanvantari S, et al. Visions by WIMIN: Global mentorship to retain underrepresented trainees. *Molecular Imaging and Biology*. 2022;**24**(4):519-525

[96] Scherer L, editor. *Addressing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism in 21st Century STEMM Organizations*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press; 2021

[97] Hassen N, Lofters A, Michael S, Mall A, Pinto AD, Rackal J. Implementing anti-racism interventions in healthcare settings: A scoping review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2021;**18**(6):2993

[98] Markle RS, Williams TM, Williams KS, deGravelles KH, Bagayoko D, Warner IM. Supporting historically

- underrepresented groups in STEM higher education: The promise of structured mentoring networks. *Frontiers in Education*. 2022;7:674669. DOI: 10.3389/feduc.2022.674669
- [99] Dewsbury BM. On faculty development of STEM inclusive teaching practices. *FEMS Microbiology Letters*. 2017;364(18):fnx179. DOI: 10.1093/femsle/fnx179
- [100] Supporting Diversity and Inclusivity in STEM | University at Albany [Internet]. [www.albany.edu](http://www.albany.edu). [cited 2022 Oct 3]. Available from: <https://www.albany.edu/rna/supporting-diversity-and-inclusivity-stem>
- [101] What NSF's new diversity grants say about attempts to help minority students [Internet]. [www.science.org](http://www.science.org). [cited 2022 Oct 3]. Available from: <https://www.science.org/content/article/what-nsf-s-new-diversity-grants-say-about-attempts-help-minority-students>
- [102] Grants to and for Under-Represented Populations | Office of Research & Sponsored Programs [Internet]. [rsp.uni.edu](http://rsp.uni.edu). [cited 2022 Oct 3]. Available from: <https://rsp.uni.edu/grants-and-under-represented-populations>
- [103] Hewlett SA, Luce CB. Off-ramps and on-ramps: Keeping talented women on the road to success [Internet]. *Harvard Business Review*. 2005 Available from: <https://hbr.org/2005/03/off-ramps-and-on-ramps-keeping-talented-women-on-the-road-to-success>
- [104] Science. Women in Science – miles to go [Internet]. *Research Matters*. 2022 [cited 2022 Oct 4]. Available from: <https://researchmatters.in/news/women-science-%E2%80%93-miles-go>
- [105] Slater A, Caltagirone C, Draper E, Busschaert N, Hutchins K, Leigh J. Pregnancy in the lab. *Nature Reviews Chemistry*. 2022;6(3):163-164
- [106] Torres I. It is time to break the silence about maternity in science and fix the system” [Internet]. *Ellipse*. 2022 [cited 2022 Oct 4]. Available from: <https://ellipse.prbb.org/isabel-torres-it-is-time-to-break-the-silence-about-maternity-in-science-and-fix-the-system/>
- [107] Mavriplis C, Heller R, Beil C, Dam K, Yassinskaya N, Shaw M, et al. Mind the gap: Women in STEM career breaks. *Journal of Technology Management & Innovation*. 2010;5(1):140-151. DOI: 10.4067/S0718-27242010000100011
- [108] Chaoqun Ni et al. The gendered nature of authorship. *Science Advances*. 2021;7:eabe4639. DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.abe4639
- [109] Davies SW, Putnam HM, Ainsworth T, Baum JK, Bove CB, Crosby SC, et al. Promoting inclusive metrics of success and impact to dismantle a discriminatory reward system in science. *PLOS Biology*. 2021;19(6):e3001282
- [110] Shah A, Lopez I, Surnar B, Sarkar S, Duthely LM, Pillai A, et al. Turning the tide for academic women in STEM: A postpandemic vision for supporting female scientists. *ACS Nano*. 2021;15(12):18647-18652
- [111] Women and Under-represented Minorities in STEM | MIT Research Administration Services [Internet]. [ras.mit.edu](http://ras.mit.edu). [cited 2022 Oct 4]. Available from: <https://ras.mit.edu/finding-funding/find-funding/junior-faculty/women-and-under-represented-minorities-stem>
- [112] Odedina FT, Stern MC. Role of funders in addressing the continued lack



of diversity in science and medicine.  
Nature Medicine. 2021;27(11):1859-1861

[113] Addressing racial gaps in NIH grant funding [Internet]. EurekAlert! [cited 2022 Oct 4]. Available from: <https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/953956>

[114] MIT Press launches grant to encourage author diversity – Research Information [Internet]. www.researchinformation.info. [cited 2022 Oct 4]. Available from: <https://www.researchinformation.info/news/mit-press-launches-grant-encourage-author-diversity>

[115] Pritchard PA, Grant C. Success Strategies from Women in Stem: A Portable Mentor. London: Elsevier Academic Press; 2015. Paperback ISBN: 9780123971814. eBook ISBN: 9780123977755



## Chapter 6

# Factors Influencing Young Women to Enroll in IT

*Andreea Molnar, Carine Khalil and Anne Brüggemann-Klein*

### Abstract

Despite the increasing number of initiatives that aim to promote Information Technology (IT) and encourage women to pursue IT degrees, the number of women in the field is still low. To better understand women's motivations, we conducted a qualitative study with women enrolled in IT degrees at the Technical University of Munich. We found that a variety of factors affect decisions to enroll in the degrees, related to both individual and environmental factors. Some initiatives, such as IT courses, help to create awareness of IT, which is a first step in women considering the field. Financial aspects of the job and the perception of the possibility of a work-life balance play an important role in decision-making. Family and friends played an influential role, especially when they are in a STEM field, while teachers' influence depended on how supportive they were. Furthermore, women also attributed personal characteristics, such as resilience, to their enrollment in IT.

**Keywords:** diversity, educational initiatives, IT, qualitative study, young women

### 1. Introduction

The number of software developers worldwide that are women is less than 10% [1]. The reasons for the low number of women in the field are complex, one of them being the low number of women enrolled in Information Technology (IT) degrees [2–4]. Despite the substantial research in the area, the number of women enrolled in IT degrees is still low in some countries, highlighting the need to better understand the reasons behind this [5–7]. In this study, we focus on what motivates women to enroll in IT degrees at a technical university in Germany.

In Germany, the percentage of women who graduate with a bachelor's degree in IT was 19.6% in 2018, an increase from 10% in 2000—however, this number is still low [8, 9]. To better understand the reasons behind young women enrolling in these degrees and what initiatives they attend that could be influential in their decision, we organized interviews with eight students. This chapter will present the results of this study. To do so, this chapter is organized as follows. The next section briefly introduces the literature review. This is followed by the study. The chapter ends with a discussion and recommendations.

## **2. Related work**

### **2.1 Diversity initiatives**

To attract women in the field, a lot of time and money has been invested in initiatives that aim to address some of the difficulties women encounter and present IT as a viable career option. For example, in Australia, there have been over 300 initiatives aimed at promoting STEM among women with very few of these initiatives being evaluated and only one had public information evaluation that went beyond participants' satisfaction [10]. A survey done in Australia found that women enrolled in IT degrees are exposed on average to more than five of these initiatives [6]. These have varying levels of success in influencing women to enroll in IT degrees [6]. It is not clear whether women enrolled in these initiatives are already thinking about pursuing a degree in IT and whether the initiatives support their decision or whether a decision to enroll is made as a result of these initiatives.

There have also been initiatives that have been successful. Some examples include computer science degree at Carnegie Mellon University that reached close to 50% in 2016–2018 and Harvey Mudd College that improved the percentage of women pursuing a computer science degree from 10% (2006) to 40% (2012) [10, 11]. Frieze and Quesenberry (2019) attributed the success to improving the curriculum for everyone rather than focusing on making it attractive for women only [11]. At the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, improvement in the number of women was obtained by changing stereotypes [12]. The Computing in Arts at the College of Charleston attracted and retained 46% of women by integrating creative expression in computer science units [13]. Postner et al. argue that working on a project that has a humanitarian focus could help retain women in computer science degrees [14]. These initiatives are a positive step toward understanding how to address some of the issues that improve women's enrollment and retention.

In Germany, where this study takes place, the number of women in IT increased but at a slow pace. This study aims to better understand what initiatives motivate women to enroll in these degrees. However as the initiatives do not work in a vacuum, it was extended to other factors. The section below presents some of the research performed in Germany.

### **2.2 Gender diversity studies performed in Germany**

Ihsen et al. surveyed students from nine technical universities in Germany [15]. The study has focused on four subjects in which the women have a low representation: physics, computer sciences, mechanical engineering and electrical engineering. They found that men and women have similar reasons for choosing a degree. They found that informative events were perceived as useful to take away insecurities and find more information about a particular degree. The women feel socially accepted but also the pressure to prove that they can perform at the same level as men.

Petrovska et al. aimed to better understand the role of gender bias and identity in students enrolled in computer science at the Technical University of Munich, showing a correlation between gender and hidden bias [7].

Schneider et al. presented an evaluation of *Engineera* [16]. *Engineera* is a tutorial provided by the Technische Universität München, Germany, for women enrolled in engineering and information technology degrees. The program provides women

opportunities to network, to visit companies, to work on projects and to attend information meetings. Students provided positive feedback on the tutorial activities and opportunities to establish connections.

Oehlhorn and Laumer interviewed women enrolled in information systems degrees in Germany [17]. Through the lenses of the theory of planned behavior, they found that women were influenced by normative beliefs (recommendations from family and friends), behavior beliefs (general expectations of the field, prior experience with IT, expectations comparative to other studies, job prospects, an alternative toward obtaining a different degree or admissions or other requirements) and control beliefs (feasibility) [18]. They recommend that institutions highlight to potential female applicants the opportunities and applications that a job in IT brings.

### **3. Methodology**

This study aims to explore what factors influenced women to enroll in IT degrees at TUM and how they did so. We use semi-structured interviews to collect the data [19]. The interview protocol questions were designed based on the Individual Differences Theory of Gender and IT (IDTGIT) [20]. In addition to these questions, participants were asked about initiatives they have participated in and how these influenced their decision. At the end, they were also asked whether there were any other aspects not covered in the interview that we should consider. The interviews took place either face to face on the university campus or online, and were conducted and analyzed in English. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the authors' institutions. Written participant consent was obtained and we agreed to maintain their anonymity—as such details about their demographic information were not disclosed as they could identify some of the women. The interviews were conducted by the first author to avoid any possible power relationship.

#### **3.1 Theoretical model**

Theoretical perspectives that aim to explain the representation of women in IT can be divided into three categories: gender essentialist perspective, the social shaping of gender and gender roles and intersectionality [20, 21]. The gender essentialist perspective focuses on bio-psychological differences to explain the low number of women; however, this theory seems to be undermined by the high number of women in IT fields in countries such as India.

The social shaping of gender roles aims to explain (lack of) diversity through the social shaping of gender and gender roles [22]. However, this theory primarily focuses on gender as a social construct without fully considering the impact of other factors, such as ethnicity, on the shaping of gender roles, and thus provides a limited understanding of the problem.

Intersectionality is another perspective which considers gender at the intersection of other factors [23, 24]. Based on this theory, Trauth & Connolly proposed the Individual Differences Theory of Gender and IT (IDTGIT) [20]. It proposes that Environmental Influences, Individual Identity and Individual Influences affect women's decisions. The theory provides a comprehensive overview of factors and hence, it was chosen as a theoretical basis for the interviews. However, it does not explain *how* these factors influence women's choices, which is what our study aims to do.

### **3.2 Data collection**

Eight women, students at TUM in IT degrees, participated in the study on a voluntary basis. We used convenience sampling. The interviews were conducted both online and in person, and took between 25 and 80 minutes. The interviews were recorded to facilitate data analysis.

### **3.3 Analysis**

To facilitate data analysis, the interview recordings were transcribed. We employed theory driven coding (based on the IDTGIT) to analyze the data.

Following the IDTGIT, the codes were categorized into three main themes: Environmental, Identity and Individual. The Environmental factor included codes related to the economy, policy, culture, societal infrastructure and work-life balance. The Identity factors encompassed codes related to demographic traits and IT identity, shedding light on the intersectionality of gender and IT studies. Finally, the Individual factors included codes related to personal influences and characteristics, providing insights into participants' unique experiences and perspectives.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Environmental factors**

Environmental factors are further grouped under three sub-themes: Economy, Policy and Work-Life Balance.

#### *4.1.1 Economy*

Overall, the interviews reveal that both job security and the possibility of earning a high income are environmental factors influencing female students' decisions to pursue IT as a study major.

##### *4.1.1.1 Job security*

The reputation of being a field in which there are jobs available was considered by some of our participants, with various degrees of influence over their decision.

*[...] the thing is, it's like when you don't know what to do and you're indecisive it's like, well, I might as well choose something that at least gives me money or gives me job, right? But I would say it was like a minor, a minor factor. (Interview 1)*

##### *4.1.1.2 High income*

The ability to have at the end of a degree a job which pays well was significant for some interviewees. There were various reasoning as of why high income attracted students, and some of them described below: For some of them was important to avoid some of the restrictions imposed by the limited financial resources they have growing up:

*I know how it was growing up with not a lot of money. Which wasn't a bad I had a great childhood, but there were some restrictions [...] when you choose a job or a career path, you have to think about the money. It's the that's how it is. And the financial plus in the tech industry have the opportunity to really, really accelerate and have a outstanding good wage and these are and you can live in almost every every country you want. This is a tech industry, gives you a freedom that almost no job in this time can give you. So this was a big motivation for me to go and tech as well because I had also other interests. But none of these jobs will give me this freedom. (Interview 3)*

For others, it was the ability to be financially independent and the freedom that gives to pursue hobbies:

*I always struggle with making decisions and I always have like a thousand things on my mind and a thousand hobbies at the same time and that I want to keep doing. So the idea of doing something that will probably make me financially independent in order to be able to do what I like to spend my time the way I want. (Interview 6)*

Other factors include pragmatic consideration about the job market, one participant describing her decision as being based on “on this really pragmatic reasoning and looking about the opportunities” and parents’ nudges to select a job which has high earning potential.

We conclude from the interviews that the financial aspects played varying degrees of importance for the interviewees, with some considering it as a major factor, while others saw it as a secondary or minor consideration compared to their passion, practicality or other influencing factors.

#### 4.1.2 Policy

After analyzing the interviews, several key findings emerge regarding the perceptions of gender policies in the IT field. The interviews reveal a nuanced perspective on gender policies in the IT field. While participants acknowledged the progress made in countries like Germany, they also identified areas where further advancements can be made. The importance of fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment was emphasized, along with the need to challenge societal norms and expectations regarding women’s roles. The opinions varied on the effectiveness of policies such as gender quotas, with concerns about potential biases and the desire for organic progress. It is evident that ongoing efforts are necessary to address the challenges and barriers that women may face in the IT industry. By creating equitable policies, promoting inclusive cultures, and challenging gender stereotypes, it is possible to achieve greater gender diversity and create opportunities for women to thrive in the IT field. However, these policies were not mentioned as a factor considered when deciding to enroll in an IT degree but rather something that women reflect on afterward.

#### 4.1.3 Culture

The participants in our interviews came from diverse backgrounds. Some were born in Germany, others were born in Germany but first-generation immigrants and some were from countries where it was not that uncommon for women to enroll in IT degrees. The low number of women in IT did not deter these women to enroll.

*So also being a woman doesn't make a difference. You also you already have to work harder, so it doesn't matter if you male or female, you're already working hard.*  
(Interview 3)

One woman reflected on the fact that she knew that moving in Germany there were fewer women in the field, and which is actually an advantage:

*[...] being a minority is actually difficult and not like being a shining star. [...]  
But again, at that time I was like, yeah, I would would have less competition.*  
(Interview 8)

#### 4.1.4 Societal infrastructure

Under societal infrastructure, the themes that evolve from our analysis are the availability of IT courses in high school and the presence of initiatives aiming to promote/familiarize students with IT degrees.

##### 4.1.4.1 IT in high school

The interviews discussing IT classes in high school revealed that exposure to programming and informatics during this period did not impede women to enroll in an IT degree. The experience with an elective course in high school called informatics was discussed but also other courses that cover more general topics such as Microsoft Office and Excel. The decision to take such elective courses is made indicating a proactive interest in informatics.

*I don't know if that's an initiative, but in my school we had an elective course that wasn't mandatory, that was called Informatics. But that was not necessarily only informatics that you learn when you study informatics. It was more general also including how to use Microsoft Office or Excel, for example. And they also had some programming basics. I didn't even hear of many university opportunities, so I have never been at a university during my school time or participate in anything which is a real pity I am thinking back now I would have loved to. I think that might have really motivated me more.* (Interview 2)

##### 4.1.4.2 Initiatives

The interviews focusing on initiatives presented to the interviewees indicated that these programs played a vital role in influencing the participants' choices regarding IT. The presence of student organizations, mentorship programs, and women-centric initiatives were cited as sources of guidance, motivation, and a sense of belonging for female students in the IT field.

It was mentioned that no prior knowledge or exposure to informatics was received before enrolling in the StudiumMINT course. However, it was expressed that the course proved to be incredibly helpful and provided the participants with their first programming experience, which was found to be enjoyable and cool. This suggests that IT classes in high school and initiatives were influential in their decision to pursue IT. The StudiumMINT course played a significant role in shaping their interest and decision to pursue informatics. StudiumMINT is an introductory semester that provides an overview of degree programs in mathematics, technology and the natural sciences.



[interviewer]

*And did you know before enrolling into this course [StudiumMINT] that you might want to go into informatics or did you only after this course to decide?*

[name]

*Only after this course, before I didn't. It was super helpful. I had my first programming experience there and it was super cool. I had never had any contact at all with Informatics, like at all. (Interview 1)*

*I wasn't sure what to do after graduating, so I wanted to take a gap year, which I did. I wanted to work and then see, uh, maybe travel and see some stuff in the other half of the year. And then Corona hit and then I just stayed where I was and kept working. Nothing special, just retail. And after I did the StudiumMINT here at home just to get an overview of the possibilities and I saw there were lectures that we could attend on games engineering and that was the first time I even considered computer science. (Interview 6)*

The findings highlight the significance of both IT classes in high school and initiatives in shaping the choices and experiences of female students in IT. They play a role in generating interest and motivation among the participants.

#### 4.1.5 Work-life balance

One of the new themes that emerge from the analysis is the concept of work-life balance. It encompasses two distinct aspects: family life expectations and remote work capability.

##### 4.1.5.1 Family life expectations

Some participants express a desire to have a family in the future and acknowledge the need to balance their career aspirations with familial responsibilities. They consider the economic aspect of supporting a family and the potential challenges of managing time between their career and family life. For instance, the participants mention that they have always planned to have a family but are currently uncertain about how they will manage their goals and family life. They recognize the importance of thinking about how much time they will have for their career and family and are grappling with finding the right balance.

*Yes, yes, it was definitely something I thought about. [...] if I want to have a family, then i'll also have to need to support that family, so this is also connected to this economic part of your future. But of course, as a woman you have to think about how much time you will have either for your career or for your family. (Interview 2)*

On the other hand, some participants explicitly state that they do not want to have children. Those participants confidently state that they do not plan to have kids. This decision may be influenced by personal preferences, career goals or other factors not explicitly mentioned in the interview.

*Actually since when I was young ever since I was young, I didn't want to have kids. Maybe marriage or having a partner would be fine, but I didn't want to have kids. (Interview 5)*

The participants' decisions regarding having a family or not highlight the individuality of these choices. Some prioritize their career aspirations, while others see family as an integral part of their lives. These diverse perspectives demonstrate that women's decisions in the IT field are not solely influenced by societal expectations but are also shaped by personal experiences and goals.

Overall, the interviews highlight the complexity of balancing career and familial responsibilities for women in the IT field. The participants' decisions regarding having a family or not reflect their individual preferences and considerations. It is important for the IT industry to recognize and accommodate these diverse choices, providing support and flexibility for women to pursue both their career ambitions and personal aspirations.

#### 4.1.5.2 Remote work/home office

Several participants express their appreciation for the flexibility and work-life integration that remote work offers. They recognize the benefits of being able to work from home, spend time with their families, and have greater control over their schedules.

The ability to work from home is seen as a positive aspect of the IT field in Germany. The legal protection against discrimination for pregnant individuals and the ease of taking maternity leave indicate that the option of remote work can support a better work-life balance for individuals planning to start a family.

*[...] once I started getting more into the sector, I kinda understood why women were not really going in and thinking about having like families. However, I think in Germany this is a little bit better because the leaves are easier if somebody is pregnant, they are not like discriminating against. You can't ask somebody. It's protected by the law. If they are planning to get pregnant in the future. (Interview 4)*

Similarly, it is acknowledged that remote work has become more prevalent, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, as it is believed that many companies now embrace the concept of remote work, which allows individuals to work from anywhere. They express optimism about the possibility of having a good work-life balance, even with a partner or family, by enjoying the flexibility of working from home.

*I guess especially like since Corona, now many companies are like opening up to the Home Office and programming can mostly always program from anywhere, unless you're like a specific piece of hardware, right? And even then, it can probably have a teammate testing it for you on the other side. So that's an option working from home even if it's not everyday, maybe like 2 days when you can rest a bit at home. I don't know. Take a bit more. Even with a partner or family. Just having, even if it's like for just just the lunch break, you know, having lunch with the person from your home, I think it is super cool always. (Interview 1)*

Additionally, the advantages of remote work in the tech industry are highlighted, particularly for individuals planning to become parents. The participants mentioned that remote work provides opportunities to spend more time with children and emphasizes the importance of simply being present for them. This suggests that the option of remote work can positively impact work-life integration and support individuals in achieving a better balance between their career and family responsibilities.

*And the great thing also about the tech industry is when especially you plan on being a mother, maybe in the future you can work from home, you have the opportunity to spend like a lot of time with your children or just being there, it's sometimes not even that you have to interact with them all the time, but just that it that your children know, OK, someone is there. (Interview 3)*

Overall, the participants demonstrate a positive outlook on the option of remote work or home office. They appreciate the flexibility it offers and how it can contribute to better work-life balance, particularly in terms of spending time with family. The increasing acceptance and adoption of remote work in the IT industry are seen as favorable developments that can enhance work-life integration and accommodate the needs and aspirations of women choosing to pursue careers in this field.

#### 4.1.6 Media representation of IT field

The participants' experiences in the field of IT were viewed as an isolated experience, the view of the field as being represented by a young man hacking in a basement.

*It wasn't like that appealing to to a young woman to go into like informatics or computer science in general because you usually have like this image of like kind of the American viewpoint of some guy with, like, sweatshirts on and in his basement and something doing some kind of hacking which is completely not the reality. (Interview 3)*

## 4.2 Individual factors

Individual factors were found to significantly influence women's decisions to study IT. Supportive family members, inspiring peers, and personal qualities like resilience all played important roles in shaping their interest, motivation, and determination to pursue a career in the field of IT.

### 4.2.1 Personal influences

#### 4.2.1.1 Parents

The analysis of the interviews revealed a significant influence of family support on the participants' decisions to study IT, where the participants highlighted the pivotal role played by their parents in shaping their choices. Parents provided guidance, reasoning, and encouragement based on their understanding of the field and the participants' abilities.

The participants' parents served as role models, inspiring them to pursue a career in IT. They recognized their children's potential and actively supported their decision to study informatics or related fields. The presence of supportive parents helped the participants overcome obstacles, such as a lack of role models or misconceptions about the field, and provided them with the confidence to pursue their chosen path. The participants' families provided an environment of support, fostering a sense of belief in their capabilities and contributing to their overall decision-making process. The influence of family support was evident in the participants' accounts, emphasizing the

significance of parental guidance and encouragement in shaping educational and career choices.

It was mentioned that a significant role was played by the parents in supporting their decision to study informatics. Guidance was provided by their parents, and the good opportunities that studying informatics could offer for their future were highlighted.

*I think the main reason or the main motivation were my parents because they always wanted to support me and my decision to what I studied and they thought that it's good to guide your child. (Interview 2)*

#### 4.2.1.2 Father

The influence of fathers has been mentioned, where one of the respondents mentioned that her father recognized her analytical mind and encouraged her to pursue IT.

*My dad who is a little bit in computer engineering and he explicitly said like ohh you have this analytical mind will be good in this field. So I think also this confirmation from your close environment that yeah you are good enough and you will do well in your studies, it was also that you feel more confident about this choice at the end. So I would also like to emphasize this. (Interview 7)*

#### 4.2.1.3 Mother

From the provided interviews, it is evident that the participants' mothers played significant roles in influencing their decisions to pursue studies in IT-related fields. The presence of inspiring and supportive mothers who have succeeded in technical fields can positively influence young women's decisions to pursue studies in IT-related disciplines. Furthermore, parental educational backgrounds can indirectly influence their children's perceptions and choices, underscoring the importance of diverse role models and supportive environments in encouraging more women to enter and excel in STEM fields. Efforts to promote female representation in these fields should take into account the role that parents, particularly mothers, can play in shaping young women's aspirations and career choices.

One participant's mother, being an engineer, served as an inspiring role model, influencing her daughter to consider a similar path in informatics. This highlights the importance of having strong female role models in STEM fields, as they can encourage and empower young women to pursue careers in traditionally male-dominated areas.

*I think this might be interesting because especially my father not having such an academic background and my mother, like, very pursued me and my brother to to go into this academic direction even though we don't want to work in this field, we should at least have some kind of degree of our own in case we wonder or needed. So it's better to have it than to not have it kind of a situation. And it definitely helped to have like a role model as a woman who, I mean, she wasn't like intact, but being an engineer. So it definitely was very inspiring to have her as a role model growing up. (Interview 3)*

Additionally, another mother's educational background in math education indirectly influenced her daughter's decision-making process. The lack of role models in

natural sciences, possibly due to her mother's career choice in education, may have contributed to her initial hesitation in considering informatics or computer science. This emphasizes the impact that parental educational backgrounds can have on shaping their children's perceptions and choices regarding academic and career paths.

*Actually, among my family, there is actually nobody who studied natural sciences. My mom studied math education, but that's why she ended up being a school teacher. So when I was young, even though I was good in math and science, the only thing that I could imagine myself was to be a teacher. And that's what I didn't want. So if I look back, the reason why I didn't choose informatics or any natural science related field was because I didn't have any role model for myself or I couldn't even imagine myself being in such fields. For example, even like short before I started my studies, I didn't know what people do when they study computer science. I thought, they are building computers, they assemble computers. But I didn't know about programming or logic. And if I knew it earlier, I would probably choose it. But I didn't have anybody who wants to pursue their career in this field. (Interview 5)*

#### 4.2.1.4 Siblings

One participant's brother acted as a key influencer and mentor in her journey toward studying informatics. His guidance, introduction to the tech industry and recommendation to enroll in a technical gymnasium played pivotal roles in helping her find her path and develop a passion for informatics. This highlights the importance of supportive family members and siblings who can provide valuable insights and encourage exploration of academic and career opportunities.

*And my brother, actually, he's doing his master degrees in informatics, It was a big help in making my decision and helping me find my path and actually. He was the person to introducing me into tech industry. I mean, back when I started and had to to decide on what I want to enroll in, it wasn't like that appealing to a young woman to go into like informatics or computer science in general because you usually have like this image of like kind of the American viewpoint of some guy with, like, sweatshirts on and in his basement and something doing some kind of hacking which is completely not the reality. But there are, I think a lot of misconceptions, but he really showed me that informatics can be created, that informatics can be helpful. And yeah, and he actually gave me the idea to switch from a normal gymnasium to a technical gymnasium. (Interview 3)*

#### 4.2.1.5 Friends

In the interviews analyzed, the influence of friends on the decision to pursue studies in the field of information technology (IT) was apparent. Several participants mentioned the impact of their friends who were already studying or interested in IT-related fields. The shared interests, positive experiences and recommendations from friends studying related fields served as important factors that influenced the participants' decisions. This highlights the significance of peer influence and the impact of social connections in guiding individuals toward specific academic and career paths.

The interest in computer games was sparked by their friends who were studying games engineering. The presence of these friends, coupled with the enjoyable experiences they shared in gaming, influenced the participant's decision to switch from informatics to computer games.

*So I like games and then I made some friends that were all studying. So in the beginning of when I started studying, I was really into this one game. It's called Smash Bros and then I was like in this discord channel. And someone asked. Oh, does anyone like playing this game and I was like ohh I like playing this game and then I made some friends and then they decided to start this Gaming night in university. A video game night so people bring monitors and video games and we would play mostly with this. And then indeed, like most of those people were studying games engineering and I was like, Ohh games, engineering is like cooler. I guess it was kind of a lot of influence from the people around me in the 1st place because I felt like everyone around me studying games and they were way cooler than the other people. (Interview 1)*

Similarly, having friends who were studying computer science who shared positive experiences and perspectives served as an influential factor in the participant's decision to pursue IT studies. The firsthand accounts of their friends' satisfaction and engagement in the field of computer science contributed to shaping the participant's own career choice.

*I had friends that had studied computer science in the past. My peers that were also women. Maybe that's why I wasn't really frustrated about the whole topic, because I feel like it was always a more men dominated area in my own mind because I was thinking, I mean, I like computers and I have technological affinity. I do play video games, but I'm not a crazy video game person like any other guy is that is studying computer science. As if that is the case, but because I also had friends that were like me that were kind of modeling. OK, I mean, they're they were also not really into all of these things that I have listed. But they have studied. And they have actually liked it. And I also looked into the whole study plan and I saw that it was a lot of mathematics. And I like mathematics. So I think it's never was really explained to me what computer science actually is. So I just tried to associate it with things that were related to computers. (Interview 4)*

Additionally, friends who were studying at Technical University of Munich (TUM) recommended the institution to them. The endorsement and encouragement from their friends played a role in the participant's decision to choose TUM as their academic destination for studying IT.

*I saw many different fields that I didn't have much of experience. And at that time, I was doing internship in Vienna, and I had some contact with some startup companies in Vienna, and they were doing natural language processing. So they kind of opened my mind that I could do something really new and creative with language and with technology. And this technology field was not there for me. And that's why I wanted to dig in about computer science and technology that I didn't have any chance to learn. So I searched some courses in Germany, and some of my friends were studying at TUM, and they really recommended me to study here, So they encouraged me a lot, and I decided to study here. (Interview 5)*

#### 4.2.1.6 Teachers

Additionally, the influence of a supportive individual, such as a teacher, played a crucial role in shaping their decisions. It was noted that not all teachers fulfilled the expected role of being supportive. Some participants encountered discouragement

from female informatics teachers who lacked up-to-date knowledge and exhibited biased attitudes toward female students' abilities. While this initially created a sense of difference and discouragement, it also served as a motivation for participants to prove themselves. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of dispelling misconceptions and cultivating a supportive educational environment to foster interest and success in the field of IT.

*Actually, I thought that my teachers weren't that helpful. Umm, it was quite interesting because I had actually two female informatics teachers and they were quite discouraging. I had one for hardware specific themes and one for software specific themes, and both weren't like necessarily good example. I respect Or admire people that have like knowledge in the things they do, and to them it wasn't like admiring because sometimes it felt a bit like OK, then they learned it like 20 years ago and never updated their knowledge so. So it was not like that inspiring to me and they also didn't vary. And it seemed like even though they they themselves were like in a field, they're like very uncommon to be a teacher in. And it still felt like they had some kind of. Like they didn't trust the girls to do as good as the as the boys in the class, which is. Quiet like weird to me because they themselves are. They should be the example that it shouldn't matter if you're male or female in this field, but they really did make us feel the difference. So I would say it on some hand it discouraged, but on the other hand, it pushed me and my ego to to try to perform better.*  
(Interview 3)

#### 4.2.2 Personal characteristics

The participants were asked whether there are any personal characteristics that they think influence them to study IT. They reported resilience, competitiveness and willingness to fail as some of the characteristics they perceived have helped them.

*I think I am kind I I think I could say that I'm kinda resilient because I remember when we had our very first mathematics course it was really I cannot say in the first few weeks I don't even know if I understand if I really understood everything or anything really. It was a very different mathematics experience. But I remember people dropping out after like the third or second week. And this didn't match my personality at all. Because you know, I didn't even know I want. I would give myself a chance. I don't say I won't do it. I give myself a chance. I decided that I wanted to continue, although I was like, I wasn't even understanding everything because I wanted to give myself a chance to succeed, but will also wanted to allow myself to fail. If I fail, then I fail at the exam and not just because I gave up. This was a mindful decision I made there, I could have dropped out too, but I didn't.*  
(Interview 2)

*I think resilience because I what is maybe interest maybe interesting about me is that I can have a lot of interests like for me it's really hard to to. I have more the problem to cut down to things and say, OK, I'm not taking this also and doing this as well I it's for me hard that I have like to focus on the on the lot of things that I'm already doing and I'm packing even more.* (Interview 3)

*I would say resilience. Because it's actually something that people can train. People don't, not the intelligent people, get degree. It's the one that are disciplined enough to keep on going.* (Interview 3)

Competitiveness also played a role in motivating some participants to excel and perform at their best in the IT field. This desire to excel and compete drove them to pursue their studies and strive for success.

*So I'm a bit competitive. So it it really draw me to do my best and to accelerate and yeah. (Interview 3)*

*I think it's because I have this competitive person in me. I'm very stubborn. And I don't know how to give up. (Interview 8)*

The ability to manage multiple interests was highlighted by a participant, reflecting her difficulty in narrowing down her pursuits. Nevertheless, this diverse set of interests ultimately contributed to her decision to pursue computer science.

Moreover, the lack of fear of failure was mentioned as an important characteristic in the field of computer science, emphasizing the importance of embracing failures as opportunities for growth and learning.

*I think I am not afraid to fail. That's important in computer science. (Interview 4)*

For some participants, the fit and sense of happiness that computer science brought into their lives outweighed the struggles they faced, reinforcing their commitment to pursuing their studies in the IT domain.

*Computer science feels more fit on me, and I am struggling more, but more happy. (Interview 5)*

### 4.2.3 Identity factors

#### 4.2.3.1 Demographic traits

The participants in the study had a varied demographic profile. In terms of age, they ranged from 21 to 27 years old. Their educational backgrounds were diverse, including attending German schools in both Germany and abroad, studying at a German high school in Turkey, and obtaining bachelor's degrees in different fields in their home countries before pursuing studies in Germany. The participants also had diverse cultural backgrounds, with some having parents who migrated from other countries such as Yugoslavia and Turkey. This mix of age, education and cultural backgrounds contributed to a rich and diverse group of individuals participating in the study on factors influencing women's choices in IT studies.

#### 4.2.3.2 IT identity

The participants in the study shared a common identity in the field of IT. Their chosen area of study revolved around informatics, with all of them pursuing or having pursued studies in this discipline. This indicated a strong interest and inclination toward the technical and computational aspects of information technology. While some participants had made specific transitions within the broader field of IT, such as switching from informatics to games engineering, the overall focus remained on the study and exploration of informatics. This common IT identity provided a cohesive thread among the participants and formed the basis for analyzing their experiences and factors influencing their choices in the IT domain (**Table 1**).



Interviewer	IT Identity
Interview 1	Informatics then switched to Games Engineering
Interview 2	Informatics
Interview 3	Informatics
Interview 4	Information Systems
Interview 5	Informatics, Computer Science
Interview 6	Informatics
Interview 7	Informatics
Interview 8	Informatics

**Table 1.**  
*IT identity of the interviewees.*

## 5. Discussion and recommendations

Building on the DTGIT, this study analyzes factors that affect young women to enroll in IT degrees in Germany [22]. We found out that environmental factors such as economical aspects of the job (i.e., high paid, job security), culture, social infrastructure factors such as availability of IT courses in high school and initiatives, as well as capability to establish a work-life balance affect women's decision to enroll in courses.

In addition, personal influences such as family (fathers, mothers, siblings), friends and teachers played a role in the decision to enroll in a degree. While most of the time these people provided a positive influence, high-school IT teachers were sometimes seen as being biased toward the young men taking the class. The participants also reported resilience, competitiveness and willingness to fail as characteristics which have helped them.

Based on these results, we provide the following recommendations:

### 5.1 Easy discovery

Making the information about degrees easily accessible and discoverable, this study, among others, found out that some women only knew that they were interested in the field after finding more information about it [25]. Access to information can be provided through university websites or initiatives that aim to promote the IT field for high-school students. Another venue is career teachers or IT teachers who have direct contact with high-school students.

### 5.2 Initiatives

When organizing initiatives aiming to promote IT, those who aim to introduce coding to women and/or in which the women are able to interact with the university academics were mentioned in our study as being highly useful. In addition, as parents play a role in influencing decisions, aiming some of these interventions at parents or including also parents could be beneficial in attracting more women to the field.

### **5.3 IT in high school**

IT courses available in high school or earlier familiarize women to the field and might demystify some of the views of the IT field. However when these courses are ran teachers' possible unconscious biases should be addressed, possibly through training. In addition, care should be taken for these courses not to be a further alienating experience for women due to the low number of women attending.

By examining these various factors, our study provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted aspects influencing the career decisions of female students in IT. The insights gained from our analysis have significant implications for fostering gender diversity and equity within the IT industry, allowing for targeted interventions and initiatives to support and empower female students in their career journeys.

## **6. Limitations**

The study was conducted with a limited sample of participants from a single university in Germany. Although some of the study results support existing findings in other contexts, care should be taken when trying to generalize them as these need to be replicated before they can be generalized.

## **Acknowledgements**

This research has been funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Free State of Bavaria under the Excellence Strategy of the Federal Government and the Länder, as well as by the Technical University of Munich – Institute for Advanced Study. There are no financial competing interests to declare. We want to thank Julia Pühl for helping us during the initial stages of the project.

## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## **Author details**

Andreea Molnar<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Carine Khalil<sup>2</sup> and Anne Brüggemann-Klein<sup>2</sup>


1 Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

2 Technical University of Munich, Munich, Germany

\*Address all correspondence to: [amolnar@swin.edu.au](mailto:amolnar@swin.edu.au)

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2024 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] Software developer gender distribution worldwide as of 2022. 2022. Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1126823/worldwide-developer-gender/> [Accessed: March 25, 2022]
- [2] Albusays K, Bjorn P, Dabbish L, Ford D, Murphy-Hill E, Serebrenik A, et al. The diversity crisis in software development. *IEEE Software*. 2021; **38**(2):19-25. DOI: 10.1109/MS.2020.3045817
- [3] Patón-Romero JD, Block S, Ayala C, Jaccheri L. Gender equality in information technology processes: A systematic mapping study. In: *Advances in Information and Communication. FICC 2023. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*. Cham: Springer; 2023. pp. 310-327. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-28073-3\_22
- [4] Tassabehji R, Harding N, Lee H, Dominguez-Pery C. From female computers to male comput ♂ rs: Or why there are so few women writing algorithms and developing software. *Human Relations*. 2021;**74**(8):1296-1326. DOI: 10.1177/0018726720914723
- [5] Addone A, Scarano V. Outreach in K-12 programming: A systematic literature review on audience and purpose. *Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Computer Supported Education*. 2022;**2**:276-283. Available from: <https://www.scitepress.org/Papers/2022/110634/110634.pdf>
- [6] Molnar A, Keane T, Stockdale R. Educational interventions and female enrollment in IT degrees. *Communications of the ACM*. 2021; **64**(3):73-77. DOI: 10.1145/3387106
- [7] Petrovska A, Goldberg P, Brüggemann-Klein A, Nyokaby A. Mining gender bias: A preliminary study on implicit biases and gender identity in the Department of Computer Science at the Technical University of Munich. In: *Software Architecture - 14th European Conference, ECSA 2020 Tracks and Workshops, Proceedings*. L'Aquila, Italy: Springer Nature Switzerland; 2020. pp. 138-150. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-59155-7\_11
- [8] Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): Quick Take 2020. Available from: <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-science-technology-engineering-and-mathematics-stem/>
- [9] UNESCO Science Report: Towards 2030. 2015. Available from: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235406>
- [10] McKinnon M. The absence of evidence of the effectiveness of Australian gender equity in STEM initiatives. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*. 2022;**57**(1):202-214. DOI: 10.1002/ajs4.142
- [11] Frieze C, Quesenberry JL. How computer science at CMU is attracting and retaining women. *Communications of the ACM*. 2019;**62**(2):23-26. DOI: 10.1145/3300226
- [12] Lagesen VA. The strength of numbers: Strategies to include women into computer science. *Social Studies of Science*. 2007;**37**(1):67-92. DOI: 10.1177/0306312706063788
- [13] Bares WH, Manaris B, McCauley R, Moore C. Achieving gender balance through creative expression. In: *50th ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education*. NY: ACM;

2019. pp. 293-299. DOI: 10.1145/3287324.3287435

[14] Postner L, Hislop GW, Ellis HJ. Humanitarian applications increase interest and motivation of women in computing. In: 54th ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education. Vol. 1. NY: ACM; 2023. pp. 416-422. DOI: 10.1145/3545945.3569832

[15] Ihsen S, Höhle E, Skok R, Baldin D. Women students at excellent technical universities in Germany (TU9) a case study. In: SEFI Annual Conference. Rotterdam: 2009. Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238071855\\_Women\\_Students\\_at\\_Excellent\\_Technical\\_Universities\\_in\\_Germany\\_TU9\\_A\\_Case\\_Study](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238071855_Women_Students_at_Excellent_Technical_Universities_in_Germany_TU9_A_Case_Study)

[16] Schneider W, Eichinger A, Ihsen S. Engineer-a programme for female students of electrical engineering and information technology. *Global Journal of Engineering Education*. 2012;14(2): 183-188. Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290008812\\_Engineer-a\\_-\\_A\\_programme\\_for\\_female\\_students\\_of\\_electrical\\_engineering\\_and\\_information\\_technology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290008812_Engineer-a_-_A_programme_for_female_students_of_electrical_engineering_and_information_technology)

[17] Oehlhorn C, Laumer S. About Well-Considered Decisions, Favorable Alternatives and Sudden Ideas: A Qualitative Research to Identify Beliefs That Influence Women to Study Information Systems in Germany. St. Gallen: Universität St.Gallen; 2017. Available from: <https://www.wi2017.ch/images/wi2017-0385.pdf>

[18] Ajzen I. The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 1991;50(2): 179-211. DOI: 10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T

[19] Magaldi D, Berler M. Semi-Structured Interviews. *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*. Cham: Springer; 2020. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3\_857

[20] Trauth E, Connolly R. Investigating the nature of change in factors affecting gender equity in the IT sector: A longitudinal study of women in Ireland. *MIS Quarterly*. 2021;45(4):2055-2100. DOI: 10.25300/MISQ/2022/15964

[21] Trauth EM. The role of theory in gender and information systems research. *Information and Organization*. 2013;23(4):277-293. DOI: 10.1016/j.infoandorg.2013.08.003

[22] Eagly AH, Wood W, Diekmann AB. Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal. In: *The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender*. Vol. 12 (174). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers; 2000. pp. 123-174. DOI: 10.1002/9781118663219.wbegs183

[23] Lunn S, Zahedi L, Ross M, Ohland M. Exploration of intersectionality and computer science demographics: Understanding the historical context of shifts in participation. *ACM Transactions on Computing Education (TOCE)*. 2021; 21(2):1-30. DOI: 10.1145/3445985

[24] Shields SA. Gender: An intersectionality perspective. *Sex Roles*. 2008;59:301-311. DOI: 10.1007/s11199-008-9501-8

[25] Greengard S. Brain implants get real. *Communications of the ACM*. 2022; 65(7):18-20. DOI: 10.1145/3535193



# Non-Inclusivity, Discrimination and the Othering of Female Students in Higher Education with Lived Experience of Trauma and Adversity

*Lisamarie Deblasio*

## Abstract

This chapter explores the experiences of female students who have lived experiences of adversity and trauma in their interactions with UK higher education personnel when they disclose and ask for support. The findings demonstrate that despite HE policies promoting inclusivity and equality, there is a deficit in the approaches taken by frontline staff towards students. This nurtures a harmful culture of othering which often leads women to early withdrawal from their studies. Solutions to this problem include training and awareness for HE staff including a trauma informed approach which recognises and responds to the rapidly changing student population.

**Keywords:** higher education, women, trauma, adversity, non-inclusivity, othering, discrimination

## 1. Introduction

Higher education (HE) is a key driver for female empowerment [1]. Universities can be influential in supporting gender equality and inclusion, both on campus and in the wider society [2]. Universities are experiencing a rapidly widening student demographic; UCAS<sup>1</sup> report that since 2020, more female students from lower socio-economic backgrounds across the UK are studying for degrees [3]. In 2022, a record number of students from deprived areas enrolled at university [4]. Simultaneously there has been a gradual increase in demand for pastoral support, in particular mental health support. These demands fall on academic staff and university support services [5]. In 2017, a 50% rise in demand for mental health provisions in universities was reported by the Institute for Public Policy Research [6]. This research will show that female students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often require enhanced

---

<sup>1</sup> The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

levels of support but may find it difficult to access. Previous research demonstrates that academic staff often struggle to engage with students at a pastoral care level [7]. Pinnock's research revealed a lack of academic awareness of the needs of non-traditional students and underdeveloped student support systems [8]. Previous research by Bleijenbergh et al. [9] also shows female students are also vulnerable to gender inequality [10]. This can impact negatively on their experiences in HE. According to Rosa and Clavero,

*'Universities can be powerful institutions for promoting gender equality and inclusion, not only in the higher education context, but also in society at large. Nevertheless, universities remain both gendered and gendering organizations' [11].*

The objective of this study was to learn more about the experiences of female students in HE in the UK who have lived experiences of adversity and trauma. I was especially interested in women with challenging backgrounds who ask for help and support. The objective of examining this group of women came from my own experiences of non-inclusive and othering conduct by some university staff whilst I was a student; and later as an academic when working with women and witnessing first-hand the challenges they face when integrating into HE; whilst trying to overcome the adversity they have in their lives. The way they are treated by university personnel when they ask for support is pivotal to their wellbeing, self-belief and present/future success.

The study explores women's interactions with HE personnel, from academic to support staff. It focuses on three key themes that were revealed in the findings: non-inclusivity, othering and discrimination. Although small scale, this study contributes to existing knowledge about the problem of inequality and gendering in HE. It also makes some new discoveries about the way women from certain backgrounds can find themselves being othered by HE personnel in ways that lack connectedness with existing policies on inclusion and equality. Drawing on findings from interviews with ten women who were enrolled on university courses and who asked for support for various difficulties, it was discovered that non-inclusive practices which are inconsistent with general principles of inclusivity,<sup>2</sup> and othering remain problematic. This conflicts directly with overarching frameworks within HE Governance such as inclusivity and equality.<sup>3</sup> It prevents female students from reaching their potential. In some cases the conduct described by participants suggested that they had been subjected to discrimination; therefore it considers whether there are breaches of the law in respect of discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 (EA) and *Abrahart v University of Bristol* 2022.<sup>4</sup> The chapter concludes by calling for more considerate practice including a 'trauma informed' approach to student's needs; and a greater awareness of non-inclusive practices. These can lead to discrimination and othering of some female students entering HE, who, due to their life experiences, may already feel they are devalued and othered in society.

<sup>2</sup> Respecting each individual's right to express and present themselves relative to their religion, culture, ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender identity, and physical and mental ability.

<sup>3</sup> Such as the Office for Students Equality Framework, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/>

<sup>4</sup> Bristol County Court Claim No.: G10YX983.



## 2. Underpinning concepts

### 2.1 Women in higher education

Historically women in the UK were not allowed to study in HE. In 1868, nine women attended the University of London. This was the first time women had been admitted to a UK university. It was considered to be ‘an immensely significant moment for the university, for women and for society as a whole’ [12]. By 1918, thanks to the Suffragette movement, women in the UK were able to vote [13]. In 1920, Oxford university permitted women to take full degrees. They had previously been allowed to study there but were awarded a lesser degree than men. In 1948 Cambridge university also allowed women to study there. During the late 1800s the idea of women achieving full degrees at Cambridge university caused riots in the city. It was said that male undergraduates were ‘burning effigies of female scholars and throwing fireworks at the windows of Women’s colleges’ [14].

In the twenty-first century social transformations such as the feminist movement have made universities accessible to women from all social classes. Females have overtaken males in HE [15]. They are 35% more likely to go to university than males [15]. However, despite four decades since the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act, research shows that institutional bias towards women still exists [15]. Research by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) found that,

*‘Universities report on institution-wide policies and services that promote gender equality. For example, nine out of ten universities have a non-discrimination policy against women and universities are actively protecting those reporting gender discrimination, with 86% of institutions stating a policy for this’ [16].*

However, the same study found that,

*‘Most universities were unable to provide relevant evidence of their policies and services that support women’s advancement, suggesting that while certain codes may ostensibly be in place, they are not yet being implemented across institutions, and students and staff may be unaware of them’ [15].*

Research shows that female students are still being treated differently to male students ([17], Accessed: 2 May 2023). The devaluation of females is prevalent in gendered institutions [11] and is another facet to a sexist culture. We know that sexism continues to be a problem in UK universities. According to Di Nitto et al. ‘universities are no less sexist than other social institutions’ [18]. Utley, writing for Times Higher Education explains, ‘Sexism is defined as prejudice, stereotyping or discrimination on the basis of sex and is far too common on university campuses’ ([19], Accessed: 3 May 2023). It is noted that ‘it is mostly but not exclusively aimed at women’ [20]. The existing literature tends to focus on the interactions between male and female staff [21] and male and female students ([19], Accessed: 15 May 2023). What is seems to miss though is the interrelationship between university personnel and female students; this is where a gap in knowledge was identified.

Inequality and non-inclusivity towards female students in HE have serious implications. Talented students experience barriers to success meaning they are unable to thrive. Those who have experienced adverse life events are often more vulnerable

to such treatment, yet they often suffer greater effects from this [22]; for example, failing to integrate with peers, isolation, early withdrawal from studies, failing to graduate, mental health and social problems such as believing that they are not worthy of their qualification or avoiding applying for graduate jobs. Collectively these factors can have a detrimental impact on the social mobility of female students as well as reinforcing an often-protracted sense of isolation and ‘not belonging’ [23]. Neuman states that ‘to belong is a fundamental human need that can shape the way people think and feel’ ([17], Accessed: 21 April 2023). The findings in the current study convey the sense of isolation felt by the participants; this had a long-term negative impact on their confidence when engaging with their course and later seeking employment. All ten participants spoke of university being a lonely experience where they felt isolated and did not ‘fit in’ with peers or some academic staff, the latter who they envisaged as privileged and unable to empathise with them because they are women who come from deprived and challenging backgrounds.

UK universities promote a proactive and comprehensive approach to student support that is designed to create a holistic network of academic and central support personnel ([24], Accessed: 16 May 2023). Yet Collias argues that ‘higher education has never been an oasis of acceptance and nurturing’ ([25], Accessed: 12 May 2023). Laws and Fiedler suggest that ‘the university environment has challenged the motivation of academic staff to engage in pastoral care, academic staff are often disturbed by unplanned student intrusions’ [7]. Rodrigo and Clavero argue that because men are at the centre of power in academia the problem of gender inequality has not been addressed sufficiently to reflect changes in the student population [11]. This argument is advanced by David, who suggests ‘patriarchy or hegemonic masculinity in HE is still strongly felt’ [15]. Morris et al. put forward that those engaged in promoting gender equality in HE ‘inevitably come up against a complex range of institutional barriers’ [26]. Despite the wide-reaching policies on equality and inclusivity we find compelling evidence that outdated cultures still exist within HE. These become apparent when some of the most vulnerable students ask for support.

## **2.2 Social mobility**

One of the key motivators for women who have fought adversity to enter HE is the potential for social mobility. Social mobility is defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as ‘equality of opportunity’ ([27], Accessed: 14 April 2023). This means that people should have the same opportunities to do well in life, ‘regardless of the socio-economic background of their parents, their gender, age, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, birthplace, or other circumstances beyond their control’ ([27], Accessed: 14 April 2023). According to de Bellaigue et al., ‘the twentieth century saw substantial changes in the educational and occupational opportunities available to women in Britain, these may have been supposed to foster new patterns of female mobility’ [28]. However, women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have less chance of studying at HE level and achieving a graduate career [29]. This is why the role of civil society, and the private sector is so crucial in shaping equal opportunities ([30], Accessed: 3 May 2023). In practice it means that women from these backgrounds can access HE and once they have, the way they are treated within this institution is paramount to their success. A key aspect of HE policy is inclusivity ([2], Accessed: 3 May 2023) which if adopted and practiced authentically, can ensure that students are able to reach their potentials and achieve social mobility.

### 2.3 Inclusivity

In recent years there has been an increasing focus on inclusivity within HE [31]. This is said to have been influenced by ‘increased globalisation and connectivity and interdependence between cultures, ideas and economies’ [32]. Inclusivity is defined as ‘the fact or policy of not excluding members or participants on the grounds of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability’ [33]. In HE, inclusivity is specifically focused on ‘the ongoing and transformative process of improving education systems to meet everyone’s needs, especially those in marginalised groups’ [32]. Inclusive practice involves ensuring that there is no segregation or stigmatising of difference’ [34]. Inclusivity is essential to students’ overall learning and development [35]. Ways that inclusivity can be promoted in HE is by effective and ongoing partnership with students, taking students’ experiences and feedback into account, ensuring that teaching and learning is provided to support students from all economic backgrounds and supporting the needs of students academically and pastorally [36]. Some of the ways inclusivity is weakened are by having a closed-door hierarchal policy, using inappropriate language, inattentive listening, making assumptions about students, not treating people the same based on race, religion, gender, size, age, personality or country of origin, excluding or ignoring, and inconsiderate scheduling [32].

Hubbard et al. emphasise the ethos of inclusivity includes careful consideration as well as actions by HE staff,

*‘We should adopt an intersectional approach to inclusion, recognising that individual students might belong to multiple disadvantaged groups. Inclusivity also recognises that students are individuals, not just members of a demographic ‘group’. Two students from the same ‘group’ might have very different experiences, so we must take care not to fall back on stereotypes or generalisations about what a particular group of student needs’ [36].*

Although inclusive practice is not a legal requirement, most UK universities openly promote inclusive policy and practice which aligns with guidance by institutions such as Advanced Higher Education ([37], Accessed: 16 May 2023) and the Office for Students ([38], Accessed: 20 May 2023).

### 2.4 Othering

Othering is a situation whereby groups of people with a certain identity are marginalised and seen as outside the normal or conventional. People are othered based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, class, caste, culture, disability, religion and age. Othering is defined by Townsin as ‘considering another person, or group of people, as fundamentally different from ‘us’, thereby failing to acknowledge their subjectivities and complexities’ [39].

And by Cherry as,

*‘A phenomenon in which some individuals or groups are defined and labelled as not fitting in within the norms of a social group. It is an effect that influences how people perceive and treat those who are viewed as being part of the in-group versus those who are seen as being part of the out-group’ ([40], Accessed: 21 April 2023).*

Othering is commonly cited as a form of hatred towards ethnic minority groups [41] and women [41]. Powell suggests that othering as a general concept, 'is not about liking or disliking someone. It is based on the conscious or unconscious assumption that a certain identified group poses a threat to the favoured group' [42]. Many reasons have been put forward why some people engage in othering, but in higher education it is considered to be,

*'Bound to issues of inclusion and belonging. Those othered are positioned to 'hold' experiences of exclusion and outsider-ness by those who are positioned on the inside and the 'norm'; othering takes us into the realm of power and how power and identity are interconnected and constructed' ([25], Accessed: 12 May 2023).*

It is believed that where people experience trauma such as child abuse, othering is an experience that can become internalised. This means that it is common for those who suffer trauma to hold hatred towards themselves and towards others with similar life experiences. This internalisation is likely to be a defence mechanism towards being othered and excluded. It will be argued later that an effective way to avoid othering women in HE is to adopt a trauma informed approach which is now widely used in many services that work with traumatised people ([43], Accessed: 25 April 2023).

## **2.5 Adversity and trauma**

Trauma and adversity are used to describe both single and reoccurring distressing life events or situations. Trauma does not have definitive examples but can include emotional, physical or sexual abuse, a violent or frightening event, witnessing harm to someone else, family conflict or domestic abuse, losing a family member or friend to suicide. Some experiences can be so traumatic they leave a person with mental health implications over a much longer period. Trauma is not a mental health condition, however, experiencing trauma and adverse life events can result in a person struggling with their emotional wellbeing, relationships and mental health ([44], Accessed: 22 April 2023). Adversity and trauma can cause a condition called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research has found that women have a two to three times higher risk of developing PTSD compared to men [45]. Symptoms of PTSD tend to vary but common symptoms are negative thoughts and feelings that make daily life exceedingly difficult for sufferers, and a 'fight or flight' reaction to stressful situations. Olf found that women with PTSD tend to react to stressful situations with a tend-and-befriend response rather than the fight-or-flight response that is often assumed [45]. Seeking out others to support when they need support themselves can have further implications for their wellbeing and can deflect the attention from their own needs. Research has consistently shown that 'females have complex patterns of adversity which carry differential risks for mental health, emotional, and social outcomes later in life' [46]. These risks, when coupled with the demands and stresses of studying, and negative experiences whilst in HE, can result in women being unable to continue with their studies, or they 'soldier on' unsupported, with long term harmful implications [46].

## **3. The Applicable Law and Regulations in HE**

The Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England (RFHEE). This Framework is published by the Office for Students which states that the,

*'Primary aim is to ensure that English higher education is delivering positive outcomes for students – past, present, and future. We seek to ensure that students, from all backgrounds (particularly the most disadvantaged), can access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.'*

The RFHEE four primary regulatory objectives are as follows: all students, from all backgrounds, and with the ability and desire to undertake higher education:

1. Are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education.
2. Receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure.
3. Are able to progress into employment or further study, and their qualifications hold their value over time.
4. Receive value for money.

The regulatory framework is designed to mitigate the risk that these primary objectives are not met. The regulatory objectives will be considered later in conjunction with this study's findings.

#### **4. The Equality Act 2010: implications for HE institutions**

The EA sets out protected characteristics which are the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful. These includes age and sex. The EA sets out prohibited conduct of direct discrimination. Section 13 of the Act defines direct discrimination to be when a person treats one person less favourably than they would another because of a protected characteristic. The EA has provided for the treatment of students. Section 91 of the Act prohibits the governing body of an HEI from discriminating against a person or student in the following ways: in the way it affords the student access to a benefit, facility or service, by not providing education for the student, by not affording the student access to a benefit, facility or service, by excluding the student, by subjecting the student to any other detriment [47]. The EA requires public sector bodies (including universities) to have due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation advance equality of opportunity between people who do and do not share a protected characteristic, foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share a protected characteristic.

##### **4.1 Duty of care to students**

The UK government state that,

*'Higher Education providers do have a general duty of care to deliver educational and pastoral services to the standard of an ordinarily competent institution and, in carrying out these services, they are expected to act reasonably to protect the health, safety and welfare of their students' [48].*

However Scolding notes that when it comes to the duty of care to provide pastoral support, there is no real clarity about how that works in practice ([49], Accessed: 20 April 2023). The Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE) Duty of Care Guidance provides principles of good practice for universities which include the delivery of student support services including effective provisions for support, transparency and a clear designation of responsibility, and importantly,

*‘The necessary training, development and support should be available to all relevant staff to enable them to undertake their roles and responsibilities in providing support to students efficiently and effectively’ [50].*

In summary students are owed a duty of care by the university, academic staff [51] such as personal tutors<sup>5</sup> and study advisers and by central Student Services. AMOSSHE advise that students who disclose challenging circumstances on admission should be given an ‘assessment of need report’ which sets out key information to those with a duty of care to the student’s wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Universities must have regard to the RFHEE objectives and are bound by the equality legislation not to discriminate or allow discrimination against students. It is not conclusive that the law protects the right to inclusivity in HE, but arguments have been put forward that inclusivity is a human right in relation to disability under International law [52] and that inclusivity is a moral human right [53]. It is however the case that non inclusive behaviour can emanate into discrimination which would then become unlawful.

## **5. Methodology**

Following a feminist methodology, a qualitative, small-scale study was carried out involving ten participants who identified as female students with lived experience of adversity and trauma. Ethical approval for the study was sought and approved by the researcher’s institutions’ ethics panel.<sup>7</sup> The first stage was an online survey sent to the Student Unions of seven UK universities<sup>8</sup> with a request to cascade the survey to female students. The survey included questions on disclosure of adverse/traumatic life events and subsequent support seeking whilst in HE. Adversity and trauma were not defined in the recruitment information so that women were able to define their own experiences. There were 63 respondents who completed a survey. From those responses ten participants were recruited via purposive sampling.<sup>9</sup> Six students came from different universities. The remaining three were students at different colleges within the same university. They were chosen because they confirmed that they had: a, lived experience of trauma, adversity, and b, they had disclosed either a characteristic or a disability to their university and had asked for support and assistance. For

<sup>5</sup> A member of academic staff who provides academic guidance and pastoral support to a student during their course of study.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> At the university of Plymouth.

<sup>8</sup> These were randomly selected from a list of all Universities in England and Wales.

<sup>9</sup> Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgement when choosing members of the population to participate in their surveys [54].

ethical purposes, before obtaining their consent, the women were asked to confirm that they were no longer experiencing domestic abuse or any other form of abusive relationship and that they were comfortable talking about their trauma. The ethical responsibility when working with vulnerable people is enhanced. Participants may not be conventionally vulnerable, but if they are in dependent and/or abusive relationships, they can feel coerced or pressured into taking part in research, so extra care is needed to ensure their involvement is ethical [55]. Each of the participants was allocated a pseudonym name to protect their identities. These names have been used to identify each person's narrative in the findings.

The second part of the study was the collection of data by semi-structured and interviews conducted face to face. Feminist research methods favour conversational interviews in a supportive and empathic environment. Reinharz explains 'the use of [unstructured] interviews have become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives' [56]. According to Ann Oakley, the feminist perspective rejects traditional masculine interviewing techniques where there is the avoidance of sensitivity and emotionality. Rather it embraces the traits of openness, emotional engagement and the development of trust within a non-hierarchical relationship [57].

Opening questions focused on asking women about their experiences of HE in general, then more specifically in the context of adversity and trauma they had suffered. Further questions were asked about specific support they sought, from who and their views on the responses and adequacy of support provided. The aim of the interviews was to collect data from natural conversation so that the participants did not feel pressured to give 'correct answers'. This approach provides the potential for obtaining rich and detailed data. This data provides empirical information about the lives and perspectives of the participants through use of words [58].

The data was analysed using discourse analysis. This method studies aspects of social life which is understood through the analysis of language and its contextual meaning. Discourse analysis supports the idea that language and discourse, in the sense of speech and communication, is not a fixed reality, but one that is shaped by social context. According to Jankowicz, discourse analysis is of relevance when listening to people's own narratives of a situation. It allows researchers to gain an understanding of people and how they communicate and explore meaning from conversations about the social life of participants [59]. From individual data, we can look for analytic themes and discursive features. From the data as a whole, we can look for patterns in words, anecdotes and the use of language [60]. In the present study, the participants' discourses were analysed twice. Firstly, to look for specific words and phrases that were relevant to the research aims, and secondly, to look at each conversation holistically to get a sense of the participants' interactions with academics and professionals and how this made them feel whilst considering the implications of the findings under the principles of inclusivity and equality.

## **6. Study limitations**

This research is not large scale enough to give an inclusive representation of the chosen study population. This work provides only a snapshot of practice in HE which corresponds with previous research and makes some new discoveries. The recruitment method also limits the generality of the findings, because it may be that only women who had negative experiences were compelled to participate. This limitation

was balanced by the identification of respondents who clearly expressed their motivation for participation, this being the wish to share their experiences so that awareness is raised and such conduct by HE staff is challenged. The recruitment method also allowed for women to enquire and agree to the research with total autonomy, there were no gatekeepers involved, thus respondents had full control over their participation. It is argued that the data collected is reliable and valid; because it is drawn from students from different institutions there is a good level of representation. Although the data is subjective and based on participant's interpretations of their experiences, this is the basis of qualitative research and is an accepted method of investigating social phenomena.

## **7. Findings and discussion**

The participants ranged in age from 21 to 40 at the time of their interviews. Five participants described themselves as white, one as black British, one as white and Asian, the remaining three did not specify their ethnicity. All the women came from lower socio-economic backgrounds and considered HE as a pathway to social mobility and 'better career prospects'.<sup>10</sup> All the participants confirmed that they had disclosed details of their circumstances to various university personnel including, central administration, personal tutors, lecturers and disability/wellbeing/mental health support workers. A theme in the findings was that a degree was more than just a qualification to these women. Going to university to study was a major life experience where they hoped to escape or transcend adversity and build their self-esteem for a more positive future.

Analysis of the results revealed significant deficiencies in inclusivity and othering at ground level with collective evidence of devaluation of these female students. These personal narratives are combined in a manner allowing for a broader picture of female students' experiences in HE to emerge, spotlighting the challenges and obstacles they often face when trying to overcome adversity and thrive academically, professionally and personally.

The findings demonstrate that despite policies on inclusivity and equality being heralded by universities, these principles are not always upheld by individual staff. There were many examples of good practice given by the participants, in particular by mental health workers and personal tutors, but of concern are the examples of non-inclusivity and in some cases discrimination which overall leads to the devaluation and othering of female students with lived experience of adversity.

Anna is a domestic abuse survivor; she spent the first two years of her law degree living in a women's refuge with her children. Anna said that she found a 'wall of disregard'<sup>11</sup> from several members of staff when she asked for specific support such as being allowed to attend a different class that worked with her childcare. Anna also described a male lecturer making 'disturbing observations'<sup>12</sup> during a meeting where he alluded to victims being weak for not leaving an abusive partner. Anna learned that the lecturer made no secret of his contempt for domestic abuse survivors. She raised concerns about his conduct to her personal tutor, but she believes that no action was taken.

---

<sup>10</sup> Transcript K (Sept 2022).

<sup>11</sup> Transcript A (Aug 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



Karima is a post graduate student; she is a domestic abuse survivor who had to leave her home with her children in her first year of study. When Karima asked her personal tutor for help because she was worried about missing lectures due to having to move home, she was refused assistance. She recalled the tutor said ‘if we make provisions for you, we will have to offer it to all the students’.<sup>13</sup> She was then directed to the course information booklet which stated that it is a student’s responsibly to attend all classes. She recalled the conversation was ‘shut down’<sup>14</sup> by the tutor with no compromise for her situation. Billy is studying social work; she spent her early years in the care system and was profoundly traumatised by her childhood experiences. She suffered from reoccurring bouts of depression. Billy felt ‘singled out’<sup>15</sup> as a care leaver in ways that suggested she was more likely to fail than other students; an example of othering being a lecturer advising her that students with ‘baggage from childhood’<sup>16</sup> should not pursue a career in social work.

Lilly is studying for a master’s degree; she grew up taking care of, and often being assaulted by troubled foster children because her parents were unable to manage them. She also experienced bullying from other students during her course, something that triggered symptoms of anxiety and PTSD from her childhood. When she sought support, she described her meeting with the programme leader,

*‘I told her that what happened to me meant I couldn’t stand up to bullies and could she help me deal with the two women who were bullying me. She had no empathy whatsoever; I felt like I was to blame. I wanted to disappear into her office wall; I was ashamed for even asking for anything’.*<sup>17</sup>

Paulina grew up in an emotionally abusive family. She suffered from severe PTSD and depression during her first year of her drama degree which led her to abuse alcohol to try and cope with her symptoms. She said she was ‘all over the place’<sup>18</sup> and needed help but could find no support in her faculty. During her second year she accidentally fell pregnant and asked her personal tutor for advice and support. She recalled his visible discomfort when she told him she was pregnant, he then advised her to withdraw from her course. She found this advice particularly upsetting because she knew a fellow male student who was expecting a baby with his partner had been ‘offered all kinds of support including extenuating circumstances for his performance assessment’.<sup>19</sup>

Cass is an English literature student. She has been diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. She spent several years in psychiatric hospitals prior to being a student. She was provided with a support package from the university disability service, but she found the attitudes of some of the academic staff judgmental. She said her personal tutor had no idea how to talk to her about her situation and made several badly informed comments about mental health, for example, he asked her what would happen if she stopped taking her medication. Cass was not on medication and was managing her condition with cognitive behavioural therapy She felt that this comment was

<sup>13</sup> Transcript K (Sept 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Transcript B (Oct 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Transcript L (Sept 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Transcript P (July 2022).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

stigmatising of people with mental health conditions. Zara is an undergraduate. She was sexually abused in her early years. She had been a witness against her abusers in two criminal trials and was extremely vulnerable when she entered HE. Initially she chose not to disclose to the university. That changed when she attended her first small group tutorial.

*‘There were about ten of us in the class. L (the teacher) thought he was ‘down with the kids’ he was messing around and everyone was laughing. Then he started telling jokes about some of those famous blokes who have been convicted of sexually abusing kids, saying some awful things about abuse survivors. I started to feel hot and nauseous, I left the class. I emailed him the next day, something like ‘some people have personal experience of abuse and your jokes were inappropriate’. His reply was something along the lines of ‘well if I’d known bla bla’, but what kind of person does that? Laughs at child abuse. I knew I could never be in a room with him again and it changed how I felt about my course’.*

Elizabeth left her degree course before graduation. She suffered from an eating disorder linked to childhood abuse. She feels angry about the way she was treated at university. Although she said some of the academic staff were ‘wonderful’<sup>20</sup>; her personal tutor was cold and unsupportive, telling her she should leave her course without advising her of any other support or options such as an interruption or extenuating circumstances. Elizabeth said that she was left feeling suicidal and with no choice but to leave a course she loved. Sammy had a similar experience. She lived with depression and OCD<sup>21</sup> and was provided with a study mentor by the university who, from the outset, caused her problems. Sammy said the mentor was keen to discuss her own personal problems whilst ignoring Sammy’s study needs. The situation became untenable when Sammy learned that the mentor had made derogatory comments about her on a social media ‘group chat’,<sup>22</sup> posting a ‘meme’<sup>23</sup> of a woman in on a psychiatrist’s sofa with Sammy’s name pasted on. When she made a complaint to her faculty office she recalled, ‘the senior professor said I was probably being oversensitive and if I got mad at every little thing, I saw on social networks I was going to have a tough time and needed to have a thicker skin.’<sup>24</sup>

Overall the narratives convey a sense of isolation felt by the participants. Despite trying to manage significant stressors and the impact of trauma, they often avoided help seeking until it was inexorable and then it was motivated by the concern that their studies would be compromised if they did not ask for help. A reoccurring theme was accounts of tutors or support staff seeming distant, unengaged or not listening. Sammy noticed that the professor did not make eye contact at all and talked to the wall above her head. Anna said the male lecturer talked over her and interrupted her every time she spoke.

<sup>20</sup> Transcript E (Aug 2022).

<sup>21</sup> Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a common, chronic, and long-lasting disorder in which a person has uncontrollable, reoccurring thoughts and compulsions that they feel the urge to repeat over and over.

<sup>22</sup> Transcript S (Oct 2022).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

## 8. How women were affected by the conduct

Participants talked about how this treatment made them feel. Some simply denied to themselves that this treatment had occurred and tried to normalise it so that they could continue with their studies. However, that was a short-term solution. Reactions included feeling isolated, mental distress, low self-esteem, a sense of being an imposter. They often went out of their way to avoid the individuals concerned, including not attending lectures or personal tutor meetings, thus enhancing their sense of segregation. Some were constantly on guard, anxious, or hypervigilant and some felt numb or detached from other people, activities and their surroundings. It is easy to see how a single incident of othering and non-inclusive behaviour can trigger a person who is sensitive to such treatment to find HE a negative and in some cases an intolerable experience. Early withdrawal and non-completion of studies is often a result, something universities are anxious to avoid ([61], Accessed: 21 April 2023). Statistics from Higher Education Statistics Agency show that 5.3% of full-time, first-degree entrants in 2019/2020 did not continue past their first year of study. Tinto found that student's positive interaction with faculty and the peer group played a significant role in student experience, concluding that students who are not integrated are more likely to withdraw [62].

## 9. Implications

Negative responses to requests for help are detrimental to students, to HE ethos and to universities' duty of care. The conduct described by the participants conflicts with the RHFEE overarching principle, 'that students, from all backgrounds (particularly the most disadvantaged), can access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.' There are clear examples of non-inclusive and othering behaviour where women were excluded because of their gender, disability and/or backgrounds. This is poor practice that fails to meet the standards set by the AMOSSHE. Because some of the participants fall within the protected characteristics defined by the EA, the conduct they describe equates unlawful harassment under the EA because it made them feel degraded, humiliated, distressed and offended. There is direct discrimination under sections 13 and 91 of the EA. Direct discrimination concerns a person being treated differently and worse than others because of who they are or because of who someone thinks they are. Being advised to withdraw when others are provided with support and being told not to pursue a career because of life experience demonstrates different or worse treatment than other students. There is discrimination on the basis of gender where the student was discriminated against by being told to withdraw because she was pregnant. There is also discrimination arising from disability. In *Abrahart v University of Bristol* 2022,<sup>25</sup> Bristol County Court held that the university had breached the Equality Act. This case involved a student with depression and social anxiety disorder who committed suicide because of the failure of Bristol university to provide her with adjustments to assessment because of her disability. The case is relevant here because Billy, Paulina, Cass, Elizabeth, Lilly and Sammy have a disability defined within the Section 6 of the Equality Act, by way of a mental impairment. This was defined by the court as in *Abrahart* as 'severe depression

---

<sup>25</sup> Bristol County Court Claim No.: G10YX983.

with prominent anxiety features.<sup>26</sup> The court said that to equate discrimination a university must have actual or constructive notice of a disability.<sup>27</sup> Knowledge on the part of any member of university staff in that capacity should usually be enough. Direct discrimination arising from disability under s.15 EA would concern unfavourable treatment because of something connected to a disability.<sup>28</sup> The court held that discrimination would occur once a university knew that a mental health disability was preventing the student from performing and then treated them unfavourably. Under the EA education providers must not engage in unfair treatment such as the provision of policies, access to benefits, facilities or services or any other detriment. It is argued that asking for help and being told to withdraw due to illness or pregnancy; or not having adequate provisions in place which impact on the student's ability to study equates unfavourable treatment as defined in *Abrahart*. Tyrer points out that '*Abrahart* will no doubt raise the profile of mental health issues in universities' ([63], Accessed: 18 May 2023). But arguably it is more pertinent to the deficit in understanding of HE staff and the quality of responses to individual students' support needs.

## 10. Suggestions and concluding thoughts

Whilst the findings show mainly examples of individual behaviour, othering and discrimination, rather than an institutional policy that permits such conduct; it does not lessen the gravity of this treatment. Indeed the attitudes of personnel can be attributed to an accepted 'culture' within an institution. Dumitrescu argues 'universities preach meritocracy but, in reality, bend over backwards to protect toxic personalities, in what she calls 'an ego driven industry' [64]. There is a need for improved and more considerate practices underpinned by a better understanding of new emerging student populations. This can be obtained through mandatory training and examples of best practice from forward thinking institutions. For example, the University of Hull have created a framework with five areas of activity which contribute to inclusive practice across an institution ([36], Accessed: 16 May 2023). There is also a need for a more unified approach to support. Some participants described receiving excellent support from a centralised service such as mental health, but complete disregard from their teachers or personal tutors. Laws believes that there remains a lack of clarity on the role and boundaries around the promotion of student's wellbeing. He argues that 'pastoral care remains ill-defined despite enduring expectations held by university administrators' [7]. May et al. suggest that 'supporting students' development and well-being should not be a distinct collection of services with deficit connotations but part of the curriculum content' [65]. This policy would require a holistic process where academic and central student support services work together transparently to provide cohesive support to students, which could in turn create more accountability for individual staff.

Trauma-informed approaches (TIA) have become increasingly important in policy and adopted in practice as a method to reducing the negative impact of trauma experiences and supporting mental health ([66], Accessed: 18 May 2023). TIA is becoming a factor in the training of HE personnel, for example, when training academics as student sexual violence liaison officers, part of the course involves

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. paras 106, 108–109.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. para 116.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 137–138.

adopting a TIA towards students who report sexual violence ([67], Accessed: 18 May 2022). It is proposed that TIA be part of an institutions mandatory training to reflect the increasing numbers of students who have lived through trauma and adversity. TIA follows a simple set of principles that staff should follow when supporting students: safety, including attempting to prevent re-traumatisation, trustworthiness, with the objective of building trust among staff, and service users, choice, including listening to the needs and wishes of service users, collaboration, in that the organisation asking service users what they need and collaboratively considering how these needs can be met, empowerment, includes supporting people to make decisions and take action and cultural considerations including incorporating policies, protocols and processes that are responsive to the needs of individuals served ([67], Accessed: 18 May 2022).

More work needs to be done at both frontline staff level and in the wider HE context to address the problems of non-inclusivity, othering and discrimination. Women entering HE from adverse circumstances often have specific vulnerabilities or 'triggers', which are highly sensitive to inconsiderate practices, sometimes resulting in withdrawal from studies and reinforcement of low self-esteem. Training for HE personnel includes diversity, and equality awareness, as well as more focused training, for example, becoming an ally for students from LGBTIQAPD+ communities. A training program that provides TIA and promotes awareness of the needs of women with traumatic backgrounds is a step in the right direction. Hornsby and Clark advise a holistic approach to supporting students which includes positive relationships between students and staff' including empathic mentoring, identification of positive character strengths and building resilience [68–72].

Finally, the women who I spoke to all suggested that more empathy, support and kindness from staff would have gone a long way to make their HE experience a better one. It may be that some staff simply need to think about the impact of their words and attitudes to students before they speak. It is easy to become jaded when there are such large numbers of students passing through our institutions each year; but we must remember that each student is in individual with different backgrounds and needs. HE personnel should also reflect on their personal biases often and engage with the available training that will encourage them to transcend negative attitudes, allowing them to support students in the manner they deserve.


## Author details

Lisamarie Deblasio  
School of Law, University of Plymouth, UK

\*Address all correspondence to: [lisa.deblasio@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:lisa.deblasio@plymouth.ac.uk)

## IntechOpen

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] Mott H. Gender Equality in Higher Education: Maximising Impacts The British Council, 2022. Available from: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/gender\\_equality\\_in\\_higher\\_education\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/gender_equality_in_higher_education_executive_summary.pdf) [Accessed: 16 May 2023]
- [2] Gov.uk. What is Inclusion in Higher Education. 2022. Available from: <https://blog.insidegovernment.co.uk/higher-education/what-is-inclusion-in-higher>
- [3] More Students from the Most Disadvantaged Backgrounds across the UK are Set to Start Degrees this Autumn, as the Global Pandemic has not Dampened Progress on Widening Participation in Universities and Colleges. UCAS. 2020. Available from: <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/more-students-most-disadvantaged-backgrounds-across-uk-are-set-start-degrees-autumn#:~:text=This%20means%202022.5%25%20of%20all,four%20nations%20of%20the%20UK> [Accessed: 2 May 2023]
- [4] Pooran N. Record Numbers of Students from Deprived Areas Enrol at University, Figures Show. The Independent; 2022
- [5] Froio N. Number of University Students Seeking Counselling Rises 33%. The Guardian. 2022
- [6] Thorley C. Not by Degrees: Improving Student Mental Health in the UK's Universities. Institute for Public Policy Research. 2017
- [7] Laws T, Fiedler B. Universities' expectations of pastoral care: Trends, stressors, resource gaps and support needs for teaching staff. Nurse Education Today. 2012;**32**:796-802
- [8] Pinnock K. Embedding Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum: Developing and Disseminating Effective Practice. Policy Research Institute and University of Wolverhampton; 2008
- [9] Bleijenbergh IL et al. Othering women: Fluid images of the ideal academic. equality, Diversity and Inclusion. 2013;**32**(1):22-35
- [10] British Council Report. Gender Equality in Higher Education - Maximising Impacts. 2022. Available from: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/gender-equality-higher-education-maximising-impacts> [Accessed: 2 May 2023]
- [11] Rosa R, Clavero S. Gender equality in higher education and research. Journal of Gender Studies. 2022;**31**(1):1-7
- [12] University of London. Leading Women 1868-2018. Available from: <https://www.london.ac.uk/about-us/history-university-london/leading-women-1868>
- [13] UK Parliament. Start of the Suffragette Movement. Available from: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/startsofsuffragette-/> [Accessed: 3 May 2023]
- [14] Oxford Royale. A History of Women's Education in the UK. Available from: <https://www.oxford-royale.com/articles/history-womens-education-uk/> [Accessed: 27 April 2023]
- [15] David ME. Women and gender equality in higher education?

In: Eggins H, editor. *The Changing Role of Women in Higher Education (The Changing Academy – The Changing Academic Profession in International Comparative Perspective)*. Vol. 17. Education Sciences; 2017, 2015. p. 5, 10-25. DOI: 10.3390/educsci5010010

[16] UNESCO. Global Universities Address Gender Equality but Gaps Remain to be Closed 2022. Available from: <https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/2022/03/08/global-universities-address-gender-equality-but-gaps-remain-to-be-closed>

[17] Neuman E. Discrimination and Prejudice: The Experience of Female Students in Male-Dominated Education. 2022. Available from: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1670758/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

[18] DiNitto D et al. Sexual discrimination in higher education. *Higher Education Review*. 1982;**14**(2):332

[19] Rogers S. Sexism on Campus. *The Complete University Guide*; 2023 Available from: <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/after-you-start/sexism-on-campus>

[20] National Union of Students, Lad Culture Audit Report. 2016. Available from: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/liberation/women-students/tackling-lad-culture/about/project-time-line> [Accessed: 3 May 2023]

[21] Edwards J. Narrating experiences of sexism in higher education: A critical feminist autoethnography to make meaning of the past, challenge the status quo and consider the future. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 2017;**30**(7):621-634. DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2017.1286405

[22] The Long-term Impacts of Trauma Such as Flashbacks, Self-harm, Depression and Suicidal Feelings can be Triggered by Inconsiderate Treatment. Available from: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/trauma/effects-of-trauma/> [Accessed: 16 May 2023]

[23] Freeman T et al. Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *Journal of Experimental Education*. 2007;**75**(3):203-220

[24] Universities UK. Student Support. 2023. Available from: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/students/student-support>

[25] Collias K. Otherness, Identity, and Belonging in Higher Education? Knowledge without Borders. 2023. Available from: <https://knowwithoutborders.org/finding-new-rituals-in-higher-education>

[26] Morris C et al. Gender back on the agenda in higher education: Perspectives of academic staff in a contemporary UK case study. *Journal of Gender Studies*. 2022;**31**(1):101-113

[27] OECD. Better Policies for Better Lives, Understanding Social Mobility. Available from: <https://www.oecd.org/stories/social-mobility/>

[28] de Bellaigue C et al. Women, mobility, and education in twentieth-century England and Wales: A new analytical approach. *Twentieth Century British History*. 2022;**33**(3):345-368

[29] The Office for Students. Supporting social mobility through higher education access, success and progression. 2018. Available from: [https://ounews.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Office\\_for\\_Students\\_Social\\_Justice\\_Pamphlet-final.pdf](https://ounews.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Office_for_Students_Social_Justice_Pamphlet-final.pdf)

- [30] The Sutton Trust, Briefing, Universities and Social Mobility: Summary Report. 2021. Available from: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Universities-and-social-mobility-final-summary.pdf>
- [31] Waterfield J, West B. Inclusive Assessment in Higher Education: A Resource for Change. Plymouth, Devon: Plymouth University; 2006
- [32] Govnet. What Does Inclusion Mean Within Higher Education. 2022. Available from: <https://blog.insidegovernment.co.uk/higher-education/what-is-inclusion-in-higher-education#a1> [Accessed: 21 April 2023]
- [33] Collins Dictionary. Available from: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/inclusivity> [Accessed: 24 April 2023]
- [34] Burgstahler S. Universal design in HE: From Principles to Practice. USA: Harvard Education Press; 2015
- [35] Opie T. 'Building gender inclusivity: Disentangling the influence of classroom demography on classroom participation. Higher Education. 2019;77(1):37-58
- [36] Hubbard K, Gawthorpe P. Inclusive Education Framework. University of Hull. Available from: <https://www.hull.ac.uk/editor-assets/docs/inclusive-education-framework.pdf>
- [37] Advance HE, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Available from: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion>
- [38] OFS, Equality and Diversity. Available from: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/>
- [39] Townsin L, Walsh C. A New Border Pedagogy: Rethinking Outbound Mobility Programs in the Asian Century. 2020. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9279-2.ch008
- [40] Cherry L. How Othering Contributes to Discrimination and Prejudice. 2023. Available from: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-othering-5084425#:~:text=Othering%20is%20a%20phenomenon%20in,part%20of%20the%20out%2Dgroup>
- [41] Rohleder P. Othering. In: Teo T, editor. Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology. New York: Springer; 2014
- [42] Powell J. Us vs them: The sinister techniques of 'othering' – And how to avoid. The Guardian. 2017
- [43] Sharpen J. Trauma Informed Work: The Key to Supporting Women. Safe Lives; 2021. Available from: [https://safelives.org.uk/practice\\_blog/trauma-informed-work-key-supporting-women](https://safelives.org.uk/practice_blog/trauma-informed-work-key-supporting-women)
- [44] Mental Health Resources. What is Trauma and Adversity. 2017. Available from: <https://mindyourway.co.uk/mental-health/trauma-and-adversity/>
- [45] Olf M. Sex and gender differences in post-traumatic stress disorder: An update. European Journal of Psycho trauma. 2017;29:8
- [46] Haahr-Pedersen I et al. Females have more complex patterns of childhood adversity: Implications for mental, social, and emotional outcomes in adulthood. European Journal of Psycho Trauma. 2020;11(1):6-12
- [47] Guidance, What equality law means for you as an education provider – further and higher education. Equality and Human Rights Commission. 2014. Available from: <https://www.>



[equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/what\\_equality\\_law\\_means\\_for\\_you\\_as\\_an\\_education\\_provider\\_further\\_and\\_higher\\_education.pdf](https://equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/what_equality_law_means_for_you_as_an_education_provider_further_and_higher_education.pdf) [Accessed: 3 May 2023]

[48] UK Parliament. MPs to Discuss Calls for a Statutory Duty of Care towards Higher Education Students. 2023

[49] Scolding, F, QC, Pastoral Care, Welfare and Mental Health in Universities (2021). Available from: <https://www.landmarkchambers.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Pastoral-care-welfare-and-mental-health-in-universities.pdf>

[50] The Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education. Responding to student mental health issues in Higher Education: 'Duty of Care' responsibilities for student services. 2011

[51] Advance HE. Personal Tutoring and Key Skills Development in Higher Education - Experiences and Challenges. 2013. Available from: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/personal-tutoring-and-key-skills-development-higher-education-experiences-and>

[52] UN Disability Convention (CRPD). 2006

[53] Stewart Gordon J. Is inclusive education a human right? *Journal of Law Medicine & Ethics*. 2013;41(4):754-767

[54] Robinson R. Purposive Sampling. In: Michalos AC, editor. *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. London: Springer; 2014

[55] Gordon B. Vulnerability in research: Basic ethical concepts and general approach to review. *Ochsner Journal*. 2020;20(1):34-38

[56] Reinharz S. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1992. p. 18

[57] Oakley A. Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms. In: Roberts H, editor. *Doing Feminist Research*. Oxford: Routledge; 1981. p. 223

[58] Punch P. *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. London: Sage; 2005. p. 56

[59] Jankowicz AD. *Business Research Projects*. New York: Thomson; 2005

[60] Potter J, Wetherell M. *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage; 1987

[61] Advance HE. Student Retention and Success in Higher Education. 2023. Available from: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/student-retention-and-success#overview>

[62] Tinto V. *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1993

[63] Tyrer, A, *Abrahart v University of Bristol: Oral Assessments Led to Suicide, UK Disability Discrimination Law 2022*. Available from: <https://www.stammeringlaw.org.uk/abrahart-v-university-of-bristol>

[64] Dumitrescu D. Ten Rules for Succeeding in Academia through Upward Toxicity. *Times Higher Education*; 2019

[65] May H, Bridger K. *Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policy and Practice in Higher Education*. York: HEA; 2010

[66] Gov.UK. *Guidance, Working Definition of Trauma Informed Practice*. 2022. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/>

working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice

[67] Lime Culture. Lime Culture Delivers ‘Trauma Informed’ Training to Police Rape Investigation Team. 2022. Available from: <https://limeculture.co.uk/limeculture-delivers-trauma-informed-training-to-police-rape-investigation-team/#:~:text=LimeCulture%20has%20developed%20‘A%20trauma,the%20willingness%20of%20the%20victim>

[68] Hornsby F, Clark R. A Holistic Approach to Student Support. *Times Higher Education*; 2022

[69] Eggins H, editor. The changing role of women in higher education (the changing academy – The changing academic profession in international comparative perspective, 2017). *Education Sciences*. 2015;17:5, 10-25. DOI: 10.3390/educsci5010010

[70] Equality and human rights commission guidance, what equality law means for you as an education provider – Further and higher education. Equality and Human Rights Commission. 2014

[71] Michalos AC, editor. *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. London: Springer; 2014

[72] Office for Students Equality Framework. Available from: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/>

---

Section 3

Politics of Gender: Planning,  
Policies and Laws

---



# Addressing Gender Inequality through Local Planning: The Colombian Case

*Yancili Lozano-Torres*

## Abstract

What does the analysis of city plans reveal about efforts toward gender equality? Gender equity is not often an explicit aim in local planning, and the analysis of planning documents does hardly evaluate the presence of efforts toward gender equity. I evaluate the degree to which city plans support gender-responsive planning (GRP) and examine the circumstances under which GRP is achieved in 21 Colombian cities. I find high mismatch between intention and action toward gender equity. Thus, I conclude with an analysis of what drives cities to include gender in their plans but then not take action.

**Keywords:** gender-responsive planning, feminist planning, gender equality and the city, Colombia, mixed methods, local planning

## 1. Introduction

Despite the stereotype as a patriarchal region, several Latin American countries score higher in the global gender gap index than some developed countries. According to [1], these countries are making substantial progress in terms of critical aspects of the feminist agenda, such as political and economic empowerment. In Colombia, a unitarian country, gender equality for women is legislated and mandated from the national government. Nonetheless, it is in the realm of local governments that these national mandates are to be implemented. Thus, this study seeks to better understand local efforts to advance gender equality in politics, economic, education and health, and safety through an analysis of municipal planning documents in Colombia.

The world has seen improvements in terms of gender equality (GE) for women in the last twenty-five years; nonetheless, there are still serious gender disparities in terms of—payment and access to—employment, health, leadership positions' occupancy, and care work, among others [2]. Colombia is an intriguing and interesting country to conduct a case study on advancing gender equality. On the one hand, it has been praised internationally for its efforts to address gender equality [3]. On the other hand, it has unique structural challenges like a fifty-year armed conflict and deep inequalities across economic and geographic lines. For these reasons, this country offered an interesting case study to explore how its municipalities address the inequality that Colombian women experience.

The benefits of tackling gender equality have been highlighted in different arenas [4–7]. Gender equality has a positive impact not just for women but also for the economy and the society at large, as it was recognized by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #5. Despite a lack of political conditions to create more equitable places [8], gender-responsive planning (GRP) can help address gender inequality. A GRP approach should be understood as one that seeks gender equality, as well as accounts for the gender differential impact that it could yield on its beneficiaries. It keeps in mind the differential impact that planning, local planning in this case, will have on different genders. It does not refer to planning for women independently; contrarily, it recognizes that the population is not gender-neutral and that programs might have different effects based on the gender of the beneficiaries. A question that a gender-responsive plan should answer is: does the implementation of the plan lower, reduce, or leave gender inequality unchanged? This research used a Convergence Mixed Method to understand local planning efforts to advance gender equality in politics, economics, education, health, and safety. I anticipate that the knowledge generated from this inquiry provides insights that can inform local governments and planners in creating strategies to address the inequality that women continue to experience within the city.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four additional sections. Section 2 presents a note on gender equality and local planning. In the subsequent section, I describe the data and methods. Then, a results section follows. Following, I discuss main findings in terms of the intentions and actions to achieve gender equality in Colombia and the factors related to these levels. Lastly, Section 5 offers concluding remarks.

## **2. A note on gender equality and local planning**

According to the United Nations' Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [1], women all around the world experience inequality in the access to basic education, health care, safe transportation; they also experience disparities in access to work, face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps, and are underrepresented in political and economic decision-making processes. Why is that a problem? Why is it important to achieve gender equality? Why should we care about it? We should start by acknowledging that, in most parts of the world, women are at least half of the population. Gender equality is therefore a matter of justice for half of the population.

Gender equality could also be seen in terms of the economic benefits that it can provide to the society in general and to the markets in particular. For instance, in the case of STEM fields, many of their associations are promoting the inclusion of women within their fields, not because it is a matter of justice, but because those fields are in need of a labor force that cannot be supplied, at least in North America, with the traditional White-male force [4]. Another instance, the McKinsey Global Institute predicted that if women have the same role in labor markets compared to men, the global annual GDP would rise by as much as 26% in the course of 10 years. In that report, India and Latin America were the two of the regions to gain the most by expanding women's participation in the labor force.

Promoting equal access for women in aspects such as education, just work, health, empowerment initiatives, and decision-making positions, among others, has been shown to help boost the results in terms of human development. Momsen ([7], p. 50),

for instance, discusses how child mortality reduces when there are increases in education for women. In the same direction, Refs. [5, 6] also debate how household welfare improves as a result of women's empowerment. Equality for women benefits not only them but also the society in general.

Based on the discrimination that women experience, and after decades of feminist activism, most of the UN member countries have defined a women's agenda to enhance women's situation and to protect their rights [9, 10]. The goals within each agenda could vary among countries or regions. However, most of them try to address (1) women's economic capacity, (2) access to resources and services, and (3) representation in decision-making processes and positions. The *economic capacity* is related to access to the job market as well as to economic resources such as land, but this is also highly determined by access to education. Activities related to this goal also include the reduction of gender wage gaps, women's participation in decent work, and actions against the discrimination they experience at work. *Access to resources* addresses problems related to women's health, in terms of both access to healthcare and their own health condition. It also includes the provision of basic services such as transportation or education. Finally, the lack of women's *representation in decision-making* should be addressed in two different fronts, that is, getting them to participate as member of the communities within planning processes and empowering them to sit at the political table where decisions are taken.

A persistent concern to reach equity at the city level is the lack of tools or political conditions to create more equitable places [8]. The traditional and most widely used urban planning model also encounters problems addressing gender inequalities since it is conceived from a gender-blind perspective [11, 12]. In terms of gender inequality, gender-responsive planning (GRP) approaches and women-liberalizing laws constitute a way to walk toward that desired equity. Refs. [13] states a comprehensive definition of what a gender-responsive approach is:

*A gender approach means analysing the forms and the links that gender relations take and the links between them and other wider relations in society. What are the links between gender and economic relations between people, whether members of a household or of different social classes, and how do changing economic relations affect gender relations? What are the links between gender and changes in productive relations and how do the conditions of reproduction of labour affect gender relations? ([13], p. 7).*

An influx of studies on the Global South are considering gender within the local planning practice [14–17]. Lirio [14], for instance, shows how female grassroots groups demanded the inclusion of gender within the planning process in Medellin, Colombia, and acted as designers by providing their local knowledge to build safer houses for them and their families. Gutierrez Rivera illustrates how women's grassroots movements are actors in the planning process with clear ideas of how to ensure a gender perspective in local planning.

Meanwhile, Olivieri and Fageda [17] uses a multilevel regression model to test the influence of the household responsibility hypothesis on women travel patterns in Montevideo, Uruguay. Their results indicate that, similar to developed countries, women's travel patterns in Montevideo show a more intense use of public transport; women travel less on private cars than men, commute less than men, and are, in general, less mobile than men. This empirical evidence helps to support the idea that planners and policy makers need to consider gender differences when seeking to enhance their planning decisions and to avoid perpetuating gender inequality.

Another contribution to the literature on GRP, and a departure from the Western theory, is provided by [18]. They defend the importance of home-based enterprises (HBE) in Enugu, Nigeria. The authors refute the notion that HBE contributes to the gender oppression of women by highlighting the wider economic and social benefits of permitting HBE on a wider scale [18]. The study illustrates the ways that planners in Enugu were persuaded by and willing to change zoning codes and land use plans to accommodate HBE in the city. These changes were thought to positively impact gender equality.

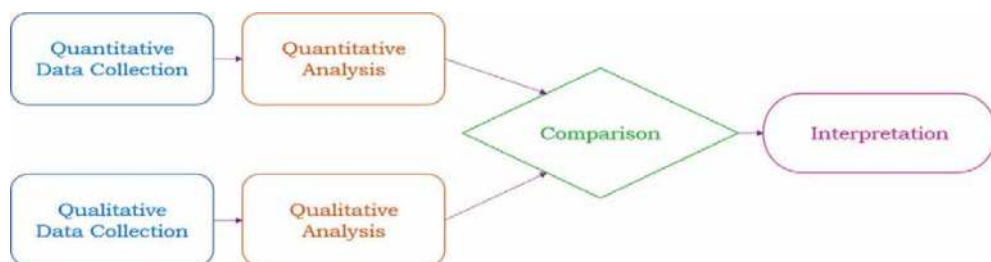
On a similar note, Yancili [16] provides empirical evidence on the determinants to aid endeavors toward gender equality at the local level. Lozano-Torres uses content and regression analysis to understand the factors linked to gender responsiveness in local planning. Her contribution is a call to not exclusively rely at who does the planning as a factor determinant to achieve GE. Her findings show women’s advocacy as the most significant factor influencing local planning efforts to be responsive toward women’s needs. This result is supported by the fact that in Colombia, and in Latin America in general, gender equality achievements are associated to women’s group advocacy for their rights.

The studies presented above expand the evidence that local planning has a notable impact on gender equality and can improve it if gender is meaningfully included in the plan. They also show some key factors and strategies that can be used to move toward GE. This chapter focuses on understanding how municipal plans incorporate gender and what actions the city takes to implement what gets planned.

### 3. Methods

In an effort to better understand local planning endeavors to reduce gender inequality, this study followed a mixed method approach (MM). Gender inequality is a multifaceted problem and so are the strategies to fight it. Thus, an MM is used to provide a more holistic research approach to it. MMs are versatile in that they could make possible research that otherwise would be impossible to conduct, in terms of either the cost or the physical feasibility ([19], p. 61).

The MM used in this study is a Convergent Parallel Mixed Method (CPMM). **Figure 1** shows the procedures on a CPMM, in which the researcher conducts the quantitative and the qualitative analysis separately and then uses the findings to discern if they converge or diverge [21]. To develop the convergence comparison, I relied on the results from the quantitative and the qualitative phases reported on [15, 16]. Those results, however, provided an index of GRP for cities in the sample as well as a record of strategies and actions to achieve gender equality. Both results, quantitative and



**Figure 1.** Convergent Parallel Mixed Method (CPMM). Source: by the author previously published in [20].



qualitative, were given the same priority. Thus, they are placed in boxes indicating that both are major components of the design [21]. The next step, the comparison, is a side-by-side analysis of the statistical results from the quantitative phase and the themes resulting from the qualitative analysis. The comparison and interpretation parts were located within a diamond to mark the result that the use of an MM will yield.

As with other methods, CPMM poses some challenges including the fact that it is a time-consuming approach since it implies to do the quantitative and qualitative analysis. In order to deal with this challenge, this study uses a sample following a rigorous sampling procedure. Another challenge with CPMM, according to [21], is the difference between the qualitative and quantitative sample sizes. In this study, that is not a problem because the aim of each phase is different. The quantitative phase yields the factors associated with GRP, while the qualitative phase provides a characterization of GRP in the Colombian context. All the cities studied in the qualitative phase were studied in the quantitative phase.

### 3.1 Sample

The study uses a two-stage sampling strategy for each phase. The quantitative phase analyzes 244 Colombian cities that include cities from different regions and socioeconomic and political background [16]. The qualitative phase was conducted in 21 cities that were also analyzed in the quantitative phase and are a representation of the different cities and municipalities of Colombia [15]. These cities also happen to exhibit different levels of GRP index, calculated in the quantitative phase.

### 3.2 Dataset

The dataset used in this study comes from multiple sources. I built an original dataset doing content analysis (CA) of, mainly, the city's websites and 2016–2019 municipal development plans (PDMs) and requesting information to the city *via* email. The index of gender-responsive planning (GRP), developed during the quantitative phase, is composed of four attributes: the existence of a women's office within the city, the adoption of the public policy for gender equality for women within the PDM, the recognition of a gender focus also within the PDM's values and or principles, and percentage of expenditure that each city dedicates to advance gender equality for women. It ranges from zero to four, zero meaning no responsiveness toward gender equality and four meaning the highest responsiveness level in the planning process. **Table 1** provides the list of cities used in this study. It also includes their GRP levels, population, and geographical information. As shown in **Table 1**, the highest GRP is 3.1482 for Envigado, while several cities exhibit an index of zero for their responsiveness toward gender equality. The sample includes cities with high, medium, and low levels of GRP.

On the other hand, the qualitative phase showed how efforts toward gender equality are portrayed in the PDMs. First, it showed that all the cities in the sample included some type of action to address gender equality (**Table A1**) ([15], p. 333). The actions differ by city, and they can be considered stronger or more trustable depending on whether they are presented as a solid plan or just an aspiration, whether they have an institutional structure to ensure that the goals will be pursued, or whether they assign a budget to implement their gender equality goal.

Although the qualitative phase used the GRP index to select the cities to sample, both analyses were conducted separately. Therefore, the CPMM seeks to unveil whether these results converge or not.

Cities	Province	Region	Population	GRP
Acandí	Chocó	Pacific	9408	1.0091
Villa de Leyva	Boyacá	Andean	17,506	0.0039
Villanueva	Casanare	The Plains	24,301	1.0782
Caloto	Cauca	Pacific	29,867	0
Leticia	Amazonas	Amazon	41,957	0
Chinú	Córdoba	Caribbean	49,362	2
Ayapel	Córdoba	Caribbean	53,152	0
Puerto Asís	Putumayo	Amazon	61,483	2.2097
San José del Guaviare	Guaviare	Amazon	66,679	2
Calarcá	Quindío	Andean	78,385	1
Yopal	Casanare	The Plains	146,202	2.0279
Tumaco	Nariño	Pacific	208,318	1
Envigado	Antioquia	Andean	232,903	3.1482
Riohacha	Guajira	Caribbean	277,868	3
Buenaventura	Valle del Cauca	Pacific	415,770	3.0082
Cúcuta	Norte de Santander	Andean	662,673	3.1477
Cartagena	Bolívar	Caribbean	1,024,882	3.0082
Barranquilla	Atlántico	Caribbean	1,228,271	3
Cali	Valle del Cauca	Andean	2,420,114	3
Medellín	Antioquia	Andean	2,508,452	3.0241
Bogotá	Distrito Capital	Andean	8,080,734	2.0279

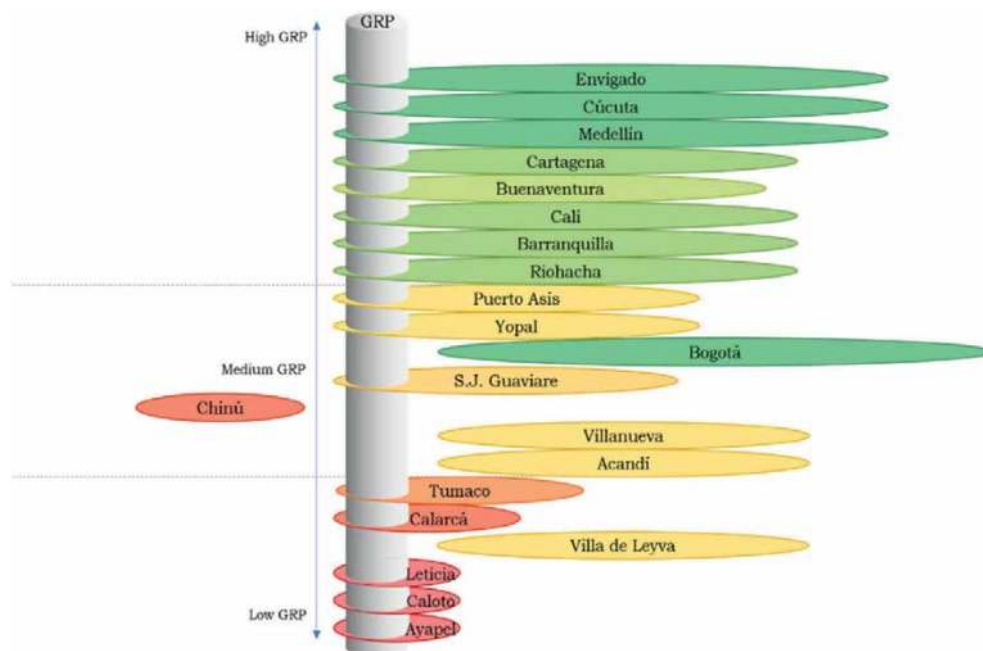
*Note: Cities with pink highlight indicate the presence of a female mayor. <sup>1</sup>This table was previously published in [20].*

**Table 1.**  
*Sample cities.<sup>1</sup>*

### 3.3 Convergence parallel analysis

The research question guiding the convergent parallel mixed analysis for this study was: to what extent do the GRP index results converge with cities’ effort toward GE? Following ([22], pp. 80–81), I built a convergence table (**Table A1**) to combine the two sets of results and provide a more complete picture of how some cities are more progressive in advancing gender equality for women. Although the analysis of convergence between qualitative and quantitative results can represent a challenge—particularly mixing different types of datasets—in this case, the twenty-one cities analyzed during the qualitative phase were part of the cities analyzed during the quantitative component. Therefore, in this specific study, a merged analysis did not represent a significant challenge.

**Table A1** (see appendix) shows a first column with the cities analyzed during the qualitative phase, a second one merging the result from both phases, and a third column indicating whether the results converge or not. The second column of the table includes the *GRP* level for the city (quantitative result) and analysis of the soundness of the city’s program for gender equality (qualitative). This last analysis is



**Figure 2.** Convergence of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Note: Size and color of the oval represents the quality of city's GE programs. Convergence is represented when the ovals are attached to the cylinder and divergence when they are detached. Source: by the author previously published in [20].

done by looking at the city's goals for gender equality, its strategies, the identification of responsible parties for these two, and the existence of a budget to address gender equality. These themes emerged as the foundations for a plan to be considered robust on addressing gender equality. The table was used to build a more illustrative figure presented in **Figure 2**.

#### 4. Do plans for gender equality become a reality?

**Figure 2** illustrates the convergence between GRP levels and efforts toward gender equality for women. The vertical cylinder contains the different levels of GRP (from higher to smaller), and the oval ones represent cities. The more spread-out the oval, the better the city's gender equality program. Likewise, the colors range from red to green, indicating where they fall along the spectrum concerning the quality of the city's program or actions toward gender equality (i.e., red means poor and green means excellent). The oval figure is based on the analysis done for **Table A1**. I assessed whether the city had identified goals toward GE and defined strategies to achieve these goals. Consideration about the identification of responsible parties for these two and the assignment of a budget to address GE were also done. Cities were considered to have a sound plan for gender equality if they meet these four criteria, and subsequently, they were assigned a wider and green oval in **Figure 2**.

Convergence is shown when the oval is attached to the cylinder. Divergence between the two strands of data is shown when the oval is detached from the cylinder. The convergence is certainly clear for the six cities with the highest and lowest values of GRP. Ayapel, Caloto, and Leticia all have a GRP of zero and weak goals for gender equality that could be considered simply statements with no strategies defined to

achieve them. Likewise, no responsible parties are assigned to their aspirational gender equality goals efforts, nor a budget to go with them. Quantitative results showed that having a female mayor reduces the GRP levels. Ayapel and Caloto have female mayors, which is consistent with their qualitative results. That is not the case for Villanueva and Acandí, however. These two cities have female mayors and are still advancing gender equality in their cities.

Correspondingly, Medellín, Cúcuta, and Envigado are the cities with the highest GRP and also excellent programs—arguably the best—to address gender equality for women. Their goals are fact-based. Their strategies are powerful with defined outcomes and accountability. They stated officers or offices to oversee these two elements. Additionally, they allocated a budget for their gender equality program.

Another ten cities were found to have a gender equality program that corresponds to their GRP level. They are cities with low ( $GRP < 2$ ), medium ( $2 < GRP < 3$ ), and high GRPs ( $GRP \geq 3$ ), and their gender equality program represents that spectrum. For cities with low GRP, the gender equality plan is similar to the ones discussed above. Cities with medium GRP, on average, have more solid gender equality goals that are usually accompanied with strategies to achieve them. Most of these cities, however, fall short in terms of either defining responsible parties for the gender equality strategies or, to a lesser extent, assigning a budget that works for gender equality for women.

Cities with a GRP greater than three usually have strong goals and strategies, with responsible parties and a budget for gender equality programs. Riohacha, Barranquilla, and Cali, however, did not have budget allocation for their GE. Although the literature and my own experience would mark these cities as not taking gender equality seriously due to the lack of budget, I would also think that for cities like these (i.e., provincial capitals), the fact that they have more national oversight on them could indicate that the lack of a budget is not as bad as it could be for a small or distant municipality that is not as closely watched. Moreover, they have an office for women's affairs that is under the umbrella of a secretary and not directly under the mayor, which could also explain why their budget was not made explicit.

Despite the results presented above, as shown in **Figure 2**, the analysis did not support convergence for the following five cities: Acandí, Villanueva, Bogotá, Villa de Leyva, and Chinú. These cities do not get fastened to the GRP cylinder as an indication of their divergence respect to the GRP. The first four exhibit something that can be described as *positive* divergence from what was expected; that is, their gender equality programs were stronger than what their GRP level could have indicated. Contrarily, in the case of Chinú, its gender equality program is weaker than what one would have expected from its GRP and thus could be described as *negative* divergence.

Among the outliers, Villa de Leyva is the one with the lowest GRP (0.004). This level of GRP corresponds to the funds they allocated for gender equality issues. This city does more than what the GRP would reflect. As per the qualitative content analysis (QCA) on accommodations to work toward GE, they aspire to create a women's affair office and to leverage the Family Superintendent Office. Although no responsible parties were identified, they have clear fact-based gender equality goals and strategies, including some for GBV. This is one positive outlier with no correspondence between its low GRP and the gender equality plan. Further research is needed to understand the divergence. With a population of 17,506, they have zero women's advocacy grassroots organizations, but there is a critical mass of women within Villa de Leyva's cabinet.

With a population of only 9408, Acandí is the smallest city in the sample. Its GRP is 1.0091 as a product of its recognition of the gender equality as a guiding

principle and its dedicated budget for gender equality actions. The qualitative analysis indicates that they have defined gender equality goals and strategies including campaigns against GBV. With a female mayor and a women's grassroots group, they are aspiring to transform women's underrepresentation and financial security. Even though they did not include the responsible parties for their gender equality goals and strategies, their intentions to advance gender equality are explicit: "*Strengthen gender equality in the exercise of rights and in the expansion of women's own capacities.*" What can explain this divergence? Acandí is a positive outlier, but it is worth exploring whether this is a result of its female mayor. This presents itself as a good follow-up case study.

Consistently, Villanueva, another city with a female mayor, defines a thoughtful gender equality plan to work in favor of women, despite its GRP of 1.08. It has three of the four points to be considered as seriously working toward gender equality (a budget, goals, and strategies). The mayor made her aspirations toward gender equality explicit within the PDM: *to mainstream all the other projects that the city will undertake [...] seeking women's inclusion and equity*. Although responsible parties are not identified, they made plans to create a women's office. Thus, with a low GRP, the intentions to advance gender equality jump out.

I did not have any predetermined expectations about the aforementioned cities. They are small cities with relatively low visibility in Colombia. Yet I was expecting a high GRP for the Colombian capital. Bogotá, however, has a medium level GRP of 2.026. This number is due to the lack of recognition of the gender ideology as a foundational principle for its PDM. Still, it has one of the strongest gender equality programs such as the ones for Medellín, Cúcuta, or Envigado. Bogotá is also the only city with strategies and goals to advance gender equality in the workplace by addressing the burden of the unpaid care economy and safe job environment for women. This is a positive outlier with strategies and goals that could be emulated in the rest of the country.

Among the outliers, Chinú is the only one that has a worse gender equality plan than what its GRP (2.0) would indicate. At a medium level, most of the cities were found to have clear fact-based goals and defined strategies (see Appendix: **Table A1**). Yet Chinú, despite having a female mayor and Chief, and a cabinet with 88% of women, only mentioned statements for political participation and physical integrity. Contrary to Villanueva and Acandí, Chinú's mayor does not make her interest on women's empowerment explicit, nor were responsible parties identified either.

Yancili [16] was not able to confirm the hypothesis that *who* does the planning will have a positive effect on gender equality. There were not strong reasons behind that, but suggestions such as the lack of a critical mass of women and the need to include more variables were made. In this regard, it is interesting to see how cities with similar sizes and female mayors such as Villanueva, Acandí, and Chinú get such different results.

The planning power that mayors hold, conceivably, could also explain what happens in Acandí, Villanueva, and Chinú, as shown through web searches. In the case of Acandí, its mayor is a former public officer with more than twenty years of experience. She has been recognized as an exemplary officer for her transparency and efficient management of public resources [23]. Villanueva, meanwhile, has a mayor with experience in the private sector that wanted to bring to the city and act as "the CEO of the city." These two women, with different backgrounds but both without family political ties make clear within their PDM their intention to improve gender equality for women. That is not the case of Chinú, whose mayor is the widow of a traditional politician, which, together with her women's office chief, is being investigated for irregularities in the management of the budget for the elderly [24].

In the case of Bogotá, for instance, the previous mayor was much more interested in social transformation including GE. The 2016–2019 mayor, however, seems to be more task-oriented in terms of infrastructural changes. And yet Bogotá's *GRP* satisfies the other three attributes of *GRP*, that is, *woff* (women's office), the *PGE* (adoption of the public policy for GE), and a budget for gender equality. Then, Bogotá's medium *GRP* could, perhaps, be the result in changes on ideologies from one government to another. Additionally, since Bogotá is the capital, it has a significant amount of oversight that would ensure it complies with gender laws. Perhaps that is also the case for Villa de Leyva, which, even though is a small city, has a better focus on gender equality than what its *GRP* would suggest, since it is a small touristic city that is close to the capital.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, the concept of gender-responsive planning guides an endeavor to understand local planning efforts toward gender equality. A Convergence Parallel Model is used to analyze how 21 Colombian municipalities pair their intentions to address gender equality with actions toward it. Colombia has signed all the international agreements for gender equality and enacted different regulations aiming to improve the lives of women. The National Department of Planning recommends to all the municipalities to subscribe to these international agreements. Thus, city plans are supposed to include programs to improve women's lives.

Results reveal key findings about the efforts toward gender equality by 21 Colombian municipalities. First, all municipalities in paper plan for GE. Efforts toward gender equality in Colombian municipalities are depicted through planned actions to address the dimensions of an internationally recognized women's agenda. How rigorous each city is with the agenda varies. Second, the *GRP* and the *QCA* converge for the cities at the extremes of the line, that is, for the ones with a *GRP* equal to zero, or the ones with a *GRP* higher than three. Divergence was found for cities that are in a middle ground. Third, although empirical findings did not show *who* is doing the planning as determinant of gender equality efforts, in this case study, the presence of female mayors was predominantly aligned with more solid effort toward GE. For this particular case study, it happened when the presence female mayors was the result of a political contest such as in Villanueva and Acandí. It was not the case for Chinú, where the position was inherited.

So what drives cities to include gender in their plans but then not take action to achieve GE? Colombia has adhered to international laws and the movement to achieve GE. It is recommended by the National Department of Planning that municipalities work toward equality for women. Moreover, the Colombian National Policy for Gender Equality is indicative, which means it is not a mandate, but a recommendation. Municipalities therefore have a clear directive to include language that claims to advance gender equality. They all included goals to achieve gender equality, but not all of them follow through with their plans, presumably because there is less pressure in the actual implementation. It is unknown if the results would have changed with a compulsory policy. Colombia has also been denoted as a legalistic but lawless country [25], meaning it has excellent laws overall but does a very poor job in enforcing them.

For the period analyzed, the incentives to achieve these goals were not clear. However, in cities like Envigado, Riohacha, or Villanueva, where plans for gender equality converge to actions and implementation, there were always key groups

advocating for it. These came in the shape of women’s grassroots advocacy groups, a critical mass of women within the cabinet, or as a result of the awareness that the political contest generated.

How, then, can urban planners ensure that a gender-responsive approach is followed within the plan? Urban planners can shape the nature of public investments [26] and serve as advocates to pursue a more equal access to opportunities and conditions by various marginalized groups, including for women [27]. This can be most effectively done when harnessing existing civil society groups and other stakeholders’ voice and advocacy efforts. In order to do so, planners all need to be aware of the need and benefits of gender equality. Gender awareness is needed in order to change the condition of women and to enjoy the benefits that empowered women bring to societies. This is a necessary condition for contexts such as Colombia where there are laws and policies that will support gender responsive approaches in planning but fall short on the implementation of them.

### Conflict of interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Note

This chapter uses data collected within the framework of the PhD dissertation available in <https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A760049/datastream/PDF/view>, constituting a revised version of Chapter 7 of the dissertation.

### Appendix

Cities	GRP on PDMs	Analysis
Ayapel	With a <i>GRP</i> of zero, Ayapel’s GE’s efforts are just a statement that women will be incorporated as a key element for economic and social development, as well as a declaration on training against GBV. Nothing about physical integrity is developed within their PDM. They do not further develop strategies to achieve these goals, nor do they assign budget or responsible parties to them.	Converge
Caloto	Caloto’s <i>GRP</i> is zero. A first glance at its GE’s efforts shows two out of the four minimum requirements to be considered as seriously taking care of GE. However, its goals and strategies are weak in comparison to other municipalities. They have nothing for physical integrity of women. This matches its zero <i>GRP</i> . Nonetheless, since they still have some GE goals, even having zero <i>GRP</i> could be as a result of having <i>a female mayor</i> or just a compliance with the <i>national regulations</i> . Further research would clarify the reasons behind.	Converge
Leticia	Leticia’s efforts toward GE correspond to a <i>GRP</i> of zero. They have fact-based goals for physical integrity of women but with blurred strategies. Responsible parties and budget are not assigned within the PDM. Although it has two <i>groots</i> and their petitions and desires are visible within the PDM, they are not transformed into goals and strategies.	Converge

Cities	GRP on PDMs	Analysis
Villa de Leyva	Villa de Leyva's <i>GRP</i> (0.004) is associated to budget for GE issues. They have zero <i>groots</i> , but there is a critical mass of women within Villa de Leyva's cabinet. They do more than what the <i>GRP</i> would reflect. They aspire to create a <i>woff</i> and to leverage the <i>FSO</i> . Although no responsible parties were identified, they have clear GE goals and strategies, including <i>GVB</i> . This is one positive outlier since there correspondence between a low <i>GRP</i> and the GE plan.	Diverge
Calarcá	Calarcá has <i>GRP</i> equal to one because it recognizes GE as a guiding principle. That is represented within its PDM by having some GE goals and strategies. They have, however, just a statement to prevent <i>GBV</i> and do not assign a budget or responsible parties to their goals.	Converge
Tumaco	Tumaco has a <i>GRP</i> of one because it adopted the <i>PGE</i> . It has clear fact-based GE goals, including an excellent program to prevent <i>GBV</i> with <i>road map</i> . They do not have an assigned budget or responsible parties for GE initiatives. They seem to have stronger goals (not just statements) and strategies than cities whose <i>GRP</i> is one as a result of <i>idea</i> , but still no political commitment is shown here.	Converge
Acandí	Acandí's <i>GRP</i> is slightly greater than one because it recognizes GE as a guiding principle and assigns a budget for GE actions. They have defined GE goals and strategies including campaigns against <i>GBV</i> . With a female mayor, they are aspiring to transform women's underrepresentation and financial security. They did not include the <i>responsible parties</i> for their GE goals, but this the smaller city in the sample. Intentions to advance GE are explicit. This can be considered a good outlier, explained by its <i>female mayor</i> . This will be a good case to follow up.	Diverge
Villanueva	Villanueva has three of the four points to be considered as seriously working toward GE. It has a <i>GRP</i> of 1.08 and a <i>female mayor</i> . The mayor made her aspirations toward GE explicit within the PDM. They have clear GE goals, strategies, and budget but not responsible parties. However, they made plans to create a <i>woff</i> . Although with a low <i>GRP</i> , you can see the intentions to advance GE. Good outlier, which could be explained by its female mayor.	Diverge
Chinú	Chinú has a <i>GRP</i> of two. It also accounts with a cabinet of 88 percent of women and a <i>female mayor</i> and planning <i>chief</i> . They have identified goals in terms of economic empowerment of women but only statements for political participation and physical integrity. Chinú's female mayor does not make her interest on women's empowerment explicit. This is one outlier. It should have better goals and strategies. <i>Not responsible parties</i> were identified either.	Diverge
San José del Guaviare	San José's <i>GRP</i> is two, resulting from <i>PGE</i> and <i>idea</i> . <i>GRP</i> is depicted within the PDM with fact-based GE goals and strategies, some more clear than others, including projects and campaigns against <i>GBV</i> but no road map. Responsible parties are identified, but no budget is assigned. Good depiction for its level of <i>GRP</i> , although responsible parties is unusual at this level.	Converge
Bogotá	Bogotá, as it is expected because is the capital of the country, has one of the strongest GE program. Its <i>GRP</i> , however, it is at medium level (2.026) because they do not recognize gender ideology as a foundational principle. The other components are good. They have two goals that could be modeled in the rest of the country to advance gender equality in the work market (care economy/unpaid work and safe job environment for women). This is a positive outlier.	Diverge



Cities	GRP on PDMs	Analysis
Yopal	Yopal has a <i>GRP</i> of 2.03 as a result of having a budget for GE activities, a <i>woff</i> , and <i>PGE</i> . In terms of its PDM, that is translated into fact-based goals for GE, with monitoring mechanisms. However, no responsible parties are defined for the goals, and they have just a statement for GBV. They have a budget for GE and explain how it will be spent. Good depiction for its <i>GRP</i> 's level.	Converge
Puerto Asís	Puerto Asís has a medium level <i>GRP</i> (2.21). Although no responsible parties are mentioned, its GE program is fact-based, and its goals are identifiable. The political commitment to the GE is shown in the early efforts to create the <i>woff</i> , the budget assigned to GE goals, and all the moves to get the administrative structure ready to work toward GE for women. They have no <i>road map</i> for GBV.	Converge
Ríohacha	With a zero budget for GE, Ríohacha's <i>GRP</i> is on the high level (3), as a result of having a <i>woff</i> , observance of <i>PGE</i> , and recognition of gender equality as a guiding principle. They have identifiable but not fact-based GE goals. Nonetheless, their goals tackle all the levels of equality, but no responsible parties are assigned to them. Campaigns against GBV, but no <i>road map</i> .	Converge
Barranquilla	Barranquilla's <i>GRP</i> of 3 is aligned with its GE program. It has clear fact-based goals and strategies, although it did not assign it a budget. Responsible parties are identified.	Converge
Cali	Cali's <i>GRP</i> (3) is aligned with its GE program, whose goals are fact-based and with clear strategies. It has the best GBV program including a road map. Goals are attached to responsible parties, and except for its lack of a GE budget, political commitment cannot be denied. No actions are specified for economic empowerment.	Converge
Buenaventura	Buenaventura's <i>GRP</i> is high (3.01) because it includes all the <i>elements</i> adding to it. In terms of the GE program, it also has all the elements to be considered as taking GE seriously. However, its goals, although fact-based, are weak. For a high <i>GRP</i> such as this, one would expect a sounder GE program, but that is not the case. It does not transcend the neutral nature of a development program. It frames all its goals within the access and welfare levels to achieve their goals but leaving existing distribution of resources unchanged. Less than 30 percent of women in the cabinet, but the only one with more than 30 percent in the local council.	Converge
Cartagena	Except for the lack of responsible parties, Cartagena's high <i>GRP</i> (3.01) is in correspondence with its GE goals. Its goals are identifiable but not fact-based. Cartagena's program has a lot of transformative potential if they implement and monitor their planned goals. The problem is that they do not establish indicators, which weakens their monitoring possibilities. That is not shown by its <i>GRP</i> .	Converge
Medellín	Medellín seeks to transform gender relations toward a more egalitarian one by addressing all the points in the women's agenda and dedicating enough resources to do it. Its GE program reflects its <i>GRP</i> high level (3.02), and it is one of the best GE programs.	Converge
Cúcuta	Cúcuta addresses all the points within the women's agenda, hence its transformative potential. Its GE program corresponds to its <i>GRP</i> high level (3.147).	Converge
Envigado	Envigado's plan could not be less than transformative. It attacks gender inequality from all the possible flanks and is in perfect alignment with having the highest <i>GRP</i> (3.148).	Converge

<sup>1</sup>This table was previously published in [20].

**Table A1.**  
 Convergence matrix.<sup>1</sup>

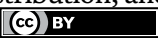
### **Author details**

Yancili Lozano-Torres  
Independent Researcher, USA

\*Address all correspondence to: [yancillylt@gmail.com](mailto:yancillylt@gmail.com)

### **IntechOpen**

---

© 2024 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] UNWOMEN. UN Women | UN Women – Women in Parliaments. Available from: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#notes> [Accessed: December 3, 2014]
- [2] Jahan S, Mukhopadhyay T. Is Gender Equality Destined to Remain our Perpetual Aspirational Dream? 2016. Available from: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-equality-destined-remain-our-perpetual-aspirational-dream>
- [3] World Bank. World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development. The World Bank; 2012. Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/4391>. License: CC BY 3.0 IGO
- [4] Beede DN, Julian TA, Langdon D, McKittrick G, Khan B, Doms ME. Women in STEM: A Gender Gap to Innovation (August 1, 2011). Economics and Statistics Administration Issue Brief No. 04-11. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1964782> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1964782>
- [5] Kristof N, WuDunn S. Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide. United States: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group; 2009
- [6] Blumberg RL. Women's economic empowerment as the magic potion of development? In: 100th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association; Philadelphia. 2005. Available from: [http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/files/8696/11283330079Magic\\_Potion.pdf/Magic+Potion.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/files/8696/11283330079Magic_Potion.pdf/Magic+Potion.pdf)
- [7] Momsen JH. Gender and Development. Psychology Press; 2004
- [8] Thomas JM. The minority-race planner in the quest for a just city. *Planning Theory*. Nov 2008;7(3):227-247
- [9] Mundial B. Informe sobre el desarrollo mundial 2012: Igualdad de género y desarrollo: Panorama general. Washington D.C.: Banco Mundial; 2011
- [10] Nallari R, Griffith B. Gender and Macroeconomic Policy. World Bank Publications; 2011
- [11] Sandercock L, Forsyth A. A gender agenda: New directions for planning theory. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 1992;58(1):49-59. DOI: 10.1080/01944369208975534
- [12] Fainstein SS, Servon LJ. Gender and Planning: A Reader. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press; 2005
- [13] Ostergaard L. Gender and Development: A Practical Guide. London: Routledge; 1992
- [14] Rivera G, Lirio. A safer housing agenda for women: Local urban planning knowledge and Women's grassroots movements in Medellín, Colombia. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 2020;45:1038-1046. DOI: 10.1111/1468-2427.12892
- [15] Yancili LT. The quest for gender equality: Understanding and measuring gender responsiveness in Colombia's municipal planning. *Cities*. 2021;119. DOI: 10.1016/j.cities.2021.103358
- [16] Lozano-Torres Y. Planning befriends women: A look of a gender responsive city in the colombian context. *Revista Iberoamericana de Estudios de Desarrollo = Iberoamerican Journal of Development Studies*. 2021;10(1):310-336. DOI: 10.26754/ojs\_ried/ijds.559
- [17] Olivieri C, Fageda X. Urban mobility with a focus on gender: The case of a middle-income latin

American City. *Journal of Transport Geography*. 2021;**91**(February):102996. DOI: 10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2021.102996

[18] Ezeadichie, Hope N, Jiburum U, Onodugo VA, Onwuneme CA, Kingsley A. Integrating home-based enterprises in urban planning: A case for providing economic succour for women of global south. *Berkeley Planning Journal*. 2018;**30**(1):443-463. DOI: 10.5070/BP330137903

[19] Patterson BJ. A Mixed Methods Investigation of Leadership and Performance in Practice-Based Research Networks. 2013. Available from: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/5039/>

[20] Lozano Torres Y. The Quest for Gender-Responsive Planning: A Comprehensive Study of Colombian Municipalities. 2019. Available from: <https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A760049/datastream/PDF/view>

[21] Creswell JW. *Research Design (Illustrated)*. SAGE Publications Inc.; 2013. Available from: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/research-design/book237357>

[22] Creswell JW, Clark VLP. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. SAGE; 2011

[23] *Revista El Congreso*. Acandí, ejemplo de eficiencia y transparencia. 2019. Available from: <http://www.revistaelcongreso.com/Acandí-ejemplo-de-eficiencia-y-transparencia/>

[24] *Revista Dinero*. Procuraduría Abrió Investigación a 21 Funcionarios Públicos En Córdoba. 2018. Available from: <https://www.semana.com/pais/articulo/procuraduria-inicio-investigaciones-a-7-alcaldes-de-cordoba/259055/>

[25] *The Economist*. Legalism v Democracy. 2014. Available from: <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2014/03/29/legalism-v-democracy>

[com/the-americas/2014/03/29/legalism-v-democracy](https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2014/03/29/legalism-v-democracy)

[26] Rakodi C. Cities and people: Towards a gender-aware urban planning process? *Public Administration and Development*. 1991;**11**(6):541-559

[27] Young K. Planning from a gender perspective: Making a world of difference. In: Visvanathan N, Duggan L, Nisonoff L, Wiegiersma N, editors. *The Women, Gender, and Development Reader*. London, England: Zed Books; 1997. pp. 366-374

## Chapter 9

# Challenges for the Constructing of Equity and Equality in Mexico

*Adriana Ortiz-Ortega and Adriana Baez-Carlos*

*Dedicated to Mujeres en Plural, a network of women fighting for women's rights and norms to prevail in Mexico*

### Abstract

Mexico stands ahead of the rest of Latin American countries in terms of legal transformation on behalf of gender equality, non-discrimination, and laws for the treatment and follow-up of gender-based violence. Yet, although significant progress has been achieved during the last two decades, thanks to the uninterrupted efforts of feminists and women's networks in collaboration with female and male decision-makers, gender disparities continue to limit women's empowerment in various areas. These inequalities include education, employment, teenage pregnancy, gender violence, and sexual division of labor.

**Keywords:** gender, equality, feminists, disparities, women's empowerment

### 1. Introduction

Mexico stands ahead of the rest of Latin American countries in terms of legal transformation on behalf of gender equality, non-discrimination, and laws for the treatment and follow-up of gender-based violence. Yet, although significant progress has been achieved during the last two decades, thanks to the uninterrupted efforts of feminists and women's networks in collaboration with female and male decision-makers, gender disparities continue to limit women's empowerment in various areas<sup>1</sup>.

These inequalities include education, employment, teenage pregnancy, gender violence, and sexual division of labor. Thus, women in Mexico continue to face barriers to accessing equal opportunities, and cultural norms continue to limit their autonomy and perpetuate gender stereotypes. The seemingly contradictory outcome between the improved legal framework and women's lives is the result of centuries of women's submission to male norms and the building of a democratic system that has focused on the electoral arena. Considering the pending institutional transformations that lay ahead in terms of gendering institutions, it is highly relevant to stress the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Mujeres en Plural* (Women in Plural) was founded in 2012 to promote the political rights of women. It is composed of female ex governors, magistrates, deputies, senators, academics, political candidates, public officials and journalists who work in horizontal ways to fulfill its mission.

connections between formal and informal female political organizing to build parity democracy as a means to amend prevailing inequalities.

The argument of this chapter is twofold: on the one hand, we argue that women are raising to become critical actors not only in terms of building gendered public institutions but, more recently, in the defense of parity democracy. This type of democracy emphasizes the end of political violence, women's representation, and the incorporation of a gender agenda through the working of plural coalitions, among other critical issues.

On the other hand, we argue that women are working in demanding a gender trans electoral agenda through the workings of plural coalitions that work to tamer the centralization of political power by Morena, the dominant party in power and which has held an ambivalent position: on the one hand, neglecting critical women's demands in the area of gender violence; while, on the other hand, working to allow parity democracy to advance, mostly thanks to the work of women in this party in collaboration with women politicians from other parties.

## **2. Women's role in the building of democracy in Mexico**

To sustain our argument, we are content in favor of the relevance of present women's ability to alter the existing legal order by stressing the role of women's mobilization even before the transition to democracy in Mexico, which took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. Such transition found women already involved, since the decade of the 1970s, in the construction of a public voice that expanded traditional forms of universal citizenship. This feminist voice challenged dominant gender-blind institutions and encompassed, among other key topics in their gender agenda, bodily integrity, violence against women, the sexual division of labor, and the recognition of diverse expressions of sexualities [1]. This means that feminists engaged in gendering the (electoral) transition to democracy in Mexico, resulting in a partial and fragmented, but tangible, deconstruction of the public arena. This happened through the establishment of clear connections between the private and public divide at a time when the dominant party, the then located within the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) sought to attract women to expand its social presence and leadership.

In this context, a relatively small group of women through their collective and individual work succeeded in securing for themselves—and for the rest of women—a contested but critical place in the transition to democracy [1]. In the background of women's mobilizations stands out the fact that since the beginning of the 1970s, two tendencies manifested. On the one hand, an independent feminist movement that struggled to be acknowledged as a public actor; on the other hand, different forms of official feminism, that received informal support from PRI as this party sought to recapture feminists' demands and transformed them into social not political concerns. For these reasons, commitment to equality became a leading force for feminist demand for legal change. Nonetheless, feminists debated among themselves regarding the extent of collaboration with the state that they should embrace. In any case, it can be argued that during the first half of the 1970s, women as a social group also provoked a legal and institutional change that secured the recognition of matters of personal and bodily integrity, health, and reproduction [2].

To be sure, Mexico hosted in 1975 the UN's First International Women's Conference, and this served to foster women's legal status in the country, which began to be

transformed at a fast speed. For example, federal labor laws were altered to abolish legal protections for women that were deemed discriminatory, as these dispositions limited women's access to night shifts or prevented them from working overtime [3]. Similarly, following the 1975 UN Conference, women gained greater access to land ownership. A decade later, the transformation of the regulation of abortion started. This suggests that when Mexican women joined the 1995 Beijing Conference, whether they were coming from the official or social sectors, different forms of collaboration existed. Certainly, the Beijing Plan of Action, a worldwide landmark women's conference, contributed to Mexico's standing in the Latin American region. Relying on the worldwide government signature of the Beijing Platform of Action, women in Mexico, as well as in other latitudes, gained salience to demand governments to place political representation at the forefront. For example, in Mexico, in 1996, the Federal Code of Institutions and Electoral Procedures (Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales, Cofipe) recommended not more than 70% of the same-sex candidates in electoral lists, favoring a female participation of 30%. Effectively this limited male presence in institutional politics.<sup>2</sup> In 2002, a quota law was passed that made it compulsory for parties to include at least a 70–30% split of male and female representation, and finally, in 2008 the law established a 60–40% split.

It was in the context of an uninterrupted feminist struggle and a transition to democracy that, almost 50 years later, Parity Democracy was issued as a Constitutional norm in 2019. Thanks to this measure Mexico stands one among a handful of countries in the world where parity democracy prevails for public representation posts as well as top-level designations in the Legislative, Judicial, and Executive power. Parity democracy prevails at the federal, state, and municipal levels. And this refers to the full integration of women, on an equal footing with men, at all levels and in all areas of the workings of a democratic society, by means of multidisciplinary strategies (European Institute for Gender Equality) [4].

In Mexico, Parity democracy applies also to decentralized, as well as state agencies that hold institutional budgetary as well as programmatic autonomy. Among these, we find the National Electoral Institute, responsible for organizing elections at the federal, municipal, and state levels, as well as the Banco de México, responsible, among other critical functions, for overseeing Mexican reserves, the national supply of Mexican pesos, the stability of its purchasing power and for the development of the financial system.

In 2020, Mexico established a legal disposition to deal with political violence against women, considering it a criminal, administrative, and electoral offense. This conceptualizes political violence on the ground of gender as actions or omissions that can be carried out against women candidates or elected officials in the public or private sphere. According to Law for a Life Free of Violence of Women *Ley General de Acceso a una Vida Libre de Violencia*, Article 20 Bis: political violence occurs when actions are carried out “with the purpose or with the result of limiting, annulling, or undermining the effective exercise of the political and electoral rights of one or more women. This legal disposition is allotted to give women access to the full exercise of the inherent attributes of their position, work or activity, free development of public function, decision-making, freedom of organization, as well as access and exercise of prerogatives” (this law applies extensively to the case of pre-candidacies, candidacies, or women carrying out public functions or positions of the same type).

---

<sup>2</sup> Reform to Cofipe Article 5/22 transitory.

Its normative progress includes engineering that covers a good part of the gaps that political parties have used to evade their responsibility in this matter, trying to ensure that parity in candidacies for popular representation positions translates into a parity integration of representative bodies.

The development of parity democracy includes the 2023 the “3 out of 3” initiative (which is in the process of being approved by local congresses) whose purpose is to impede men responsible for sexual assaults, family debts, or involved in cases of gender violence to hold public seats.

As the examples provided above show, tangible progress in terms of women’s political impact exists resulting from women’s uninterrupted reorganizing since, at least, the decade of the 1970s of the twentieth century.

The transition to democracy in Mexico was no exception, they had to rally in Electoral Tribunals while demanding in the public arena that the quota system was respected. It was only following the Trial 12624 that quotas began to be respected allowing women to enter the Chambers of Deputies and Senators. Once women found themselves in a self-built space for full interactions from within political parties, female legislators expanded the construction and advocacy of gender agendas. In this process, women have received limited funding when compared to their male counterparts while receiving signals from the top of the parties that moving forth a gender agenda is a risky activity in a male-dominated arena which is rarely taken by women candidates.

Recapitulating, new legal dispositions for the incorporation of gender representation have contributed to political diversity. Yet violent confrontation, political corruption, and an ongoing centralization of power in political parties and presidential hands are features that manifest almost after a quarter of a century that the transition occurred. Nonetheless, as most of these gains have been made within the electoral arena, several challenges remain. For example, a solid network of female legislators, and activists work intensely to defend that procedures are kept in place or to work in favor of the elimination of discrimination against women and to halter violence against women exists through the issuing of new laws or by requesting the position of women as heads of autonomous bodies or within the Executive power. We find that at present, data shows gender gaps which are addressed, mostly by women, through legislative and programmatic initiatives amidst a competition between old and new forms of making politics [2].

It is relevant to highlight women’s representation in the legislative as a salient feature of the Mexican transition to democracy. But also, that the initial privileging of the electoral arena, and, thus, that institutional transformation has lagged [5]. This suggests that, although theorists of transitions to democracy have paid attention to the enhanced role of legality as a means to construct a new social order, electoral politics still determine institutional and legal reconstruction. Therefore, the drafting of new constitutions—or at least bringing transformations to the existing one in Mexico—has preceded the edification of a new institutional apparatus [6]. Regarding women’s status, this means that institutions such as the Institutes for Women, in charge of the implementation of new laws issued, have been required to have at their backbone female coalitions collaborate with male allies who occupy critical political positions to foster and implement policies directed to eradicate inequalities and inequities in Mexico?

### **3. Positioning women gains as political actors within the electoral system**

The connections between electoral politics and the transformation of women’s status are critical for our case study. Mexico has a mixed electoral system for the



integration of its collective bodies of popular representation (congresses and city councils), which are composed of 60% seats by relative majority and 40% by proportional representation. For nominations, the rules contemplate candidate formulas of the same gender (owner and alternate); proportional representation lists and candidate slates with gender alternation from beginning to end; alternately headed by women and men in each elective period, with provisions in favor of women when there is an odd number of seats at stake in an election and prohibition of the use of partisan criteria for nominating candidates that place one gender in districts with lower chances of winning. Starting in 2023, it also foresees the parity integration of the two houses of the Congress of the Union, that is, parity of results.

The normative progress made allowed, starting in 2021, for the Chamber of Deputies and 27 state legislatures to be composed of women<sup>3</sup> with only five falling one seat short of parity due to their odd number of seats. Parity is also visible in the slates of municipal councils.<sup>4</sup>

The current challenges are related to the definition of norms to guarantee parity in single-person positions, such as municipal presidencies, governorships, and the federal executive. For mayoral candidacies, which lead the slates of municipal councils, vertical criteria (in their composition), horizontal criteria (considering all presidencies at play per entity and electoral process), and in some cases, transversal criteria are envisaged which contemplate competitiveness blocks and size of municipalities. Thus, through electoral reforms women have achieved parity in municipal councils but not in municipal presidencies. After the 2021 electoral process, in which municipalities in 30 federative entities were renewed, only 20.9% of the country's 2016 municipalities were under the presidency of women.

The first advances to apply parity in gubernatorial candidacies were made in 2021, 2022, and 2023, when by judicial mandate, national political parties had to apply the parity principle in their gubernatorial candidacies.<sup>5</sup> This measure allowed for the triumph of five women in 2021, two in 2022, and one more is expected in 2023, for a total of 10 female governors by the end of 2023. More than the country had ever had in its history.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the solution is provisional both because it is up to the federative entities to define the rule to be applied in their areas of competence and because the Electoral authorities had to intervene. Not surprisingly, four years after the transversal parity constitutional reform, only three states have advanced in regulating

---

<sup>3</sup> The Legislatures of the following states remain one position behind total parity: Estado de México, Nuevo León, Chihuahua, San Luis Potosí, Durango, and Querétaro. Guerrero, Guanajuato, and Tamaulipas achieved parity and the 23 remaining state legislatures which register an over representation of women.

<sup>4</sup> The LXV Chamber of Deputies legislature (that will run from 2021 to 2024) was integrated by 250 male legislators and 250 female legislators. Nonetheless, during the second year, one man required a license in this legislature and in he was replaced by a woman. Thus, by May 2023 we find 251 female legislators and 249 male legislators.

<sup>5</sup> This ruling was issued by the Electoral Court of the Federal Judiciary as a resolution to a petition filed by Selene Lucía Vázquez Alatorre, a Morena candidate for the Michoacán governorship, and the organizations EQUILIBRA, Center for Constitutional Justice, and LITIGA, strategic litigation, on August 11th, 2020. See INE/CG569/2020.

<sup>6</sup> In 2023, the states of Baja California, Mexico City, Guerrero, Campeche, Tlaxcala, Chihuahua, Quintana Roo, and Aguascalientes are governed by women, and a new female governor will be elected for the State of Mexico from the upcoming June 2023 elections.

the subject matter.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the rules that will apply to guarantee parity in the Presidency of the Republic are still to be discussed.

The progress stated above suggests that the achieved parity is mostly descriptive.<sup>8</sup> This means women's presence has not yet resulted in a full exercise of power or in the drafting of a comprehensive gender agenda. In addition, stereotypes in task allocation are reproduced within the collegial bodies given that the power of party leadership remains predominantly in the hands of male legislators. A recent study revealed that despite occupying 53% of seats in the plenary sessions of legislatures in Mexico, women only coordinate 23% of the caucus, which is 18% of the political force in the congresses, and preside over only 39% of the ordinary committees that dictate structural economic and political issues [8].

On the other hand, they must remain aware that their negotiations are made vis a vis political party structure. This dynamic slows down the political negotiating process of the gender agenda. Regarding this latter point, a group of researchers from the 32 federal entities analyzed the gender topics addressed by state legislatures during the first period following the approval of gender parity in legislative candidacies, which was in effect in Mexico between 2014 and 2019 [9]. The study found that the most addressed topic was gender-based violence in general, with one-third of the initiatives presented, approved, and promulgated, followed by political violence based on gender, with one-fifth of the initiatives focused on women's labor rights, political representation, sexual and reproductive rights, as well as inclusive language, among others. However, the study also confirmed claims that while some female legislators promote gender-related legislation they also promote initiatives related to violence against women, reproductive and sexual rights, measures against discrimination, and in favor of equality [10].

Summarizing, regarding gender matters, progress is made topic by topic, given the lack of consensus on a general women's agenda. Nonetheless, women's exercise of political abilities requires also that they prove themselves constantly. This can be exemplified by the following data: according to the civil association *Buró Parlamentario*, female legislators in the local congresses of Mexico have been more productive and efficient than men, registering the approval of an average of 4.41 initiatives, 31% of the projects they present; compared to an average success rate of 3.15 initiatives, 26%, of male legislators. The data emerged from the study of over 40,000 initiatives presented in the 32 legislatures between 2014 and 2022, and the finding is significant given that women's political trajectories are younger than men's [11].

Instead of the above, we must stress that according to the Latin American Parliament and UN Women's Framework Norm (2014), signed by Mexico, parity is acknowledged as one of the key forces of democracy. Democracy is seen in this view as a means to achieve equality in power, decision-making, social and political representation mechanisms. However, gatekeepers that allow for the eradication of the structural exclusion of women require a new architecture given that the pending agenda is still extensive. It is for this reason that the multilayered connections between democratic change and gender transformation need to be explored at length.

---

<sup>7</sup> Hidalgo, State of Mexico, and Coahuila have been the only entities to legislate on gender parity at the government level. However, Coahuila's regulations were invalidated by the TEPJF, and those of the State of Mexico will come into effect in 2029.

<sup>8</sup> According to Hanna Pitkin, substantive representation refers not only to the descriptive presence of women in legislative bodies, but it must reflect the interests and needs of those being represented. See Pitkin [7].

#### **4. Gender agendas female political representation and present inequalities in Mexico**

In the face of advances in women's political representation, academic analyses are beginning to focus on the study of their legislative agendas, to verify whether parity begins to translate into substantive representation. Freidenberg and Gilas [12, 13] argue that "presence is not incidence," since a significant number of female legislators do not support the "feminist" gender agenda. In contrast, Báez et al. [8] claim that women are marginalized from leadership positions in party groups in legislatures, only coordinating those parliamentary groups with little political representation, or being excluded from the leadership of committees that address critical issues. This suggests they lack sufficient strength to push initiatives and depend on multi-party coalitions to get equality issues addressed. Certainly, both assessments of women's political participation take different sides on the matter. Freidenberg and Gilas analyze female participation by equating male and female input, resting aside the structural difference from which they build their interventions. In contrast, Baez and Bárcena highlight the structural differences. Possible contributions to this debate are first, assessments of female political participation are changeable and temporal in a climate where new strategies for lobbying and negotiations are taking place as Parity democracy is established. Second, more attention needs to be given to the institutional restructuring of state agencies and how women are placed in them as a result of the combined influence of transnational feminisms in institutional politics as well as the impact of female leadership in Mexico to direct their attention to gender inequities [14]. Promoting this debate around the institutional design of agencies, institutes, and ministries that have an uneven but tangible impact on attending to the needs and demands of the female population is relevant.

At this point it seems relevant to consider recent gender-disaggregated statistical analysis, the National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Informatics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, INEGI) to evaluate existing inequalities. In other words, INEGI provides data that can shed light on critical issues that need to be part of a common feminist agenda. A general overview would state that, according to the most recent official statistics on gender gaps [15], Mexico ended 2018 with a population of 124.9 million people, of whom 51.1% are women and 48.9% are men. On average, the fertility rate among Mexican women is 1.0 children, but among indigenous-speaking women, it rises to 3.3 children. This data confirms that fertility is higher when lower levels of maternal education exist if these are measured by the years of schooling that women attend, and vice versa. In addition, women construct their motherhood aside from economic independence: of the women who became mothers in 2017, 69.5% reported not engaging in any economic activity, and only 21.4% reported being employed. This suggests not only that the majority of women were financially dependent on their partners or their family. More importantly, this can be a tendency that will produce a long-lasting dependency due to the difficulties of joining the labor market as age progresses.

Given that in this chapter, we wish to connect political participation with female education and employment we would like to stress that among the issues to be analyzed first and foremost is clear that political representation is the area where the most progress has been made. Nonetheless, inequalities in this arena persist; for example, in 2021, women held 47.6% of senator's seats versus the 52.3% that men hold; the lower house of Congress in contrast has a 50% for men and women. And as we stated earlier, only 9 out of 32 governorships and less than 10% of all municipalities have women as presidents.

Beyond female political representation, one of the most significant areas of gender inequality in Mexico is education. While girls' enrollment rates in primary education are nearly equal to boys, they are less likely to complete secondary education, with dropout rates higher for girls than for boys. This disparity is even more pronounced for indigenous girls, who face additional barriers to education, including language barriers and discrimination. To better understand these dropout rates in education it must be remembered that domestic violence and teenage pregnancy reinforce each other and continue to hold women back. Domestic violence entails that many girls can initiate their sexual lives in the hands of relatives, and this led them to seek relief in the hands of boyfriends and men with whom they run away from home. It is not surprising that this early sexual initiation leads to prolonged engagements in relations where gender violence arises.

Women who can continue their studies at the university level focused on areas of study such as Education, Health, Social Sciences and Law, Business and Administration, Arts and Humanities, while men preferred Information and Communication Technologies, Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, Agronomy, and Veterinary Sciences, among others. Thus, while the gap favored women by 48.8 percentage points in Education studies, it reached 51.8% in favor of men in Information and Communication Technologies.

Women in Mexico also face significant challenges in the workforce. They are more likely to be employed in informal, low-paying jobs with limited job security, and have limited access to leadership positions at work. In addition, the gender pay gap remains a persistent problem, with women earning less than men on average for comparable work.

Thus, we find a compound problem that includes education and work. Mexico has made significant progress in closing the gender gap in education, but inequalities persist in the workplace, where women receive lower salaries for the same work and are excluded from decision-making positions.

In 2019, the Mexican population aged 15 and over, of legal working age, reached 94.6 million people, of which 60.2% constituted the economically active population (EAP), and 39.8% did not. By sex, 45.0 million were men, eight out of ten of whom were economically active, and 49.6 million were women, four out of ten of whom participated in the labor market. The economic participation rate is 77.1% for men and 44.9% for women. Women with medium-high and higher education represent 41.3% of the total employed in the labor market, while only 36.5% of men have reached that level. Of the women who work in the labor market, 25.4% work in commerce, while 31% of men work in industrial jobs such as artisans and helpers. However, more than half of employed women earn up to two minimum wages, which is 12.0 percentage points higher than men. Women with incomes above five minimum wages represent only 2.4% of the total employed. In general, the remuneration received by women for their work is lower than that received by men in different economic activities. In addition, 77.7% of women with paid work do not have access to daycare or maternal care, since only 22.3% have access to these services.

In 2018, of the more than 13 million people aged 15 and over who had no income of their own and were not studying, 17.4% were men and 82.6% were women. Women devoted 39.1 hours per week to domestic work, while men devoted 14.1 hours; women were primarily responsible for caring for children under the age of six, and only men with higher education levels showed greater participation in domestic work [15].

The gender gap worsens when women belong to other historically marginalized groups and live in poverty. In 2018, 27.3 million women in Mexico were living in poverty compared to 25.1 million men. While the illiteracy rate was 3.1% among the

population aged 15–59 years, it was 13.3% among the population who speak indigenous languages, 6.9% among the population who self-identify as indigenous, 4.7% among the Afro-descendant population, and 3.6% among the population with diverse religious backgrounds [15–17].

A difficult and uneven work-education equation for women seems to be heightened by the fact that women often simultaneously have greater responsibilities for household chores, childcare, and caring for sick and elderly family members, without access to public support. This unfortunate combination is particularly severe for women living in poverty, who constitute the group that experiences scarcity of resources the most and is exacerbated when these women also belong to historically marginalized groups, such as indigenous, Afro-Mexican, disabled, and others. Thus, leaving unattended the needs of working mothers, a social group on the rise, appears as a gender-blind failure of the present Andrés Manuel López Obrador administration.

Another aspect to be considered is that men and women have different lifestyles, which is reflected in higher male mortality rates, particularly among young men. For every 100 female deaths, 128 men die, with the highest rates of male excess mortality due to liver diseases, violence, and accidents. Between 2000 and 2008, the gender gap in the illiteracy rate in Mexico decreased, with literacy rates increasing from 96.9% to 99.1% in men and from 96.5% to 99.2% in women. However, the achievement was less significant in localities with less than 2500 inhabitants.

## **5. Conclusions**

Mexico continues to face barriers to equal opportunities, including cultural norms that limit women's autonomy and perpetuate gender stereotypes. Thus, the most significant areas of gender inequality in Mexico that stand out are employment, uneven care responsibilities, gender violence, and education. These continue to configure inequalities regardless of women's greater access to decision-making. In this sense, positions gained by women in the political arena have resulted in normative advances. Nevertheless, resistance to gender parity persists in the male leadership positions within political parties, executive, legislative, and, to some extent, judicial power. This highlights the importance of the persistence of plural networks of women who work on behalf of a gender agenda and who direct their efforts to surpass the obstacles that individual women leaders can experience at the institutional level. This means that women's forms of political representation are expanding well beyond the institutional arena to encompass the community, social and private sectors. This is so because a defense of existing democratic mechanisms requires that the fragile electoral mechanisms are strengthened in different areas. The above is due to the institutional erosion that has taken place due to the arrival of a presidential rule that remains aloof to the institutional mechanisms and public programs that worked since the first half of the twentieth century to end domestic violence, to promote women's incorporation in the labor market by offering childcare facilities. Although it is true that during the López Obrador administration, legislators work in favor of making abortion legal much more needs to be done to achieve gender equality and equity. It is for this reason that women's plural networks play a key role in defining agendas in collaboration with deputies and senators in ways that are gender aware and hold a gender-conscious lens and perspective. For these reasons, researchers interested in gender contribute to building this agenda with a scientific data-focused perspective.

In this context, the time seems right for pushing again for transnational women's networks to support women's rights and open the conversation about state agencies and the use of technology to produce contrasting effects to the negative impacts of climate change, globalization, and inequality. State actions initiated in the last decades of the twentieth century in collaboration with civil society to bring about new policies need to be redrafted considering the international, regional, and national climate on gender within complex scenarios.

## **Normativity**

Political Constitution of Mexican United States.  
Federal Code for Political Institutions and Electoral Procedures.  
General Law for Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence.  
General Law for Political Institutions and Electoral Procedures.

## **Author details**

Adriana Ortiz-Ortega<sup>1\*</sup> and Adriana Baez-Carlos<sup>2</sup>


1 Student Affairs Department, Technological Autonomous Institute, Mexico City, Mexico

2 Political and Social Sciences Faculty, National Autonomous University, UNAM, Mexico City, Mexico

\*Address all correspondence to: [adriana.ortiz@itam.mx](mailto:adriana.ortiz@itam.mx)

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] Adriana O-O, Barquet M. Gendering transition to democracy in México. *en Latin American Research Review (LARR)*. 2010;45(Special Issue): 108-137
- [2] Adriana O-O, Scherer C. Contigo aprendí: Una lección de democracia gracias a la Sentencia 12,624. México: Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación; 2013
- [3] Villalobos K, Patricia. Las condiciones laborales de las mujeres en los contratos colectivos. Mexico City: Imprenta independiente; 1975
- [4] Praud J, Dauphin S. Parity democracy: Women's political representation in Fifth Republic France. Vancouver, BC, Canada: University of British Columbia Press; 2011
- [5] Valdés Ugalde F. Régimen político y democracia: una relación en conflicto. In: *Izquierda, democracia y crisis política en México*, edited by Roger Bartra. Mexico City: Nuevo Horizonte Editores and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; 2007. pp. 57-70
- [6] Woldenberg J. la izquierda en su laberinto In *Izquierda, democracia y crisis política en México*. In: Bartra R, editor. Mexico City: Nuevo Horizonte Editores and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; 2007. pp. 10-27
- [7] Pitkin HF. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1967
- [8] Báez A, Sergio B, Medina O, Tellez J. *Fuerza Política de las Legisladoras en México City*. México: Inmujeres; 2022. Available from: <https://isbnmexico.indautor.cerlalc.org/catalogo.php?mode=detalle&nt=381641>
- [9] Hernández M. Aidé (coordinadora) *Avances y Desafíos en la Construcción de la Agenda de Género en los Congresos Locales en México 2018-2022*. México: Instituto Nacional Electoral; 2022
- [10] Franceschet, Piscopo. Gender quota and Women's Substantive representation: Lesson for Argentina. *Politics and Gender*. 2008;4(3):393-425
- [11] Buró Parlamentario. "Mujeres en los congresos locales, más eficientes y con mejores resultados que los hombres: Buró parlamentario". Servicio Especial de la Mujer. 2023. Available from: [https://www.semmexico.mx/mujeres-en-los-congresos-locales-mas-eficientes-y-con-mejores-resultados-que-los-hombres-buro-parlamentario/?fbclid=IwAR1cETF9SOOkeHIW-D5uW8an-K2-dGKnWdfxdd1uV\\_UqHGflg7a88dzi1kp0](https://www.semmexico.mx/mujeres-en-los-congresos-locales-mas-eficientes-y-con-mejores-resultados-que-los-hombres-buro-parlamentario/?fbclid=IwAR1cETF9SOOkeHIW-D5uW8an-K2-dGKnWdfxdd1uV_UqHGflg7a88dzi1kp0) [Accessed: 10 de marzo de 2023]
- [12] Flavia F, Karolina G, et al. *Women in Mexican Subnational Legislatures, From Descriptive to Substantive Representation*. Switzerland: Springer; 2022
- [13] Karolina G, Flavia F. ¡Ellas tienen los escaños, ellos el poder! Representación legislativa de las mujeres en el estado de Morelos. In: *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Nueva Época, Año XV, número 240, September-October 2020. 2021. pp. 327-358
- [14] Adriana O-O, Anel OA. Transnational policy transfer and the gender-based violence agenda: Contributions from civil society. In: *Fernanda VC, editor. Political Representation and Gender Equity*. London: Palgrave MacMillan; 2022. pp. 245-262

[15] Instituto Nacional de Geografía e Informática (INEGI). *Mujeres y Hombres en México*. Mexico: Mexican Government, Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística; 2019

[16] ONU Mujeres y Parlamento Latinoamericano y Caribeño. *Norma Marco para Consolidar la Democracia Paritaria*. 2015. Disponible en: <https://lac.unwomen.org/es/digiteca/publicaciones/2016/06/marco-paritario> [fecha de consulta: 27 de abril de 2021]

[17] Servicio Especial de la Mujer. Available from: [https://www.semmexico.mx/mujeres-en-los-congresos-locales-mas-eficientes-y-con-mejores-resultados-que-los-hombres-buro-parlamentario/?fbclid=IwAR1cETF9SOOk eHIW-D5uW8an-K2dGKnWdfxdd1uV\\_UqHGflg7a88dzi1kp0](https://www.semmexico.mx/mujeres-en-los-congresos-locales-mas-eficientes-y-con-mejores-resultados-que-los-hombres-buro-parlamentario/?fbclid=IwAR1cETF9SOOk eHIW-D5uW8an-K2dGKnWdfxdd1uV_UqHGflg7a88dzi1kp0) [Accessed: 10 de marzo de 2023]



# The Gendered Electoral Choices: Insights from an Experiment on Gender Stereotypes in Political Issues, Parties, and the Voters Preferences for Candidates

*Chia-Heng Chang*

## Abstract

Political issues and political parties in the United States have been connected to different gender labels, which further influences voters' electoral choices. This study utilized an online survey and experiment (N = 1238) with hypothetical congressional candidates to examine the influence of gender stereotypes in ten political issues and the two main political parties on individuals' electoral choices when only limited information is offered. Results found gender stereotypes attached to political parties and topics worked as cognitive shortcuts, affecting individuals' perception of male and female capability of handling different issues. Participants reported a higher likelihood of voting for female candidates when they showed concern for feminine topics and affiliation with the Democratic party; they also preferred male candidates when it comes to masculine issues and the Republican party. Male and female participants further reported different voting preferences, and females reported baseline preferences for female candidates.

**Keywords:** gender stereotype, cognitive shortcut, electoral decision, political party, issue ownership

## 1. Introduction

Since the first female politicians entered Congress in 1917, the total number of congresswomen has grown to 150 in the United States now in 2023 [1]. As female candidates become more visible in the field of politics, how they present themselves and how the voters view male and female candidates differently thus require more academic attention. While showing gender stereotypes in electoral choices had become “politically incorrect” in U.S. society, voters have been found to refer to a certain level of gender cues when it comes to different political topics [2–4] and political parties [3, 5]. Not only are political issues discussed in elections connected to the gendered concepts of femininity and masculinity, but political parties are also

linked to the gendered topics (and further) “own” particular topics, which makes the political parties gendered as well [3, 5, 6].

These gender elements have been found as factors influencing voters’ decisions between male and female candidates. The current research, therefore, integrated studies on cognitive shortcuts in an electoral context, gender schema theory, and how political issues and parties are associated with gender features. As scholars (see [7, 8]) found research bias in studies that asked explicit questions to the participants and required participants to choose between male and female candidates who are equally qualified in a specific area, the current study utilized an experiment to rule out the potential bias caused by the participants’ social desirability with implicit cues of gendered names and icons in the context.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Gender stereotypes as cognitive shortcuts in electoral decisions**

The current study builds on highlighting the differences between sex and gender and their influence on individuals’ thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors differently in the context of political communication [9–11]. Specifically, sex refers to individuals’ biological differences as male, female, or intersex, indicating one’s sex hormones, reproductive system, and other biological traits [12]. Gender, on the other hand, refers to socially defined and constructed identities that are rather unstable [13]. Individuals, therefore, are born biologically as male or female sex and grow into gendered beings in society and view others with a gendered lens.

Along the same line, gender schema theory (GST) explains the gendered characteristics linked to males and females in organizing meanings for individuals [14]. The theory claims that the pre-registered scripts in society that are related to individuals’ sex would constitute “gender schema.” With the theory, a quantifiable scale, Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) scale, was created to investigate individuals’ evaluation of others and their endorsement of the stereotypical male and female characteristics; the scale includes 60 items on three categories of masculine, feminine, and neutral personality traits [15]. The application of the BSRI scale found that individuals internalized society’s standards of desirable (and mostly stereotypical) behaviors as it measures what characteristics people consider appropriate for males and females. When these associations between sex and gendered characteristics consolidate, gender stereotypes then emerge as a result, becoming a generalized belief about how males and females should typically act. The current research further focuses on how these gendered characteristics and features are attached to political candidates to comprehend the voters’ decision between male and female candidates.

In the case of political advertising and campaigns, politicians usually have limited time and condensed texts to present themselves and discuss issues. In the meantime, voters have also been found to have the tendency to pay only passing attention to political information or lack the ability to organize limited information while making electoral decisions [16, 17]. Citizens may use cognitive shortcuts, especially in low-information settings, to evaluate the candidates [17, 18] or infer specific personality traits [3, 18, 19], characteristics of political parties [20], sex and gender-related stereotypes [9–11], and sexualities [21] from the candidates. These cognitive shortcuts individuals utilize can come from specific cognitive schemata they develop over time to process and interpret incoming information.

Concepts and pre-registered embedded meanings associated with the cognitive schemata work as systematic networks for human brains [22]. However, it is also the same cognitive system that could (over) generalize complicated concepts, which can make individuals make choices consistent with their stereotypes instead of information rationality, including in the electoral decision. Researchers (for example, see [6, 9, 10, 21, 23]) then found that gender stereotyping and traditional gender roles influence the voters' choices. This study specifically investigates the gender stereotypes that are found to be linked to political issues and political parties as a part of the cognitive shortcuts voters refer to when only limited information about candidates is offered.

## 2.2 Gender stereotypes and political issues

Reference [3] defined the act of political gender stereotyping as “the gender-based ascription of different traits, behaviors, or political beliefs to male and female politicians” (p. 120). Take male politicians for instance, they are consistently stereotyped as stronger leaders, more competent, tougher, rational, and assertive than women [3, 18, 23]. In the BSRI scale in Ref. [15] mentioned above, masculine items also include similar stereotypical male characteristics, such as “act as a leader,” “competitive,” and “aggressive.” Researchers (e.g., [5, 6]) also found voters generally perceive male politicians as more competent in certain political issues associated with the so-called male characteristics, such as defense, military, crime, international diplomacy, foreign trade, business, and economy. In the post-September-11th context, surveys further showed voters' higher preference for male candidates with the increasing salience of national security and military crises issues, which made female candidates disadvantaged in a male-issues-dominant political agenda [6].

On the other hand, compared to males, female politicians are given credit for dealing with particular political issues that are associated with stereotypical feminine personality traits. For instance, voters generally perceive female candidates to be more empathetic and less decisive than men [3]. At the same time, females are considered to be more caring, sensitive, compassionate, caring, honest, and accessible to the public than male politicians [2, 4]. The BSRI scale also includes feminine items like “affectionate,” “compassionate,” “gentle,” “understanding,” and “sensitive to the needs of others” [15]. Voters, consequently, were found to consider females to be more capable of handling “compassion issues” or “female issues” [3, 24–26] like healthcare [27], poverty, social welfare, education, and child-related issues [3].

U.S. female politicians also tend to have these “women's issues” on their electoral agenda [28] and prioritize these issues in their campaigns [19, 29]. The analysis in Ref. [27] on the 2006 U.S. Congressional election then revealed that female senator candidates were viewed more positively than male candidates because they were considered more honest, caring, and more competent at dealing with healthcare-related issues. The same phenomenon was also found across nations and cultures: for example, female candidates in the U.S. and Finland both emphasize “soft” issues and personal traits to soften up their own images by expressing warmth and compassion [28]. In these cases, female characteristics and political topics are associated with the traditional domain of family [6]. As such, this study hypothesized:

H1a (gendered topics): The gender cues of political topics in candidate information will interact with the voters' decision among male or female candidates. Specifically, H1b: voters will prefer female candidates when it comes to “feminine and compassion” topics and prefer male candidates when it comes to “masculine and tough” topics.

### **2.3 Gender stereotypes and political parties issue ownership**

In the meantime, as political parties usually play an essential role in elections, these parties in the context of U.S. politics are often found to be associated with certain political issues. According to the theory of “issue ownership” [20], political parties are considered by the public to own certain issue-handling reputations. The theory identified issues “owned” by the two major political parties and found that candidates would emphasize specific issues they are advantaged of [20]. It has been noted later by researchers that Democrats tend to emphasize “compassion” issues that reflect women’s stereotypical issue strengths like social welfare and education, which makes the Democrat party (regardless of the sex of the candidates) feminine [3, 5]. The Democrats were also viewed as more competent in managing these issues [30]. On the other hand, the Republicans emphasize “tough” issues that reflect men’s stereotypical issue strengths, such as national security and military, which label the Republican party masculine [5, 6]. In this regard, not only are the main two political parties in the United States linked to the gendered topics in political discussion, but the political parties themselves are also gendered at the same time due to their agenda and policy priorities.

In other words, as the political issues become gendered, the parties that “own” the issues are equally linked to the gender stereotypes. Hence, there are scholars who found that U.S. political parties become gendered, in that Republicans are viewed as masculine while Democrats are viewed as feminine. The analysis of data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys in Ref. [5] then revealed the voters’ cognitive schemas of Democrats and Republicans in gender-specific ways. Politicians are also found to define and represent themselves according to the issue ownership labels. For instance, the content analysis of the presidential campaign ads of 1952–2000 in Ref. [31] demonstrated Democrat candidates discussing Democrat-owned issues (education, health care, jobs/labor, poverty, and environment) more as the Republicans discussing Republican-owned issues (national defense, foreign policy, government spending/deficit, taxes, and illegal drugs) more. In this regard, the study hypothesizes:

H2a (issue ownership): When the voters make electoral decisions, the gender cues in the candidates’ political parties will interact with the political topics the candidates show concern with. H2b: Specifically, voters will prefer Democrat candidates when it comes to Democrat-owned issues and prefer Republicans when it comes to Republican-owned issues.

H3a (gendered party): The gender cues of the two main political parties will interact with the voters’ electoral choices on male and female candidates, such that H3b: voters will prefer female candidates when it comes to Democrats and prefer male candidates when it comes to Republicans.

As candidates in elections would involve more than one element of gender cues (political parties and topics), the current project further tests if different categories of gender cues would impact one another. Female candidates in Democrat (feminine political party) can either show concerns with feminine or masculine issues, which may “add up” or “decrease” the strength of gender cues, and this leads to the following hypothesis:

H4a (gendered topics and gendered party): The interaction between the gender cues in political parties and topics will interact with the voters’ preferences of candidates. H4b: Specifically, female Democrats concerning feminine political issues and male Republicans concerning masculine political issues would show the highest

likelihood to be voted since the two types of candidates offer gender cues in both political parties and topics.

Simultaneously, not only the sex and gender cues of the candidate would influence the voters' electoral choices, but also the voters' own sex. Previous studies pointed out that individuals are more likely to vote for candidates who are similar to themselves to represent them [32]. Female voters are also more likely to have a baseline preference for women candidates with more "gender consciousness" [10, 24, 33–35]. In the review of female politicians' public speech in Ref. [36], women politicians see themselves as a "voice for the voiceless." Reference [37] also highlighted the importance of visibility in representation and how women politicians can be role models for adolescents. Thus, this research hypothesized that:

H5a (candidate sex X participant sex): There will be significant differences between male and female voters in their voting preferences for different candidates. H5b: Specifically, Female voters would prefer female candidates more than male voters.

### **3. Research methods**

#### **3.1 Research methods in existing literature**

Several studies have evaluated stereotypes and gender cues in elections through existing data: reference [38] adopted data from the 2006 American National Election Study (ANES) Pilot Study, [39] took regression discontinuity design on data from U.S. House primary elections between 1972 and 2010, and [40] coded data of candidate sex, election outcomes, candidate characteristics for analysis. Other researchers conducted experiments about the relationship between voting behaviors and candidates' personal traits [3], candidates' "facial" traits [41], and the attractiveness of appearance [42]. In Ref. [10], a telephone survey about a hypothetical choice between two candidates was conducted. Participants were asked to answer questions, such as "if two equally qualified candidates were running in the [Democratic/Republican] primary for the U.S. House of Representatives, one a man and the other a woman, do you think you would be more inclined to vote for the man or the woman?" However, like many other studies, such approach and survey design would compromise the intention of the research, and participants could make different choices while being "watched" by the researchers. The study in Ref. [24] on individuals' baseline preference for supporting candidates of a particular sex, the researcher utilized an experiment to demonstrate head-to-head matchups between male and female candidates, which would again compromise the result as the respondents being aware of "surveillance" of the researcher.

In this sense, while making decisions between male and female candidates, participants that originally would vote for male candidates due to gender stereotypes could choose otherwise to avoid being judged as sexist or not being politically correct. According to reference [8], self-report data from explicit questions involving sensitive topics (such as gender stereotypes) can be compromised by the human tendency of positive self-representation. In other words, research bias can be caused by the participants' social desirability. Researchers then exploited different research methods to avoid bias. Reference [7] did a qualitative review of previous poll questions and pointed out the problems made by leading questions. Reference [43] used an experiment with self-report data about gender stereotypes and applied technologies to record eye movement and see if the participants responded to the questions with their "most honest" answers.

### **3.2 Research procedure and design**

Although the current research did not apply the same eye-movement technology to see if the respondents are showing their “true” preference of political candidates, it started with a series of questions of demographic information to learn about the participants’ previous voting decisions without revealing the researcher’s intention of testing gender cues in the experiment.

After the Institutional Review Board at the University approved the study, participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). After entering the survey link on a Qualtrics survey voluntarily, the participants were directed to a web page that demonstrated a short introduction to the study. In this introduction, it is stated that this research is designed to understand the relationship between the voters’ likelihood to vote for different candidates and the topics they support or are concerned about. Upon indicating consent, the survey started with demographic information gathering, including age, sex (biology), gender (social identification), race, educational level, employment status, religion, and marital status. Also, to obtain information about how voters make electoral decisions generally, the survey also included a section that asked about the participants’ political ideology (very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, very conservative), partisanship (Democrat/lean Democrat, bipartisan/no lean, Republican/lean Republican), the important reasons that influenced their previous (or future) electoral choices (the topics candidates concern with, the candidates’ partisanship, personality, sex, popularity, previous experiences, age, other).

In this research, the participants were randomly given 40 individual stimuli that showed 40 different short candidate descriptions, including name (that specifically revealed the candidates’ gender from an online random name generator), the age of the candidates (40–60), their previous work experiences (such as lawyer, U.S. military, and doctor that are related to the topics they show concern with), and three topics and bills they support selected from the five masculine and five feminine topics. The participants were then requested to choose from a 5-point Likert-type scale survey to express how likely they would vote for the candidate (from 1-least likely to 5-very likely). Thus, the dependent variable was the favorability and likelihood to vote for the candidates shown to the respondents.

As reference [41] noted, the attractiveness of appearance, especially gender-specific attractiveness, plays a significant part in elections. Therefore, to prevent the influence of the candidates’ physical appearance on the respondents’ decisions, the research did not provide photos of the candidates. Instead, the gender cue of the candidate image was replaced by a gender-implicit avatar icon that is often seen as the default image when one signs up for online accounts. Names that could reveal the candidates’ sexual identities were offered: these names were randomly selected from an online character name generator website for writers rather than using the real names of politicians to avoid misleading cues. (See Appendix A for candidate description stimuli example).

Five gendered political issues were equally provided in each category. The feminine and compassion issues include (1) social welfare, (2) education [3], (3) healthcare, (4) family and childcare, and (5) poverty [9]. Masculine and tough issues included (1) national security and military, (2) economy [24], (3) science, (4) crime, and (5) foreign policy [9]. The 40 stimuli were equally distributed into the ten topics. For instance, of the ten female candidates that had the main concern with feminine issues, two of them support social welfare policies, and two of them show concern

Research experiment Design

	<i>Feminine political issues</i> (1) social welfare (2) education (3) healthcare (4) family and childcare (5) poverty	<i>Masculine political issues</i> (1) national security and military (2) economy (3) science (4) crime (5) foreign policy
<b>Democrat</b>	5 Male candidates	5 Male candidates
	5 Female candidates	5 Female candidates
<b>Republican</b>	5 Male candidates	5 Male candidates
	5 Female candidates	5 Female candidates

**Figure 1.**  
 Research experiment design.

with education topics. In this regard, the current study came up with a 2 (candidates' sex: male, female) X 2 (candidates' party: Democrat, Republican) X 2 (the topics candidates showing concern with: feminine topics, masculine topics) factor statement as the **Figure 1** illustrates.

As each category included five hypothetical candidates, all candidates are divided into five groups: (1) one male Democrat candidate concerning feminine topics, (2) one female Democrat candidate concerning feminine topics, (3) one male Republican candidate concerning feminine topics, (4) one female Republican candidate concerning feminine topics, (5) one male Democrat candidate concerning masculine topics, (6) one female Democrat candidate concerning masculine topics, (7) one male Republican candidate concerning masculine topics, and (8) one female Republican candidate concerning masculine topics. To prevent exhausting participants, each participant was randomly assigned to only two groups of candidates.

#### 4. Research result

A total number of 1238 individuals finished the whole survey and experiment section. Out of these participants, 49.51%, or 613 were females, 50.16%, or 621 males, 3 preferred not to reveal their sex, and 1 identified as other. 50.24%, or 622 participants identified themselves as Democrat/lean Democrat, 31.18%, or 386 Republican/lean Republican, 16.40%, or 203 No lean, and 2.18%, or 27 Other.

The descriptive data revealed that participants significantly preferred more for female candidates ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) than male candidates ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = .78$ ),  $t(1237) = -17.74$ ,  $p < .001$ . They also reported more preference for Democrats ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) than Republicans ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = .92$ ),  $t(1237) = 3.07$ ,  $p < .005$ . This was not a surprising finding since 50% ( $N = 622$ ) of the participants identified themselves as Democrat or lean Democrat in the demographic information survey. A multivariate test also unveiled a main effect on the voters' preference for the candidates of different parties made by the voters' party recognition, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .70$ ,  $F(6, 1134) = 36.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .16$ . Simultaneously, the participants generally reported more preference for candidates concern with feminine topics ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) than candidates concern with masculine topics ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = .78$ ),  $t(1237) = 17.74$ ,  $p < .001$ .

H1a and H1b were both supported as a multivariate analysis demonstrated a significant interaction between the candidates' sex and the topics they concern with in the candidate description (see **Table 1**: candidate sex X topic). The participants reported a significantly higher likelihood to vote for female candidates concerning feminine topics (M = 3.13, SE = .04) than female candidates concerning masculine topics (M = 2.98, SE = .04), Wilks'  $\Lambda = .91$ ,  $F(1, 571) = 56.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$  (see **Table 1**). They reported significantly more preference for female candidates (M = 3.13, SE = .04) than male candidates (M = 3.01, SE = .04) when the two candidates both showed concern with feminine topics. In the meanwhile, they reported significantly more preference for male candidates (M = 3.06, SE = .04) than female candidates (M = 2.98, SE = .04) when the candidates both showed concern with masculine topics.

The multivariate test revealed another significant interaction between the political party and political topic (see **Table 2**: candidate party X topic), Wilks'  $\Lambda = .91$ ,  $F(1, 571) = 56.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ , which supported H2a. In general, the participants reported significantly higher voting likelihood for Democrat candidates (M = 3.21, SE = .04) than Republicans (M = 3.11, SE = .04) while they both showed concern for feminine topics. Among the candidates showing concern with masculine

Candidate sex × political topics candidates showing concern with.		
	Feminine political issues	Masculine political issues
Female Candidates		
Mean	3.13 <sub>aA</sub>	2.98 <sub>aB</sub>
SE	.04	.04
Male Candidates		
Mean	3.01 <sub>bA</sub>	3.06 <sub>cB</sub>
SE	.04	.04

*Wilks' A = .93, F(1, 571) = 45.28, p < .001, partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ . Means with no subscript in common differ at p < .05 using Holm's sequential Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.*

**Table 1.**  
Interaction between candidate sex and political topics candidates showing concern with.

Candidate party affiliation × political topics candidates showing concern with.		
	Feminine political issues	Masculine political issues
Democrat		
Mean	3.21 <sub>aA</sub>	3.03 <sub>bA</sub>
SE	.04	.04
Republican		
Mean	3.11 <sub>aB</sub>	3.09 <sub>bC</sub>
SE	.04	.04

*Wilks' A = .91, F(1, 571) = 56.07, p < .001, partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Means with no subscript in common differ at p < .05 using Holm's sequential Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.*

**Table 2.**  
Interaction between candidate party affiliation and political topics candidates showing concern with.



Candidate sex × candidate party affiliation		
	Female candidates	Male candidates
Democrat		
Mean	3.25 <sub>aA</sub>	3.10 <sub>aB</sub>
SE	.04	.04
Republican		
Mean	2.89 <sub>bA</sub>	2.95 <sub>bB</sub>
SE	.04	.04

*Wilks' Λ = .95, F (1, 571) = 30.6, p < .001, partial η<sup>2</sup> = .05. Means with no subscript in common differ at p < .05 using Holm's sequential Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.*

**Table 3.**  
 Interaction between candidate sex and party affiliation.

topics, the participants reported significantly more preference for Democrat candidates (M = 3.03, SE = .04) than Republicans (M = 3.09, SE = .04). Among Republican candidates, the participants reported significantly higher voting likelihood for concerning with feminine topics (M = 3.11, SE = .04) than the candidates concerning with masculine issues (M = 3.09, SE = .04). Therefore, H2b was rejected.

The test also supported H3a by laying out a main effect on the interaction between the candidates' party affiliation and the candidates' sex (see **Table 3**: candidate sex X party), Wilks' Λ = .95, F (1, 571) = 30.6, p < .001, partial η<sup>2</sup> = .05. Among both male and female candidates, the participants showed a significantly higher preference for Democrats (female: M = 3.25, SE = .04; male: M = 3.10, SE = .03) than Republicans (female: M = 2.89, SE = .03; male: M = 2.95, SE = .03). They showed higher likelihood to vote for female Democrats (M = 3.25, SE = .04) than male Democrats (M = 3.10, SE = .03) as well as for male Republicans (M = 2.95, SE = .03) more than Republican females (M = 2.89, SE = .03), which supported H3b.

In the descriptive data in **Table 4**, participants reported the highest scores in likelihood to vote for female Democrat candidates concerning feminine topics (M = 3.42, SD = 1.10). When both the party-affiliation Democrat and the political topics both offered feminine gender cues, the participants reported a significantly higher likelihood to vote for female candidates (M = 3.42, SD = 1.10) than male candidates (M = 2.96, SD = 1.02),  $t(1237) = 14.30, p < .001$ . Nevertheless, the participants' preference for male Republicans concerning masculine political issues does not come out with the same tendency; rather, the candidates that include three masculine gender cues at the same time in their description reported rather low scores in the likelihood of being voted (M = 2.80, SD = 1.10). While both the political party (Republican) and the topics offered masculine gender cues in the candidates' description, the participants reported a significantly higher likelihood to vote for female candidates (M = 3.22, SD = 1.09) than male candidates (M = 2.80, SD = 1.10),  $t(1237) = 14.38, p < .001$ . In the meantime, with further analysis through a multivariate test, the study found no main effect on the interaction between the candidates' party affiliation, the topics they concern with, and the candidates' sex (Candidate Party X Topic X Candidate Sex), Wilks' Λ = .96, F (1, 571) = 24.62, p < .001, partial η<sup>2</sup> = .04, which supported H4a.

To test H5a and H5b, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on the voters' sex and the voters' likelihood to vote for each type of candidate was conducted. The

Descriptive data of candidates				
	Feminine political issues		Masculine political issues	
	Male candidates	Female candidates	Male candidates	Female candidates
Democrat				
Mean	2.96	3.42	3.02	2.96
SD	1.02	1.10	1.03	1.02
Republican				
Mean	2.76	3.19	2.80	3.22
SD	1.10	1.08	1.10	1.09

**Table 4.** *Descriptive data of the participants' voting preference for candidates.*

analysis revealed significant differences between male and female voters in some specific cases: Female participants ( $M = 3.62, SE = .04$ ) showed significantly higher rates for Democrat female candidates concerning feminine issues than male participants ( $M = 3.23, SE = .04$ ),  $F(3, 1234) = 13.96, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Male participants ( $M = 2.90, SE = .04$ ), on the other hand, showed higher rates for Republican male candidates concerning feminine issues than female ( $M = 2.61, SE = .04$ ),  $F(3, 1234) = 7.80, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ . They also reported higher rates ( $M = 3.04, SE = .04$ ) rates for Democrat male candidates concerning feminine issues than female ( $M = 2.89, SE = .04$ ) as well as more preferences for Republican male candidates concerning masculine issues ( $M = 2.98, SE = .04$ ) than female participants ( $M = 2.62, SE = .04$ ),  $F(3, 1234) = 11.67, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ . In other cases, notwithstanding, there were no significant differences between the voting preferences of male and female participants. Therefore, H5a was partially supported. However, in general, female participants reported a significantly higher likelihood to vote for female candidates ( $M = 3.03, SE = .04$ ) than male candidates ( $M = 2.93, SE = .04$ ), Wilks'  $\Lambda = .96, F(1, 569) = 21.56, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ , which supported H5b.

## 5. Discussion

This study utilized an experiment to investigate how gender stereotypes intersect with political parties and political issues and influence U.S. voters' choices between different political candidates. Instead of asking the participants explicit questions and putting male and female candidates into head-to-head comparisons, the experiment that randomly assigned hypothetical candidates to participants tested the gender stereotypes cognitively attached to their implicit attitude toward each candidate. While many existing studies have discussed gender stereotypes in politics (see [3, 25]) and the representation of females in the electoral context (see [24, 32, 33]), this research provides a nuanced examination of the impact of gender stereotypes on the individuals' electoral choices.

As the research design purposefully provided only very limited candidate information that contained different types of gender cues, the results disclosed that participants did rely heavily on cognitive shortcuts and referred to the gendered

characteristics while making decisions in low-information situations. The research findings unveiled that individuals' voting preferences can be influenced by how they cognitively associate certain political topics with gender stereotypes. Consistent with existing literature (for example, see [23, 24, 26]) on how political topics are gendered, the experiment results confirmed that voters would prefer female candidates when it comes to feminine issues and prefer male candidates when it comes to masculine issues. The study results also confirmed the argument in Ref. [5, 6] on how the two main political parties in the U.S. are linked to stereotypical male and female characteristics. Viewing the experiment results from the viewpoint of gender schema theory (GST) [14], the implicit association between the political topics and the candidates' sex then indicates the public's stereotypical perceptions regarding what males and females are more capable of. Behind the association, there is also a categorical thought about how males and females should act or perform themselves.

Nevertheless, the participants did not consider the political issues examined in the study specifically owned by the two political parties in the exact same way previous studies found. The participants reported a higher likelihood to vote for Democrat candidates when it comes to masculine issues. They also reported a higher preference for Republican candidates that showed concerns with feminine topics rather than masculine topics. Indeed, more than two decades have passed since reference [20] introduced the concept of "issue ownership" of political parties. Not only how the voters view each political party can constantly change, but how the political parties prioritize their agenda can also vary. While gender stereotypes were found to be attached to certain political topics and political parties in this research, the issue-ownership of political parties hypothesized by the study was not supported. These findings, furthermore, suggest that researchers need to re-examine the interaction between political topics, the candidates' party affiliation, and the candidates' sex.

In the meantime, there were significant differences between male and female participants in several cases. Female voters, in general, reported significantly more preference for female candidates over male candidates. The study results were then consistent with the female baseline preferences for female candidates that existing literature (see [24, 33, 34]) discovered. This then added to the literature finding female voters identifying with female candidates with more "gender consciousness" [10, 35].

Results on the gender stereotypes attached to the candidates' sex supported the study's hypothesis and demonstrated society's consolidated perception of how individuals (including politicians) would (and should) act or be more capable of certain things. Viewing this result from the social constructionist theory [44] that argues individuals act in specific ways according to their adaptation to the socially constructed concepts (like gender), this research further highlights the fact that one does not only passively follow the social norms but also contributes to the same social norms. When individuals become aware of the socially constructed gender stereotypes they take for granted, they can examine their actions and decisions more consciously and further change the long-fixed gendered perception.

As with all studies, the current research has its limitations. Making electoral decisions is a complicated process, and there are other potential factors affecting voters' choices that were not analyzed in the experiment and survey, such as other demographic backgrounds (e.g., racial identities, ethnic identities, and geographic areas of residency), the voters' previous electoral decisions, and the topics that voters consider important. Future research can, thus, include more variables for further analysis of the candidate description's influence on voters' electoral preferences.

As the current research referred to the existing literature, the political topics studied were limited to the five feminine issues—healthcare (see [24, 27]), social welfare, education, poverty, childcare, poverty (see [3])—and five masculine issues—national security and military, economy, science, crime, and foreign policy (see [5, 6]). As society and the public's concerns change over time, new political issues can be further created (such as topics related to climate change). This then calls for future research to explore new political topics that have not been studied in a gendered sense. The experiment also put political topics into two main categories (masculine and feminine political topics) in the experiment design, it is unclear whether individual topics are gendered at different levels. It will take further studies to investigate how much individual topics are associated with gendered concepts by U.S. voters. For instance, researchers can apply implicit attitude tests (IAT) to explore whether particular keywords link political topics to gender stereotypes, as the method has been utilized to measure stereotypes and prejudices in different social contexts (see [45–47]).

Simultaneously, there are more topics discussed in the electoral context that are not associated with gender stereotypes or deemed as masculine or feminine issues, such as environmental and climate issues. While environmental issues like renewable energy and water pollution may be associated with (or even be owned by) certain gendered political parties, the issues themselves may not be gendered at the same time. Future studies can design experiments to examine each topic individually and include the “gender-neutral” category. There are also some issues that can researchers can approach from different perspectives. For instance, while discussing unemployment rates, the candidates can address the topic from a social welfare perspective, which is often related to the feminine feature of care. They can also discuss the issue through an economic aspect, and the association with the economy can thus make it categorized as a masculine/male issue as existing literature (see [6]) suggested. It will require further studies that use different research methods to take the same political topics into account.

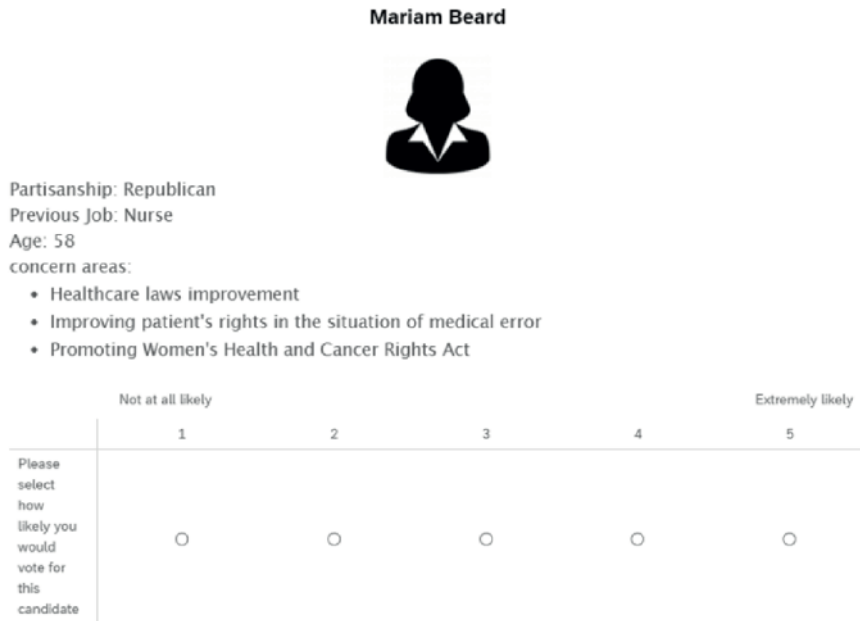
## **6. Conclusion**

The experiment in the current study revealed how gender stereotypes in political parties and political issues interact with U.S. voters' choices between different political candidates. The results confirmed gender stereotypes are utilized as cognitive shortcuts that individuals adopt when making electoral decisions. The political topics studied are found to be gendered, such that the participants preferred female candidates when it comes to feminine topics and male candidates for masculine topics. While the study showed the interaction between gender stereotypes and the two political parties in the U.S., the participants did not consider the topics owned by the two political parties as existing literature found. Further examination of how “issue ownership” of political parties and the gender stereotypes embedded have changed over time is then required. Consistent with previous findings on female voters' baseline preference, the female participants demonstrated a significantly higher preference for female candidates compared to their male counterparts. Since the current research only included political topics discussed by existing literature, the author calls for further examination of more political topics, including the ones that might be considered “gender neutral,” and whether they are considered owned by particular political parties. Different research methods (both qualitative and quantitative) are also required to explore the details of each political topic as well as how gender stereotypes are used as cognitive shortcuts in different cases.

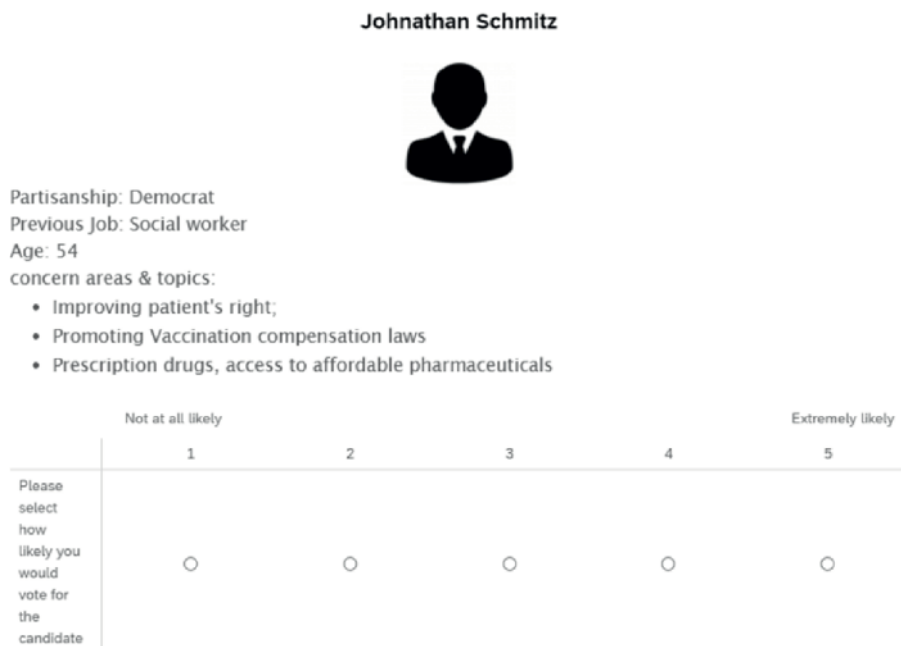
## A. Experiment examples

See **Figures A1** and **A2**.

### Experiment Examples



**Figure A1.**  
*Experiment example: female Republican candidate showing concern with health issues.*



**Figure A2.**  
*Experiment example: male Democrat candidate showing concern with health issues.*


### **Author details**

Chia-Heng Chang  
University at Albany, New York State University, Albany, NY, USA

\*Address all correspondence to: cchang6@albany.edu

### **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] Women in the U.S. congress 2023 [Internet]. Center for American Women and Politics. Available from: <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/levels-office/congress/women-us-congress-2023> [Accessed: January 24, 2023]
- [2] Burrell BC. *Woman's Place Is in the House: Campaigning for Congress in the Feminist Era*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press; 1996
- [3] Huddy L, Terkildsen N. Gender stereotypes and the perception of male and female candidates. *American Journal of Political Science*. 1993;**37**(1):119. DOI: 10.2307/2111526
- [4] Kahn KF. Does gender make a difference? An experimental examination of sex stereotypes and press patterns in statewide campaigns. *American Journal of Political Science*. 1994;**38**(1):162. DOI: 10.2307/2111340
- [5] Winter NJG. Masculine republicans and feminine democrats: Gender and Americans' explicit and implicit images of the political parties. *Political Behavior*. 2010;**32**(4):587-618. DOI: 10.1007/s11109-010-9131-z
- [6] Lawless JL. Women, war, and winning elections: Gender stereotyping in the post-September 11th era. *Political Research Quarterly*. 2004;**57**(3):479-490. DOI: 10.1177/106591290405700312
- [7] Frankovic KA. Women and the polls. In: Whitaker LD, editor. *Voting the Gender Gap*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press; 2008
- [8] Van De Mortel TF. Faking it: social desirability response bias in selfreport research. Com.au. Available from: [http://www.ajan.com.au/archive/Vol25/Vol\\_25-4\\_vandeMortel.pdf](http://www.ajan.com.au/archive/Vol25/Vol_25-4_vandeMortel.pdf) [Accessed: April 24, 2023]
- [9] Dolan K. *Voting for Women: How the Public Evaluates Women Candidates*. London, England: Routledge; 2019
- [10] Sanbonmatsu K. Gender stereotypes and vote choice. *American Journal of Political Science*. 2002;**46**(1):20. DOI: 10.2307/3088412
- [11] Sapiro V. If US. Senator baker were a woman: An experimental study of candidate images. *Political Psychology*. 1981;**3**(1/2):61. DOI: 10.2307/3791285
- [12] Payne S. 'Smoke like a man, die like a man?': A review of the relationship between gender, sex and lung cancer. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2001;**53**(8):1067-1080. DOI: 10.1016/S0277-9536(00)00402-0
- [13] Krieger N. Genders, sexes, and health: What are the connections — And why does it matter? *International Journal of Epidemiology*. 2003;**32**(4):652-657. DOI: 10.1093/ije/dyg156
- [14] Bem SL. The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 1974;**42**(2):155-162. DOI: 10.1037/h0036215
- [15] Bem SL. Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex typing. *Psychological Review*. 1981;**88**(4):354-364. DOI: 10.1037/0033-295x.88.4.354
- [16] Bartels LM. Uninformed votes: Information effects in presidential elections. *American Journal of Political Science*. 1996;**40**(1):194. DOI: 10.2307/2111700
- [17] Carpini D. In search of the informed citizen: What Americans know about

- politics and why it matters. *The Communication Review*. 2000;**4**(1):129-164. DOI: 10.1080/10714420009359466
- [18] McDermott ML. Voting cues in low-information elections: Candidate gender as a social information variable in contemporary United States elections. *American Journal of Political Science*. 1997;**41**(1):270. DOI: 10.2307/2111716
- [19] Kahn KF. Does being male help? An investigation of the effects of candidate gender and campaign coverage on evaluations of U.S. senate candidates. *Journal of Politics*. 1992;**54**(2):497-517. DOI: 10.2307/2132036
- [20] Petrocik JR. Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study. *American Journal of Political Science*. 1996;**40**(3):825. DOI: 10.2307/2111797
- [21] Doan AE, Haider-Markel DP. The role of intersectional stereotypes on evaluations of gay and lesbian political candidates. *Politics & Gender*. 2010;**6**(1):63. DOI: 10.1017/s1743923x09990511
- [22] Littlejohn SW, Foss KA, editors. *Gender and media*. In: *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications; 2012
- [23] Alexander D, Andersen K. Gender as a factor in the attribution of leadership traits. *Political Research Quarterly*. 1993;**46**(3):527-545. DOI: 10.1177/106591299304600305
- [24] Dolan K. The impact of gender stereotyped evaluations on support for women candidates. *Political Behavior*. 2010;**32**(1):69-88. DOI: 10.1007/s11109-009-9090-4
- [25] Sanbonmatsu K. Political knowledge and gender stereotypes. *American Politics Research*. 2003;**31**(6):575-594. DOI: 10.1177/1532673x03255167
- [26] Shapiro RY, Mahajan H. Gender differences in policy preferences: A summary of trends from the 1960s to the 1980s. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 1986;**50**(1):42. DOI: 10.1086/268958
- [27] Fridkin KL, Kenney PJ. The role of gender stereotypes in U.S. senate campaigns. *Politics & Gender*. 2009;**5**(3):301. DOI: 10.1017/s1743923x09990158
- [28] Carlson T. Gender and political advertising across cultures: A comparison of male and female political advertising in Finland and the US. *European Journal of Communication (London)*. 2001;**16**(2):131-154. DOI: 10.1177/0267323101016002001
- [29] Beail L, Longworth RK. Puritan or pit bull: The framing of female candidates at the national level. In: Vaughn J, Goren L, editors. *Women and the White House: Gender, Popular Culture, and Presidential Politics*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky; 2013
- [30] Huddy L, Terkildsen N. The consequences of gender stereotypes for women candidates at different levels and types of office. *Political Research Quarterly*. 1993;**46**(3):503-525. DOI: 10.1177/106591299304600304
- [31] Benoit WL, Hansen GJ. Issue adaptation of presidential television spots and debates to primary and general audiences. *Communication Research Reports*. 2002;**19**(2):138-145. DOI: 10.1080/08824090209384841
- [32] Bailenson JN, Iyengar S, Yee N, Collins NA. Facial similarity between voters and candidates causes influence. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 2008;**72**(5):935-961. DOI: 10.1093/poq/nfn064



- [33] Dolan K. Women voters, women candidates is there a gender gap in support for women candidates? In: Whitaker L, editor. *Voting the Gender Gap*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press; 2014
- [34] Plutzer E, Zipp JF. Identity politics, partisanship, and voting for women candidates. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 1996;**60**(1):30. DOI: 10.1086/297738
- [35] Rosenthal CS. The role of gender in descriptive representation. *Political Research Quarterly*. 1995;**48**(3):599-611. DOI: 10.1177/106591299504800307
- [36] Representation matters: Women in the U.S. congress [Internet]. Center for American Women and Politics. Available from: <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/research-and-scholarship/representation-matters-women-us-congress> [Accessed: January 25, 2023]
- [37] Campbell DE, Wolbrecht C. See Jane run: Women politicians as role models for adolescents. *The Journal of Politics*. 2006;**68**(2):233-247. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00402.x
- [38] Dolan K, Sanbonmatsu K. Gender stereotypes and attitudes toward gender balance in government. *American Politics Research*. 2009;**37**(3):409-428. DOI: 10.1177/1532673x08322109
- [39] Bucchianeri P. Is running enough? Reconsidering the conventional wisdom about women candidates. *Political Behavior*. 2018;**40**(2):435-466. DOI: 10.1007/s11109-017-9407-7
- [40] Pearson K, McGhee E. What it takes to win: Questioning “gender neutral” outcomes in U.S. house elections. *Politics & Gender*. 2013;**9**(04):439-462. DOI: 10.1017/s1743923x13000433
- [41] Carpinella CM, Hehman E, Freeman JB, Johnson KL. The gendered face of partisan politics: Consequences of facial sex typicality for vote choice. *Political Communication*. 2016;**33**(1):21-38. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2014.958260
- [42] Nicholson SP, Coe CM, Emory J, Song AV. The politics of beauty: The effects of partisan bias on physical attractiveness. *Political Behavior*. 2016;**38**(4):883-898. DOI: 10.1007/s11109-016-9339-7
- [43] Coronel JC, Federmeier KD. The effects of gender cues and political sophistication on candidate evaluation: A comparison of self-report and eye movement measures of stereotyping. *Communication Research*. 2016;**43**(7):922-944. DOI: 10.1177/0093650215604024
- [44] Berger PL, Luckmann T. *The Social Construction of Reality : A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Open Road Media; 1966
- [45] Blair IV, Ma JE, Lenton AP. Imagining stereotypes away: The moderation of implicit stereotypes through mental imagery. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 2001;**81**(5):828-841. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.81.5.828
- [46] Rezaei AR. Validity and reliability of the IAT: Measuring gender and ethnic stereotypes. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 2011;**27**(5):1937-1941. DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2011.04.018
- [47] Chang C-H, Yang F. How gender stereotypes impact health information seeking intention: Insights from an implicit association test. *Cogent. Social Sciences*. 2021;**7**(1):1999614. DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2021.1999614



# Article 175 of Turkish Civil Code, No. 4721: Assessment of Debate on the Duration of the Poverty Alimony

*Burcu G. Özcan Büyüktanır and Dila Okyar*

## Abstract

Even after the dissolution of marriage, as a reflection of solidarity obligation, Turkish law grants the party who will fall into poverty due to divorce the right to request alimony from the other spouse. Article 175 of Turkish Civil Code (TCC), no. 4721, titled “poverty alimony,” states that the party “may request alimony indefinitely”. It is the phrase indefinitely that has led to heavy discussions. The constitutionality of this provision was also challenged before the Turkish Constitutional Court, and in 2012, the Court had declared that the phrase indefinitely is not unconstitutional. Still, the debate on the duration of the poverty alimony is on the agenda. Even though Article 175 TCC grants the right to request poverty alimony to both of the spouses, without making any distinction in terms of male or female, this alimony is generally granted to women who are *de facto* at home and are economically weaker. The debate results from the situation of unemployed married women who suffer economically after the divorce. This study aims to examine poverty alimony under Turkish law with respect to its duration, evaluate the different doctrinal opinions in the literature, and, as a proposed solution, present an alternative way to interpret Article 175 TCC.

**Keywords:** poverty alimony, indefiniteness, time limit, divorce, obligation of solidarity

## 1. Introduction

Article 175–178 of Turkish Civil Code (TCC) envisages that the spouses have financial obligations even after the dissolution of marriage. The general purpose is to regulate the responsibilities of spouses, due to social and moral reasons even for the post-marriage. The basis of this alimony is the partial continuation of solidarity obligation between the spouses even after the dissolution of marriage [1].

Different jurisdictions address this type of support with different concepts such as *spousal support* or *postmarital maintenance*. In this study, we preferred “poverty alimony,” which is the direct literal translation of the legal concept used in TCC. “Alimony” is defined as a regular amount of money that a law court orders a person to

pay to his/her partner after the legal ending of the marriage by divorce [2]. Since the spouses are expected to support each other during the marriage, the concept of spousal support seems to fall short of reflecting its postmarital qualification. Thus, rather than support or maintenance, in this study, the concept of “alimony” is adopted. Since, under Turkish law, granting this alimony is conditional on falling into poverty, the concept of *poverty alimony* is thought to fit best in reflecting the fundamental requirement of this legal institution.

According to Article 175 TCC, titled “poverty alimony,” *“the party who will fall into poverty due to divorce may request alimony for his/her livelihood indefinitely from the other party in proportion to his/her financial power, provided that his/her fault is not grosser. The fault of the alimony obligor is not sought”*. Under Turkish law, the starting point of the heavy discussions rests at the phrase “*indefinitely*”. Under the first text of Article 144 former TCC (Türk Kanunu Medenîsi, no 743), poverty alimony was limited with time; it could only be ordered for a period of 1 year. In 1988, with the Law, no. 3444, the provision was modified; the time limit was removed, and it was envisaged that the poverty alimony can be granted indefinitely. Article 175 TCC, which is in force today, still preserves indefiniteness in its wording. This is because the discussion as to the duration of the poverty alimony dates back to 1988 under Turkish law.

This study aims to briefly explain the concept of poverty alimony under Turkish law and examine the conditions of Article 175 TCC with special focus on the duration of the poverty alimony. In the conclusion part, personal thoughts and, as a proposed solution, an alternative way to interpret Article 175 TCC will be presented.

The study reviews the relevant jurisprudence of Turkish Court of Cassation as well as the decision of the Turkish Constitutional Court regarding the unconstitutionality challenge brought against Article 175 TCC. It also examines the different doctrinal opinions put forward both in Turkish and Swiss literature.

With the establishment of Republic of Türkiye, the adoption of a civil code based on secular principles was one of the leading revolutions of the new Türkiye. For the realization of this purpose, Swiss civil law was preferred since, by that time, Switzerland was the country with the newest, most modern civil law system, which has the simplest language that the public can easily understand and which includes provisions that ensure social balance thanks to its liberal structure. In 1926, the Swiss Civil Code and the Swiss Code of Obligations were directly translated and adopted. Although the current Turkish Civil Code is renewed in 2002, Turkish civil law is still under the Swiss law influence. Since it constitutes the reference law, this study makes comparative analysis with Swiss Civil Code.

## **2. The concept of poverty alimony**

Poverty alimony is a type of maintenance alimony. Its main purpose is to support the spouse economically after the divorce and to ensure that the standard of living is minimally affected after the marriage. The underlying idea of poverty alimony is the continuation of mutual assistance and financial solidarity between spouses, subject to some conditions, even after the termination of marriage by divorce [1, 3].

During the divorce suit, the judge is not allowed to order poverty alimony; if conditions are met, the judge may, instead, order precautionary alimony. Upon the finalization of the decision of divorce [4, 5], the precautionary alimony turns into poverty alimony. In order for the judge to order poverty alimony, it must be either

stipulated by the parties in the consensual divorce protocol in case of an uncontested divorce or demanded while the divorce suit is ongoing.

Poverty support does not qualify technically as compensation. As it was held by the court (YHGK, 04.04.2018, 2017/2-1579 E., 2018/673 K.), “*since the poverty alimony is for protecting the party who will fall into poverty after the divorce, the poverty alimony to be granted to the divorced poor party is, by no means, a punishment or compensation imposed on the other party*” [6]. It is argued that if compensation is awarded together with the decision of divorce, the condition of “falling into poverty due to divorce,” stipulated under Article 175 TCC as a condition for the poverty alimony, should presumed to be eliminated, and so the alimony should not be awarded [3, 5]. However, besides the need to discuss the criterion of falling into poverty; the essence of granting poverty alimony is to support the spouses financially and being less faulty is found sufficient to request [1]. Conversely, to award material or moral compensation due to divorce, the other spouse is required to be at fault. In such a case, not rendering a separate order for poverty alimony despite the request will *ironically* result in “rewarding” the faulty spouse.

### **3. The conditions of poverty alimony**

#### **3.1 Finalization of the divorce decision**

Poverty alimony is a secondary consequence of divorce. In order for the judge to grant poverty alimony, the divorce decision must be finalized [1, 4]. While the divorce suit is ongoing, the judge may decide, upon request, on precautionary alimony as a temporary measure.

#### **3.2 Request of the party**

In a divorce suit, the judge cannot decide *ipso iure* on the poverty alimony without the request of the parties [4]. Poverty alimony can be requested either together with the divorce when filing the divorce suit or after the divorce decision is finalized, as a separate lawsuit within 1 year (Article 178 TCC). The requested amount must be clearly stated [5]. If the amount is not specified, the judge is obliged to ask the requesting party for clarification.

#### **3.3 The requesting party shall not be more faulty than the other spouse**

The spouse is allowed to request poverty alimony as long as his/her fault is not grosser than the other spouse. The requesting spouse shall be either faultless or less faulty. Here, the decisive criterion is the degree of fault. The ratio behind this requirement is to prevent rewarding the spouse with alimony who caused the divorce with his/her gross fault.

#### **3.4 The requesting spouse shall fall into poverty by the end of the divorce**

The law does not provide an explicit definition of poverty alimony. Poverty is (Y3HD, 26.05.2014, 2014/820 E., 2014/8178 K.) “*decided by evaluating the economic and social conditions and lifestyles of the parties, together with the economic conditions of the day*” [7]. Falling into poverty due to divorce should be evaluated in each concrete

case. It must be underlined that falling into poverty does not mean that the alimony creditor (requesting party) does not have a job or income [4]; the poverty in the sense of Article 175 TCC occurs if he/she cannot make a living with his/her own work and financial power [1]. The court held that (YHGK, 04.05.2011, 2011/2-155 E., 2011/278 K.) the state of poverty occurs if the spouse does not have sufficient income to meet the necessary expenses to improve his/her individual's corporeal existence such as nutrition, clothing, shelter, health, transportation, culture, and education [7].

### **3.5 Determination of the amount according to the financial situation of the alimony obligatory spouse**

While the judge decides on the amount of the alimony, a fair ratio should be established between the amount of support required to prevent the alimony creditor from falling into poverty and the income of the alimony obligatory spouse.

## **4. The discussions on the duration of poverty alimony in Turkish law**

### **4.1 The decision of Turkish constitutional court**

The constitutionality of Article 175 TCC was challenged before the Turkish Constitutional Court (case dated 17.05.2012, E. 2011/136, K. 2012/72, Official Gazette 26.06.2012/28335). It was argued that the provision is not sufficiently detailed since it does not clearly regulate the conditions and the effect of the issues such as the financial strength of the parties, their age, the duration of marriage, and so forth. Either the complete cancelation of the provision or, if this is not accepted, partial cancelation limited with the phrase of indefinitely was requested. The Constitutional Court evaluated the contested rule in the light of “social legal state” under Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution and has declared that the phrase “indefinitely” in Article 175 TCC is not unconstitutional.

The main reasoning of the Court is as follows: the obligation of solidarity and assistance of spouses continues after marriage, albeit partially; the term “indefinite” cannot be understood as an obligation for lifetime; the poverty alimony is regulated as conditional on falling into poverty; the purpose is the economic support of the spouse who will fall into poverty due to divorce by the other, and under Article 175 TCC, the financial situation of the alimony obligor is also taken into consideration.

The dissenting opinion expressed in the aforementioned decision of the Turkish Constitutional Court examines the issue from a different perspective and finds indefinite alimony as unconstitutional: *“Despite the fact that people have ended their legal relationship by getting divorced, the continuation of their responsibilities in the marriage union for life is both unjust and contrary to equity. The existence of an alimony obligation arising from divorce, which is, under some conditions, continuous throughout the life of the alimony debtor as if it were a property right, damages the sense of justice in a legal system in which the concepts of statute of limitations are accepted”*.

### **4.2 Poverty alimony under Swiss law as the reference law**

As in many legal systems, poverty alimony is a legally discussed issue [8]. Swiss law provides poverty alimony only if the spouse cannot make a living on his/her own. *Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch* (ZGB) adopts, under Article 125 ZGB, the concept of

*Nachehelicher Unterhalt* (postmarital alimony), which was formerly regulated under Article 152 former ZGB. Article 175 TCC corresponds to Article 152 former ZGB. Article 125 ZGB is almost completely different than the current Article 175 TCC.

None of the abovementioned ZGB provisions stipulate time limit. However, in Swiss practice, the Swiss Federal Court has introduced some criteria regarding time limitation. According to Article 125 ZGB, the judge shall decide the amount and duration of the alimony, taking into account various variables [8]. These variables are regulated explicitly in the law.

Article 125 ZGB is as follows:

If a spouse cannot reasonably be expected to provide for his or her own maintenance, including an appropriate level of retirement provision, the other spouse must pay a suitable contribution. In deciding whether such a contribution is to be made and, if so, in what amount and for how long, the following factors in particular must be considered:

1. the division of duties during the marriage;
2. the duration of the marriage;
3. the standard of living during the marriage;
4. the age and health of the spouses;
5. the income and assets of the spouses;
6. the extent and duration of child care still required of the spouses;
7. the vocational training and career prospects of the spouses and the likely cost of reintegration into working life;
8. expectancy of federal old age and survivor's insurance benefits and of occupational or other private or state pensions, including the expected proceeds of any division of withdrawal benefits.

Exceptionally, a maintenance contribution may be denied or reduced if it would clearly be inequitable, particularly because the spouse otherwise entitled to receive such contribution:

1. has grossly neglected his or her duty to contribute to the maintenance of the family;
2. has wilfully brought about his or her own indigence;
3. has committed a serious criminal offense against the other spouse or a person close to him or her.

As is seen, the Swiss judge is granted with wide discretionary power with respect to postmarital alimony. Article 125 ZGB is indeed the statutory version of the criteria developed in practice by the judges by way of using their discretionary powers (Article 4 ZGB).

## 5. Different doctrinal opinions in the debate on the duration of poverty alimony

With the marriage union, the spouses are obliged to be in solidarity and to participate in the expenses of the marriage with their labor and assets as much as they can afford (Article 185 TCC, Article 159 ZGB). As long as the conditions exist, even after the dissolution of marriage, this obligation of solidarity continues to exist economically under the name of poverty alimony. The underlying idea is, based on social and moral considerations, the protection of the trust formed by marriage and supporting the spouse who will be adversely affected by divorce in economic sense [1].

Article 175 TCC has caused controversy recently since it allows to decide on poverty alimony indefinitely. Poverty alimony can be paid either in lump sum or in the form of annuity. In practice, generally, it is decided to be paid in the form of annuity [4]. Debate with respect to the duration of the alimony comes to the fore when it is decided in the form of annuity. The indefiniteness of poverty alimony is the result of this debate [9].

The discussion under Turkish law dates back to the amendment made with the Law No. 3444 in 1988. Prior to the amendment, Article 144 of former TCC restricted the poverty alimony with a period of 1 year. By then, the focus of the debate was the incompatibility of one-year period with the purpose of alimony [9]. Indeed, it was stated that “*poverty alimony is an institution that has been accepted purely by social and moral considerations. However, since it can be ruled for (one year) finally in our country, it does not give practical results suitable for the purpose of its acceptance*” [10]. The amendment modified Article 144 former TCC and introduced that the poverty alimony can be granted indefinitely. Another amendment was the removal of the condition of “falling into gross poverty”.

Article 175 TCC provides the right to request poverty alimony to both parties, without making any distinction in terms of gender of the spouse. Since mostly it is the female spouse who requests this alimony, the “time debate” stems from the woman’s request of indefinite alimony after divorce. The main point of criticism is the introduction of an obligation to pay alimony for lifetime, which is regarded as not equitable [7]. *Akıpek/Akıntürk/Ateş* states that the modification made in Article 144 former TCC was the result of doctrinal criticisms on the one-year time limit and finds this criticism as justified [1]. *Zevkliler* also supports the modification in the former TCC [3]. Similarly, *Şipka* states that alimony should not be time-limited since the time-limitation may cause unfair results [11].

A closer look at Article 175 TCC brings another approach to the debate. This approach argues that it is not legally correct to conclude that Article 175 TCC directly provides indefinite alimony; although the judge is allowed to render alimony indefinitely, in each concrete case, the judge should be able to decide on the duration of the alimony [12, 13]. Another view in the same direction supports that the provision, in fact, does not introduce an upper limit; the judge, by using its discretionary power, should be able to set a limit and thus order a time-limited alimony [5, 11].

According to the practice of Turkish Court of Cassation, if the parties do not request alimony for a certain period or if the alimony was not agreed upon as time-limited in the consensual divorce protocol, the judge has no discretion in determining the duration of the alimony. The Court held that (Y2HD, 11.07.2012, 2012/14282E., 2012/19487 K.) “*Poverty alimony in the form of monthly income for the benefit of the defendant was ordered, and the poverty alimony was limited to four years. As a reason for*



the limitation, the Court stated that 'the assignment of indefinite alimony would not be in accordance with fairness, and the limitation to four years, taking into account the age of the parties, was in accordance with equity'. The law did not limit the poverty alimony to a certain period, it stipulated that this alimony could be requested indefinitely. The aim is to support the spouse who will fall into poverty due to divorce by the other to meet the minimum living requirements. In this regard, unless the requesting party explicitly states, limiting the alimony to a certain period of time means to include an element that is not included in the law. In cases where the law grants the judge discretionary power or orders to consider the requirements of the situation or justified reasons, the judge decides on an equitable basis (Article 4 TCC). The law does not order the judge to give any discretion regarding the duration of the alimony, and to determine the duration by taking into account the requirements of the situation or justified reasons. Since the law clearly stipulates that this alimony should be indefinite, unless the party asked for limitation, limiting alimony to a certain period of time by way of using discretionary power, constitutes a clear violation of the law" [7]. Şıpka argues that literal interpretation of Article 175 TCC grants the judge with the discretionary power and adds that "removing the indefiniteness of poverty alimony with an amendment in law and introducing an upper time limit shall lead to unfair results in most of the concrete cases. Especially in our country, considering the classical mother model where due to reasons such as the wife being a housewife, being under-educated, not even being literate, having to take care of the children, and being deprived of the financial means to make a living after marriage that lasted for many years and ended in divorce, the possibility of receiving indefinite alimony should also not be abolished" [11].

Another view supports the application of the *clean-break principle*. This principle means the termination of the ties with the end of the marriage and the severance of the economic relations of the parties [9, 14]. With the divorce, the property rights are shared at once and the bond of the spouses ends economically [14]. In the clean-break principle, alimony is regarded only as a temporary support given to the spouse who will suffer financial difficulties, until he/she achieves economic independence [14]. Akipek Öcal states that with the dissolution of the marriage, a structure should be established in which the spouses can terminate the social and economic relationship between them as soon as possible and underlines that the indefinite request for alimony should be subject to certain conditions [12]. Despite the obligation of solidarity, the necessity of individuals to earn their own living cannot be ignored. When the marriage ends, the parties should also need to separate their ties [15]. Although the literal interpretation of Article 175 TCC supports the indefinite order of poverty alimony, solely literal interpretation should be avoided; teleological interpretation, by way of applying the clean-break principle, leads to the conclusion that the poverty alimony could be limited in time in accordance with the needs of the alimony creditor [15]. Under the practice of Turkish Court of Cassation, the existence of the obligation to pay poverty alimony is subject to the continuation of the state of poverty of the alimony creditor. Such practice is regarded as a reflection of the clean-break principle. Although this principle is not explicitly mentioned in the court decisions, it is not completely ignored [15].

From another perspective, the basis of the discussion on the duration of the alimony is related to the question of whether Article 175 TCC is of mandatory nature [11, 12, 16]. By way of literal interpretation, it is argued that this provision is not mandatory, and thus, the judge has discretion [17]. According to Dural/Öğüz/Gümüş, Article 175 TCC, in its current wording, does not grant the judge with discretionary power with respect to duration [9]. The authors also argue that, *de lege ferenda*, the clean break principle should be adopted under Turkish law by amending the law,

“provided that the principle of post-marital solidarity is not weakened excessively by giving undue weight to the principle of ending the bond between spouses as soon as possible, given the economic and social situation of women in Turkey” [9]. Another view underlines that “(...) there should be no harm in requesting alimony indefinitely as long as the duration of the marriage is considered and the alimony request of the party, who has the capacity to work but violates the principle of honesty by choosing not to work arbitrarily, is prevented” [6]. Oktay-Özdemir states the need to develop some criteria to help in the realization of equity when determining the amount and duration of poverty alimony. Introducing such criteria by law will serve to eliminate the differences in application. In particular, objective criteria such as the duration of the marriage, the distribution of duties in marriage, age, health status, and the sacrifices made within the marriage need to be taken into consideration [18].

## **6. Our view on the duration of poverty alimony**

At the heart of debate on the “time limit/indefiniteness” of poverty alimony lies a critic question of interpretation. How to interpret Article 175 TCC? Does it grant power of discretion to the judge in terms of duration? As in Swiss law, introducing criteria for determining the duration is another option. Although the Swiss Civil Code is considered as the reference source for Turkish law, it is important to note that solutions for problems in real life is searched at abstract legal rules. Social structures and dynamics of society can justify different legal solutions. While the legal problems of different societies are basically similar, the proposed solutions may differ. In this study, we prefer to approach the debate from this perspective and with respect to the term “indefinite”, to question the applicability of clean-break principle.

Under Swiss law, the postmarital alimony obligation also includes the maintenance of the children [8]. In a sense, it provides support for both the care of children and the economic maintenance of the spouse. In Swiss law, there is a 10/16 rule for child support. According to this rule, the spouse with custody can work half-day when the child turns to the age of 10 and can work full-time when the child turns to the age of 16 [8, 19]. The amount of alimony is determined accordingly. It is also stated that postmarital alimony is gradually losing its importance in Swiss law since spousal support is not requested in more than 70% of divorce suits [8].

Under Turkish legal system, for the postmarital stage, there is a separate type of alimony for children. For Türkiye, 2022 divorce data of TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute) shows that while the number of divorced couples was 175.779 in 2021, it was 180.954 in 2022. When the divorce cases are analyzed according to the duration of marriage, it is seen that 32.7% of the divorces in 2022 occur within the first 5 years of marriage, and 21.6% within the 6–10 years of marriage [20]. Considering the employment rates according to TUIK data, the employment rate of women is less than half of men. According to the results of the survey on household labor force, the rate of employed people aged 15 and over in 2021 was 45.2%. This rate is 28.0% for women and 62.8% for men [21].

A research conducted on a database containing judicial decisions regarding the demand for poverty alimony between 2012 and 2019 reports that when the first 83 decisions were examined, it was not understood whether the request for alimony was made by female or male spouse due to the use of the phrase plaintiff-defendant in 16 decisions; in the rest of the decisions, it was seen that the request for alimony was made by the female spouse. Accordingly, it is seen that under Turkish Law, the debate

with respect to indefiniteness of the poverty alimony is basically stemming from the request of the female spouse [17].

In jurisdictions that have abandoned the principle of fault in divorce law, poverty alimony has started to be questioned. Imposing alimony on the non-faulty spouse for life time is discussed [14]. Poverty alimony is one of the financial consequences of divorce; however, regardless of the fault requirement in divorce law, the poverty alimony does not qualify as “compensation”. This justifies why the obligation to pay poverty alimony is independent of fault. The fault is of importance only for the request; the requesting spouse must be either faultless or less at fault in the divorce.

We support that Article 175 TCC should be read in conjunction with the following provision. According to Article 176 TCC, “(...) *The pecuniary compensation or alimony that is decided to be paid in the form of annuity is automatically terminated in the event of the remarriage of the creditor or the death of one of the parties; if the creditor lives as if he/she is de facto married without official marriage or the state of poverty ceases or he/she leads dishonourable life, it is abolished by a court decision. The judge may decide to increase or decrease the income in cases where the financial situation of the parties changes or when equity requires it. The judge may, upon request, decide how much the material compensation or alimony that is decided to be paid in the form of annuity will be paid in the coming years according to the social and economic conditions of the parties*”.

The conditions stipulated under Article 175 TCC and grounds for abolishment set forth in Article 176 TCC lead us to conclude that obligation to pay poverty alimony does not necessarily last for lifetime. The Court held that (Y2HD, 14.01.2013, 2012/13534 E., 2013/264 K.) under Article 175 TCC, poverty alimony cannot be ordered in favor of the spouse who has more income [7] or (Y2HD, 14.01.2013, 2012/13540 E., 2013/268 K.) with a similar economic situation [7]. Also, it was decided that (Y2HD, 06.05.2014, 2013/28754 E., 2014/10439 K.) “*From the investigation and the evidence gathered, it is understood that both parties work in textiles. It was accepted by the court that the plaintiff (woman) is working. Considering that the plaintiff is working and the income levels of the parties are close to each other, it is not correct to order alimony for the benefit of the plaintiff (woman), since the plaintiff (woman) will not fall into poverty by divorce and the conditions of Article 175 have not been fulfilled*” [22]; and (Y2HD, 16.10.2019, 2019/2007 E., 2019/10211 K.) “*according to the economic and social situation research conducted by the court, it is understood that the plaintiff (woman) works at minimum wage and the defendant (man) works at minimum wage and does not have any other income. In this case, the incomes of the plaintiff (woman) and the defendant (man) are equal. It cannot be said that the conditions of Article 175 of the Turkish Civil Code are fulfilled for the benefit of women. It was not correct to rule on alimony for the benefit of the plaintiff woman*” [22].

In the final analysis, we are of the opinion that *de lege lata*, the phrase of *indefiniteness* in Article 175 TCC, does not seem to be grossly problematic. First, Article 175 TCC states that the spouse “(...) *may request alimony indefinitely*”. By applying the principle of *in toto et pars continetur*, one may conclude that time limitation is indeed *inherent* in the scope of the word “indefinitely”. Thus, Article 175 TCC, as it stands, is suitable to read it as the alimony may be ordered either for a certain period of time or without any time limit (indefinitely). Secondly, the judge, by exercising its discretionary power, should evaluate the request for poverty alimony by taking into consideration objective criteria such as the duration of the marriage, the requesting party’s capacity to work, and the principle of honesty (Article 2 TCC). Third, the word “indefinite” does not mean “lifetime”. Article 175 TCC is subject to Article 176 TCC. If the conditions of Article 176 TCC are met, the obligation to pay poverty alimony

is removed by court decision. Taking into account all of these should significantly contribute to reaching a fair balance in each concrete case.

## **7. Conclusion**


It is not easy to bring a sharp end to family relations. Despite the legal dissolution of a family law relationship, due to its nature, it inevitably continues to have antegrade influences. Poverty alimony is such a legal institution of family law. The underlying reason is the partial continuation of financial solidarity despite the termination of the marriage. The crucial question is, in terms of time, to what extent should it continue? For how long is fair to lay this burden on the spouse despite his/her lack of fault in divorce? The duration of poverty alimony has long been controversial in Turkish law. The former article 144 of TCC was criticized because it limited the request of poverty alimony with one-year period; the current Article 175 TCC is again criticized since it allows for indefinite request. In 2012, the Turkish Constitutional Court had ruled that the phrase “*undefinite*” is not unconstitutional since it is not to be understood as a lifetime obligation. Indeed, at the heart of this debate lies a critical question of interpretation. When the conditions of request under Article 175 TCC are considered and read together with the grounds for abolishment under Article 176 TCC, the limits of the poverty alimony become more clear. The authors of this paper also suggest an alternative way of interpretation to the phrase of *indefiniteness*; due to the *principle of in toto et pars continetur*, it may be concluded that the provision itself inherently grants power to judge to order alimony for a certain period of time.

## **Author details**

Burcu G. Özcan Büyüktanır\* and Dila Okyar  
Faculty of Law, Hacettepe University, Department of Civil Law, Ankara, Turkey

\*Address all correspondence to: bgozcan@hacettepe.edu.tr

## **IntechOpen**

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] Akipek J, Akıntürk T, Ateş D. Aile Hukuku. İstanbul: Beta; 2021
- [2] Cambridge Dictionary. Available from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/alimony> [Accessed: May 15, 2023]
- [3] Zevkliler A, Acarbey B, Gökyayla E. Zevkliler Medeni Hukuk. Ankara: Seçkin; 1999
- [4] Kılıçoğlu A. Aile Hukuku. Ankara: Turhan; 2019
- [5] Kulaklı E. Yoksulluk Nafakası ve Yoksulluk Nafakasının Süresi Bağlamında Bir Mukayeseli Hukuk İncelemesi. İstanbul Medipol Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi. 2018;5(2):237-268
- [6] Erdem M, Makaracı-Başak A. Aile Hukuku. Ankara: Seçkin; 2022
- [7] Gençcan Ö. Türk Medeni Kanunu Yorumu, C. 1. Ankara: Yetkin; 2021
- [8] Schwenzer I, Keller T. Recent developments in Swiss family law, public and private international law. Bulletin. 2015;35(1):1-28
- [9] Dural M, Öğüz T, Gümüş M. Aile Hukuku, C.III. İstanbul: Filiz; 2022
- [10] Feyzioğlu FN. Aile Hukuku. İstanbul: İstanbul Hukuk; 1979
- [11] Şıpka Ş. Yoksulluk Nafakasının Süresine Eleştirel bir Yaklaşım. In: Güllüoğlu Altun Y, editor. Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Hatemi'ye 80.Yıl Armağanı. İstanbul: On İki Levha; 2018. pp. 15-20
- [12] Akipek Öcal Ş. Yoksulluk Nafakası Kavramı ve Hukuki Niteliği. In: Tuzcuoğlu T, Cihan AH, editors. Yargıtay Kararları Işığında Güncel Medeni Hukuk Problemleri Sempozyumu Bildirileri. İstanbul: On İki Levha; 2019. pp. 203-211
- [13] Reyhani Yüksel S. Yoksulluk Nafakası ve Süre Sorunu. NKÜ Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi. 2021;2:485-509. DOI: 10.51562/nkuhukuk.2021226
- [14] Schwenzer I. Das clean break-Prinzip im nachelichen Vermögensrecht. Vol. 4. Bern: FamPra.ch; 2000. pp. 609-628
- [15] Kocabaş G. Evlilik Sonrası Dayanışma İlkesi ve Bu İlkenin Sınırı Olarak Clean Break İlkesi Doğrultusunda Yoksulluk Nafakasını Belirleyici Ölçütler. İstanbul: MÜHF-HAD, C.19, S.1; 2013. pp. 357-392
- [16] Özdemir H. Yoksulluk Nafakasında Süresizlik Sorunu, Türk Medeni Hukuku Çerçevesinde Aile Hukukunda Güncel Meseleler Sempozyumu. İstanbul: On İki Levha; 2021. pp. 23-42
- [17] Baş S, Özcan N. Yoksulluk Nafakasında Süre Sorununun Anayasal ve Medeni Hukuk Boyutuyla Tartışılması ve Bir Öneri Olarak Boşanma Tazminatı. ASBUHFD. 2022;1:328-383. DOI: 10.47136/asbuhfd.1059706
- [18] Oktay-Özdemir S. Türk Hukukunda Boşanma Sisteminde Revizyon İhtiyacı. Public and Private International Law Bulletin. 2015;35(1):29-46
- [19] Hausheer H, Geiser T, Aebi-Müller R. Das Familienrecht des Schweizerischen Zivilgesetzbuches. Bern: Stämpfli; 2007
- [20] Turkish Statistical Institute. Available from: <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/>

Bulten/Index?p=Evlenme-ve-Bosanma-Istatistikleri-2022 [Accessed: May 15, 2023]

[21] Turkish Statistical Institute.  
Available from: <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Kadin-2022> [Accessed: May 15, 2023]

[22] Lexpera. Available from: [www.lexpera.com.tr](http://www.lexpera.com.tr) [Accessed: May 15, 2023]

---

Section 4

**At the Time of Crises**

---





# Refugee Camps in Greece: Conditions in Reception Facilities on Gender Perspective

*Foteini Marmani*

## Abstract

An attempt to objectively and comprehensively record the modern living reality of asylum seekers based on their own perspective and the views expressed by the academic and administrative staff employed at accommodation structures has been made. Emphasis is placed on women, and the common problems they encounter regardless of gender, but also on individual differences identified between female and male asylum seekers. Therefore, the present paper focuses on the living conditions in temporary accommodation centres and on the existing social relationship structures being shaped at such centres, with special emphasis on the dimension of gender (single women, single mothers). The aim of this paper was, then, to collect documented material and evidence on current practices concerning specific vulnerable groups, on the grounds that such groups still remain in obscurity to some extent and their survival is hugely dependent on individual initiatives and occasional assistance received. Our motive was the lack of comparative data, drawing attention to specific vulnerable groups in temporary accommodation centres and hostels in Athens and Lavrion and to their living conditions. Consequently, the realization of this research, for the implementation of which a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has been employed, is considered to be a minimum prerequisite for the creation of a humanitarian policy addressing refugees in Greece, as a Member State of the EU. The findings highlight the concerns about the service quality including: (1) the lack or variations in the frequency of funding, (2) the absence of women's participation in decision-making as their responsibilities residing in these centres usually fulfill their "stereotypical" roles: child care, cooking and cleaning, (3) the difficulties in recording/identifying specific incidents are mainly due to a lack of knowledge and a lack of staff, which is typical of the centres surveyed by Doctors Without Borders in Europe, but also due to the fear overwhelming violent victims, preventing the disclosure of facts and contributing to the maintenance of this bleak picture of the victims. (4) the need for psychological support due to problems that can become more severe after long periods of waiting at centres due to the uncertain outcome of asylum procedures hindering their adjustment. (5) the lack of childcare provisions inhibits employment for women. In addition as the vast majority of female refugees are poorly educated and cannot easily find a (legitimate) job—until after a long stay—they basically get employed at the informal home-based work sector and/or at other marginalized sectors of the labour market. The present research may contribute to the: (a) provision of

a clear-cut picture of the gender dimension within the refugee context, (b) identification of the female refugee population's needs and the detection of the problems they encounter, (c) the evaluation of the effectiveness of services and structures supporting refugees and (d) exploitation of results and findings for policy design.

**Keywords:** gender, asylum seekers, needs, women, refugees, staff

## **1. Introduction**

A key finding with reference to refugee and asylum seeker reception centres, undoubtedly, involves the location of such centres and, by extension, the place destined for their temporary settlement in our country. A triple typology has practically been induced: to the present moment, urban, semi-urban and rural centres are present. The criterion for the first and third group is rather obvious, provided that both the “city” and the “rural area” respectively, as socio-cultural contexts of living within traditional conceptual approaches of the terms, presently constitute widely acknowledged matters. On the other hand, suburban areas are those whose population does not exceed the number of permanent residents. The National Centre for Social Solidarity in Thessaloniki and the Sperhiada centre used to be active in the past, as well as the Lavrion centre, constituting one of the structures where our research has been conducted, embody three typical cases rendering the identified groups [1] more concrete.

Centres falling under the first group, are, by necessity, all housed in blocks of flats, old buildings, which are considerably damaged and lack maintenance provisions; they are devoid of special areas for joint activities and arranged in multiple layers that render their internal functionality problematic. Centres included in the second group are usually located in open spaces fronted by building perimeter and include space in the courtyard or adjacent sites for exercising collective action; they also encompass special areas allotted to the administrative and other departments of the centre, a separate classroom for children or adults, clinic and so on. The infrastructure of centres being part of the third group, however, is not elaborated on within the context of the present paper and therefore a comprehensive reference to it was deemed unnecessary.

It is worth mentioning that, under the restrictive measures taken by the European Union, existing centres are transferred from urban to rural areas, close to their external borders or new centres are established in them. Such measures are also roughly applied by the new member-states of the European Union such as Poland, where refugee centres are founded in its sparsely populated southeastern side (Pontlach), Slovenia and Lithuania [1].

A diversity of heterogeneity categories is evident in centres, comprising ethnic heterogeneity (with reference to the nation-state), political (political differences, given that political refugees are primarily involved), cultural (different culture and civilization), social (directly related to legal and economic heterogeneity) and economic, legal heterogeneity (resulting from the legal recognition and exemplifying an existential character), ascribing the corresponding status to refugees. Collective heterogeneity can also be witnessed (with the family serving as a central match point, e.g. a single-parent family or another type of grouping, e.g. coming from the same village) and individual heterogeneity (refugees are usually sorted by gender or age). The last heterogeneity category is sociologically explained by reference to

the “ascribed status” (e.g. sex—woman, race—black) and the “achieved status” (e.g. education— lawyer) [1].

Security provision should be a prioritized service offered to refugees at each centre. The latter feel very insecure and are taken over by feelings of persecution; they fear the unknown, which is justified considering their living conditions in their home country and their attempt to escape from this country. These concerns are related to their effort to preserve their “mental health” and health “care”, and should be provided at these centres. Therefore, the ground should be laid so that further health problems do not emerge and unpleasant situations can be prevented (e.g. preventive medicine-medical examinations).

Furthermore, centres’ contribution to finding a job, and thus to providing the potential for a dignified living, is critical. The provision of legal support by the centres is imperative, given the insufficient knowledge of the language, ignorance of the prerequisites demanded by the bureaucratic certification system, the multiple endogenous pathogenic nature of the Greek bureaucratic system, the feeling of insecurity among refugees and the inability to move. The centres’ staff contribution may lead to the acquisition of one’s legal status. Besides, the assistance provided by psychologists and specialized personnel could help resolve refugees’ individual and family problems and adopt a more positive approach to this population.

Another significant provision could involve the interconnection of refugees with the world outside the Greek territory through the use of mobile phones to communicate with people in their families or via satellite television to learn what is happening in their country of origin.

Finally, learning the Greek language is a key concern for refugees and ensuring classrooms and teaching staff is remarkably crucial. Likewise, the provision of opportunities for cultural expression, religious worship and entertainment are also considered fundamental.

In Greece and less often in the rest of Europe, two types of administrative detention centres can be identified. More specifically, we come across:

- closed centres for illegal immigrants who are under administrative detention,
- open centres for asylum seekers (usually people who apply for asylum, while already detained in closed centres, do not move to open centres but remain detained in the closed ones instead).

In relation to the number of detention centres (closed) in Europe, intended for illegal immigrants under administrative detention in Morocco, Belgium, Malta, Greece and other countries, the number of reception centres (open), as often referred to, is not huge.

Open centres to accommodate Third World nationals are usually part of the package of measures for asylum seekers, or more generally for the Third World nationals requesting international protection.

The Doctors without Borders [2] research revealed the existence of different types of open centres for asylum seekers in some countries, displaying the following functions:

- reception: detection of the category the foreigner belongs to, initial examination of acceptance in the process of applying for asylum—reception and accommodation of asylum seekers during the asylum procedure.

- return preparation for those whose application for asylum has been rejected.

In this way, in Denmark, for instance, asylum seekers are initially sent to reception centres, then to accommodation centres and eventually to return centres in case their application is rejected.

The centres are located in different places, but while this research was being conducted, several ones were reported to be found in relatively isolated areas: some industrial areas on the outskirts of cities, but also in the suburbs, in places that are difficult to access. In many countries, geographic isolation (centres located in sparsely populated areas, even in forests) and difficulties in accessing some of the centres (extremely poor public transport) constitute real problems for asylum seekers.

As being the case for closed centres, a number of open centres were operated in existing facilities that were “recycled” to accept asylum seekers. Problems arise in readjusting the use of facilities, designed for other uses that sometimes differ greatly from social housing ones. Except for delaying asylum seekers’ integration into the host society, distant centres geographically create the feeling of being marginalized and abandoned, thus not meeting the demands of a dynamic individual and collective approach.

The concentration of a large number of asylum seekers in large centres for long periods of time appears to trigger problems such as conflictual relations, devoid of humanism, both within centres and outside of them, considering that there are countries whose indigenous population is hostile to the concentration of foreigners in their country, due to its not being familiar with people of different origins and cultures.

Numerous cases of psychological depression have, therefore, been observed to a greater extent at distant and/or large centres. On the assumption that people can be kept in reception centres for several months, or even years, physical conditions can have a significant influence on the quality of the residents’ lives. When these conditions are not adapted to their needs or deteriorate, they can damage personal or family relationships irreparably and create or exacerbate vulnerable situations due to problems comprising lack of privacy, violence and so on. Excessive restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement encourage residents’ withdrawal and isolation, who may feel that they are kept unfairly “locked”. This is considered to be an additional obstacle impeding residents’ smooth integration into the host society.

Throughout the studies conducted [3], the fact that women require special attention because of their greater vulnerability to different types of violence within centres has been highlighted. The issue of domestic violence has already been mentioned. This type of violence is exceptionally difficult to identify, as it is aided by the lack of privacy while the way of living at the centres due to overcrowding and other factors appears to cause tension and multiple problems. The difficulty emerging in identifying incidents of violence and sexual abuse against women was reported throughout our research. Single women, living in extremely vulnerable situations, are greatly exposed to various forms of abuse, especially sexual ones. Such risks were observed in countries such as Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The risk of violence in general and the risk of violence against women in particular increases as a result of the large number of single, not engaged in activities, and isolated men at these centres.

Conducting a comparative review of the reception status and conditions for asylum seekers in selected European countries, it could be argued that attempts to harmonize the reception system for asylum seekers in European countries, could definitely be attributed to existent, significant differences that can decisively

impact the distribution of “asylum demand” to various Member States of the European Union. However, such divergences and disparities cannot be utterly eliminated, since internal conditions, geographical and transportation data, the standard of living, the level of social benefits, unemployment problems, problems related to crime/public safety and so on vary greatly in different regions of the continent.

With reference to Greece and based on research carried out by the Doctors without Borders [2] it can be concluded that immigrants’ living conditions at the detention centres are unacceptable, hygiene and the distribution of relief items are inadequate, there is a lack of information, interpretation and medical monitoring that complicate detainees’ lives. However, the situation is expected to improve as a result of new centres’ opened in areas, such as Amygdaleza, Corinth and in other parts of Greece, provided, of course, that the conditions and procedures for foreigners’ placement in these areas will be appropriate.

As regards asylum seekers’ accommodation structures, which were thoroughly investigated by Tsovili and Voutira [3], it is indicated that there are no provisions for psychological care and medical examinations, as well as legal support. Training is essentially confined to seminars teaching the Greek language while job finding is not actively encouraged. Furthermore, there is no participatory approach to guests and none of the centres has presented awareness-raising programs on intercultural issues. Leisure activities are also limited and the guests’ psychology is poor due to insecurity and anxiety while no restrictions are exerted on their exercising their religious duties and the freedom of movement. The main problem is the lack of stable funding, which generated changes to service quality.

As for the specific problems women are faced with, the maintenance of their stereotypical roles, involving lack of participation in decision-making and limited access to higher education and vocational training programs, is observed. Further, women’s specific health needs are only met when requested and their employment is not actively promoted.

The data collected for the current host practices relating to single women and female-headed single-parent families hosted at the:

- a. Temporary Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers in Lavrion, under the auspices of the Greek Red Cross,
- b. Medecins Du Monde hostel,
- c. Roof program (autonomous pensions) run by the Praxis NGO,
- d. newly established Refugee Shelter of the Arsis NGO and
- e. recently founded E.K.Po.S.P.O. Nostos Hostel during the period between November 2011 and March 2012.

The research hypotheses for the questionnaires were formulated based on the research objectives, the relevant literature and the knowledge and experience we have acquired as regards the organization and operation of asylum seekers’ temporary hosting structures. Two central research hypotheses have been proposed with reference to the questionnaire addressed to the professionals (structures’ academic and administrative staff):

- a. The Guiding Principles of the UN High Commissioner for refugees on women's safety issues (e.g. spatial arrangements) are applied but there is a lack of counseling/psychological support within all structures; participatory approach to asylum seekers and adoption of intercultural programs are non-existent.
- b. Lack of funding, as a major problem structures are faced with, involving less quality services to asylum seekers and minimal provisions for people in need of financial assistance.

## **2. Research methodology**

The research methodology followed comprises a set of research tools, both quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative and quantitative methods share common ground in that the collection of accurate information on social phenomena is attempted but tends to differ in terms of the type of information and the way the latter is being gathered. The combined and complementary use of quantitative and qualitative methods is considered to be the most effective methodological approach towards achieving a thorough presentation and delineation of the social reality dimensions.

There was a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, involving desk research in libraries and archives, fieldwork comprised of qualitative data collection by in-depth interviews and quantitative data collection with face-to-face interviews and structured questionnaires to be completed by the interviewees (centre management, specialized staff and asylum seekers, regardless of gender) within a time frame of 15–20 min. By means of combining open and closed-ended questions with quantitative and qualitative data analysis respectively, an effective and comprehensive approach towards social reality was attempted. Furthermore, through reconciling and combining two research methods, the in-depth interviews and the questionnaire technique—tools whose exploitation was compelling as already mentioned—have been used as part of the qualitative and quantitative approaches respectively. The in-depth interviews conducted before the quantitative interviews significantly contributed to the preparation of the structured questionnaires, which had to be stated in alignment with the particularities of the population in question. In addition, my personal involvement as a researcher and as an interpreter prevented this research work from becoming a mere compilation of typically completed questionnaires. After getting the permission of each centre, the interviews were conducted in the morning and the afternoon at the centres of Accommodation using random sampling selection of the refugees being present on the days of the visit, with a view of involving the largest possible number of residents during the period of 22/11/2011 till 20/03/2012. Each of the aforementioned techniques entails a host of advantages and disadvantages but their combined use was considered to be most effective.

The population number i.e. the total number of asylum seekers accommodated at the five centres of the research, during the period of Nov 2011–March 2012 amounts to 308 adults (66.5% males, 33.5% females) and 162 children. The total number of professionals employed by these centres is 55.

The size of sample comprised 207 asylum seekers, 89 females (42.99% and 118 (57.01%) males, coming from countries, such as Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Syria, as well as 37 professionals (scientific and administrative staff) of the structures participating in the research. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 46 years.

The sampling technique applied was stratified random sampling, where the population under study was divided into two relevant subgroups/strata (guests hosted, professionals) and from each subgroup the sample was drawn randomly.

The research tools employed involved two differently structured questionnaires. In order to best cover different parameters and attitudes on the quantitative questionnaires, the qualitative method of three in-depth interviews preceded. With regards to the structured questionnaires, the first one was to be completed by the guests hosted at the centres and shelters and it included initially 22 questions all closed except the last, with a significant number of multiple choice questions, questions of scale. Specifically to investigate the needs of women were added four more open-ended questions, were addressed only to women.

The questionnaire addressed to the target group was structured on the following themes:

- The social and economic characteristics of the respondents.
- Their experiences in migration and arrival in Greece.
- The living conditions of women and men asylum seekers (assistance and protection from the centre and from NGOs, sense of security, nutrition issues, health and leisure) in order to make comparative approach.
- The employment of asylum seekers and their education.
- The perceptions and attitudes of asylum seekers about their life in Greece and the conditions prevailing in Greek society.

Similarly, the questionnaire addressed to the administration and clerical staff of the centre, which was answered by 37 professionals, included 29 questions, all closed except one, with a significant number of responses YES/NO and scale questions. The open-ended question asked respondents to report the three most common problems encountered in the structures when it comes to single women and women heads of families.

The questionnaire addressed to professionals is structured on the following themes:

- The benefits offered to the target group and the obligations of the guests.
- The mapping of staff knowledge about the demographics of the target group and the activities carried out and needs to be met.
- The opinion of professionals about the risks and problems faced by women asylum seekers and the difficulties of their own.

The completion of the questionnaires did not necessitate the inclusion of personal data in order to ensure participants' anonymity. To create case-appropriate research tools, the study of the UNHCR questionnaire, following the design of the UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Children and Women Refugees, was deemed necessary. Accordingly, the UNHCR interview form, whose design resembles the one of the UNHCR questionnaire, was taken into consideration while creating the interviews content.

The grounds for selecting the specific tools vary. Our decision has primarily been founded on: firstly, it's being a weighted, valid and reliable tool; secondly, it's being used in similar studies; and thirdly, the provision of a wealth of information in areas related to the content of the current research.

### **3. Findings**

Data for our analysis comes from 207 questionnaires completed by adult asylum seekers, 89 females and 118 males as well as from 37 questionnaires completed by professionals at five temporary accommodation centres for asylum seekers: at the Lavrion centre, at the Doctors of the World, Nostos, Praxis and Arsis NGOs. At the same time, professionals employed at these centres—administrative and scientific staff—were interviewed on the issue of refugees' way of living at the abovementioned structures.

Specifically, the issue of space was given prominence at the Lavrion centre, as pre-cast settlements with container houses have already been set up at a location, named Neraki, providing the bare essentials for dignified living (i.e. air conditioning, kitchen and toilets). Refugees residing in the existing facilities at the Lavrion centre do not wish their being transferred at the time being, for they consider the town to be well out of reach while their representatives have already visited the new facilities and put forth their demands (e.g. exterior lighting, fencing and so on). Based on the existing planning schemes, 80 men are to be transferred to the new settlement premises. The existence of a public transit service (public bus) every half an hour to facilitate their access to the city centre was also accentuated. At the existing building, Kurdish and Afghan asylum seekers reside in separate rooms, while single men and women live separately from their families. At the same time, the issue of stable, reliable and flexible funding was raised, in collaboration with social services, as the central problem facing the centre. In most cases, variations in financing bring about variations in service quality. The delay in granting political asylum along with the termination of welfare benefits and employment opportunities for refugees was also acknowledged. Finally, the insufficient staff catering for asylum seekers' needs, embodies an additional adversity.

The most significant problem all centres are confronted with involves the lack of funding. With reference to the Arsis centre, the incorporation of educational activities such as learning the Greek language, supporting teaching for preschool and school-age children, opportunities for creative play in children etc. were reported. The majority of such activities are performed on a voluntary basis in consultation with stakeholders and the municipality. A range of services including legal support, updates received from employment counselors, and psychological support both inside and outside the centre in direct contact with professionals are offered while the role social services hold on families' responsibilities-organization, medical issues and, in general, the satisfaction of refugees' needs is of tantamount importance. Recurrent problems encompass the absence of permanent doctors resulting in medical care being offered at hospitals with interpreters' unavoidable mediation and the coverage of guests' fundamental needs or provision of sanitation supplies through the centres' own resources and donations.

The problem emerging from the lack of funding is discussed with the Doctors of the World staff, along with the issues of the provision of relief items and the termination of welfare benefits. Guests are temporarily hosted in the Doctors of the World



centre for a short period of time (2–4 months). Families residing in the facilities of the same centre, are placed on a different floor from the one single men or men suffering from problems are staying at (victims of torture, damaged health); there is a specially designed space destined for creative activity (Greek language courses, craft workshops and so on). Refugee children attend schools situated in the area (cross-cultural).

At the Nostos centre the lack of staff (auxiliary, scientific) is reported as a major problem and refugees' participation in the weekly scheduled work of the centre is also noticed. The Nostos centre provides legal support to refugees.

At the Praxis centre socially vulnerable women take precedence over the rest of the guests while cases of psychiatric diseases and unaccompanied minors cannot be attended to. The integration program adopted is biannual and rests on learning the language and seeking job opportunities. Single-parent families from Africa and men suffering from serious health problems are also hosted in the centre. Creative activities include individual and group sessions; the centre's spatial arrangement is dependent on the guests' different features (sex, country of origin, *etc.*). Praxis offers accommodation but meals are not provided since the independent survival and activation of refugees is set as a strategic goal by the centre. Donations for bare necessities are crucial for all centres, including Praxis. The polyclinic inside Praxis and hospitals offer their services whenever medical issues emerge. When medical incidents turn up at hospitals, the problem of not having an interpreter becomes apparent.

Our initial hypothesis is that hosting structures share common problems, such as stable funding, leading to staff strikes—similar to the one the employees at the Lavrion centre went on due to long-term deprivation of their legal earnings—or hunger strikes that asylum seekers at the same centre embark on, is verified. Besides, staff shortages and lengthy asylum procedures hold the centres' work back.

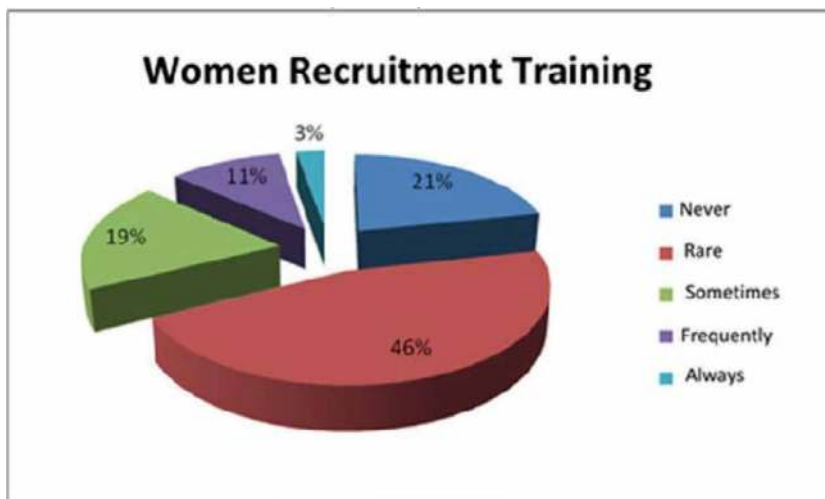
The centre's staff was encouraged to respond to the same questionnaire, containing a set of 32 open and closed-ended questions. The total number of respondents was 37, including 7 from the Doctors of the World, 6 from Nostos, 9 from Praxis, 7 from Arsis and 8 from the Lavrion centre.

With reference to the recruitment/training frequency, women hosted in the structures are employed as staff members during program design and implementation so that their participation in issues of their immediate interest can be prompted within the participatory approach. 46% of the respondents replied that they rarely recruit/educate women hosted in the centre (**Figure 1**).

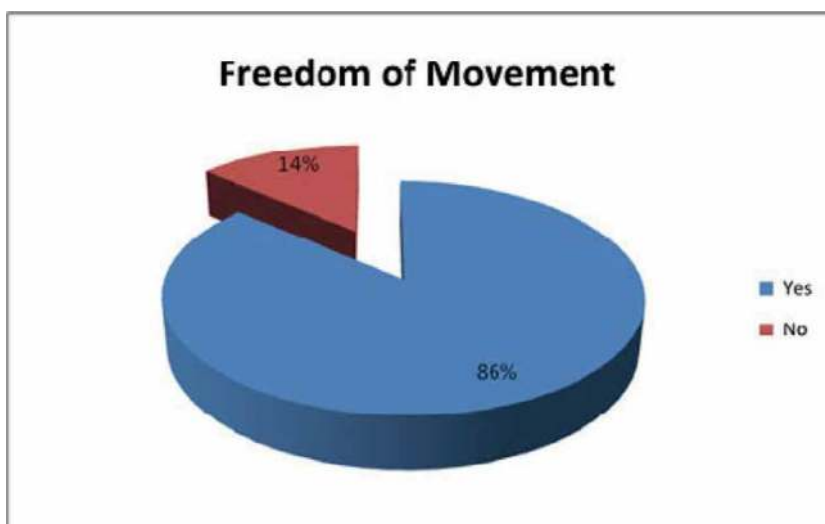
It can be argued that women's participation in decision-making is basically non-existent at the centres where the present research has been carried out. Women's responsibilities residing in these centres usually fulfill their "stereotypical" roles: child care, cooking and cleaning. Traditionally, women are not encouraged towards decision making and holding central positions in other walks of life that are equally important, encompassing their education or their children's education, professional opportunities, *etc.*

As for the respondents' view on the extent women hosted in the structures enjoy the same freedom as men, especially single or single mothers, 86% of the respondents provided a positive answer while negative responses to this question were recorded at the centres of Lavrion and Arsis (**Figure 2**).

Therefore, no restrictions on both sexes' freedom of movement are observed, a fact that could kindle the feeling of isolation and thus hinder asylum seekers' integration into the host society.



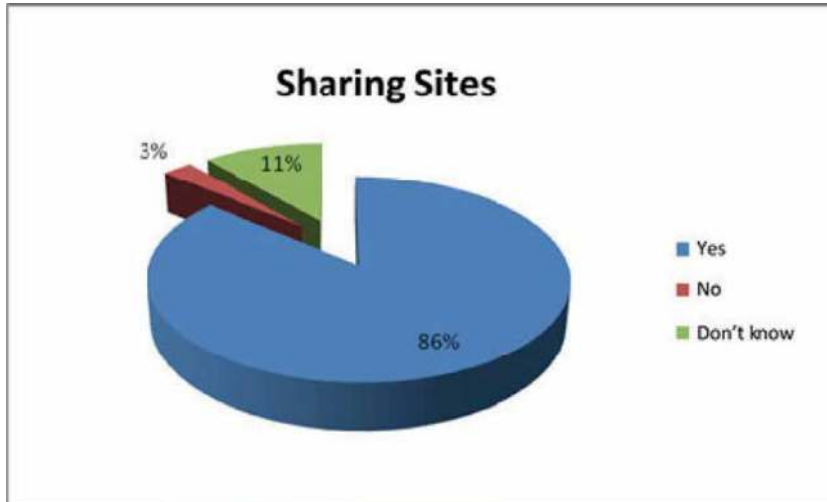
**Figure 1.** “How often are female of asylum seekers recruited/educated as staff members of the accommodation centres in order to participate in the design and application of accommodation programs?” (Footnote question #2) Sample = service provider (professionals).



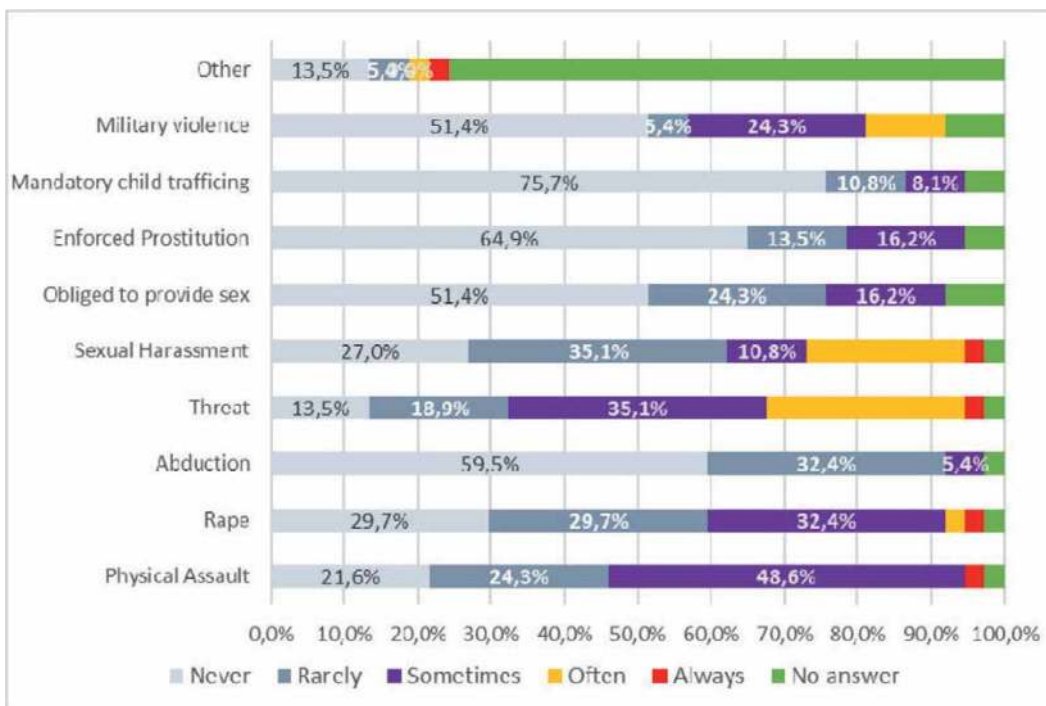
**Figure 2.** (Footnote question #3) Do female asylum seekers, especially single or single mothers hosted in the structures enjoy the same level of freedom as males? Sample = service provider (professionals).

As regards spatial arrangements at hosting structures to ensure that single women and mothers are well protected and safe, 86% of the responses of the staff gathered were positive while negative answers were only recorded at the Lavrion centre (**Figure 3**). The results demonstrate that the UNHCR guidelines are applied in support of women’s safety.

Moreover, as evident in **Figure 4** based on the low percentage of reported incidents, there are several difficulties in identifying the incidents of violence, such as sexual harassment against female asylum seekers, mainly due to lack of knowledge and a lack of staff, which is typical among the centres surveyed by the Doctors Without Borders in Europe, but also due to the fear overwhelming violence victims,



**Figure 3.** (Footnote question #6) Do spatial arrangements applied at the accommodation structures make female asylum seekers hosted at the centres feel safe and well protected? Sample = asylum seekers.



**Figure 4.** Question #7: At your knowledge, which one, if any, of the following incidents of violence against female asylum seekers has been identified/reported to your centre? Sample = Service provider (Professionals).

preventing the disclosure of facts and contributing to the maintenance of this bleak picture of the victims.

To the question concerning the types of women assumed to be more susceptible to prostitution or trafficking, the results generated, after having been qualitatively and quantitatively processed, are presented.

From the responses compiled, the highest percentage of respondents felt that single, underage (50%) women are more susceptible to prostitution. Single women with or without children, Afghan and African women were recorded to be at risk (it needs to be mentioned that this response was only recorded at Praxis, hosting Afghan and African women).

The initial hypothesis that single women living under exceptionally precarious conditions, are principally exposed to various forms of abuse, especially sexual one is verified. These risks are also mentioned in the Doctors without Borders [2] research for countries such as Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

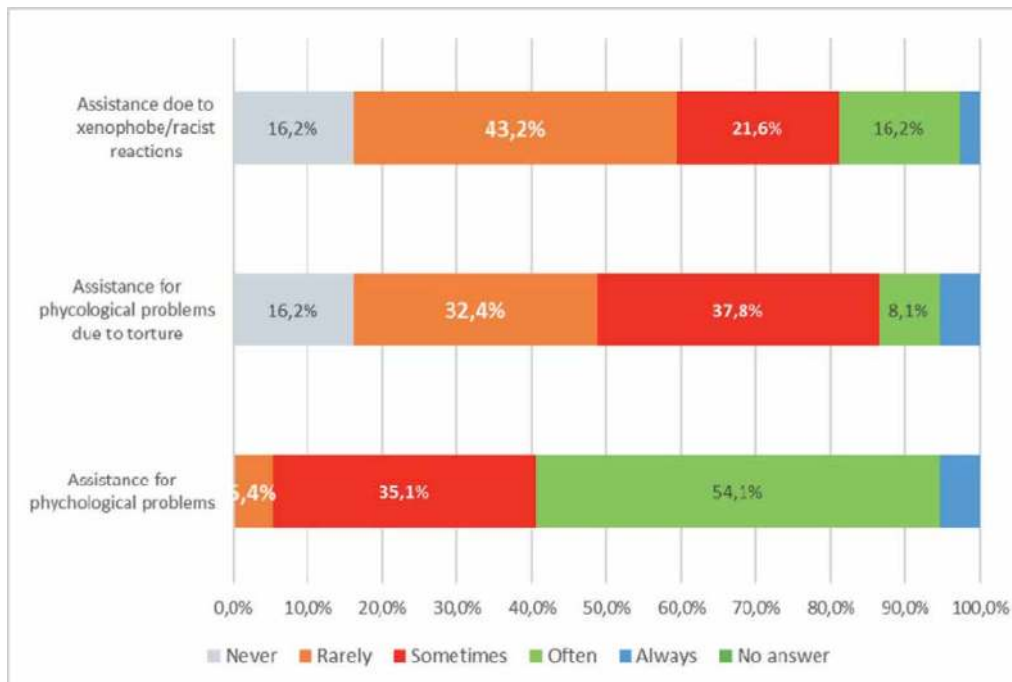
With reference to instances of single women or mothers seeking help to face psychological and adjustment problems, serious psychological problems stemming from torture or sexual abuse, and problems due to xenophobic and racist reactions, it is revealed that:

As far as the request for treatment for psychological/adjustment problems is concerned, the majority of respondents replied that such instances are a recurrent phenomenon (54%, **Figure 5**).

In regard to the request for treatment for serious psychological problems stemming from torture or sexual abuse, the majority of respondents replied that the appearance of such instances is quite regular (38%, **Figure 5**).

In regard to the request for troubleshooting these xenophobic and racist reactions the majority of respondents replied that such instances are rare (43%, **Figure 5**).

As a consequence, our initial hypothesis, assuming that asylum seekers, especially women, are in need of psychological support due to problems that can become more severe after long periods of waiting at centres and due to the uncertain outcome of asylum procedures hindering their adjustment, is confirmed.

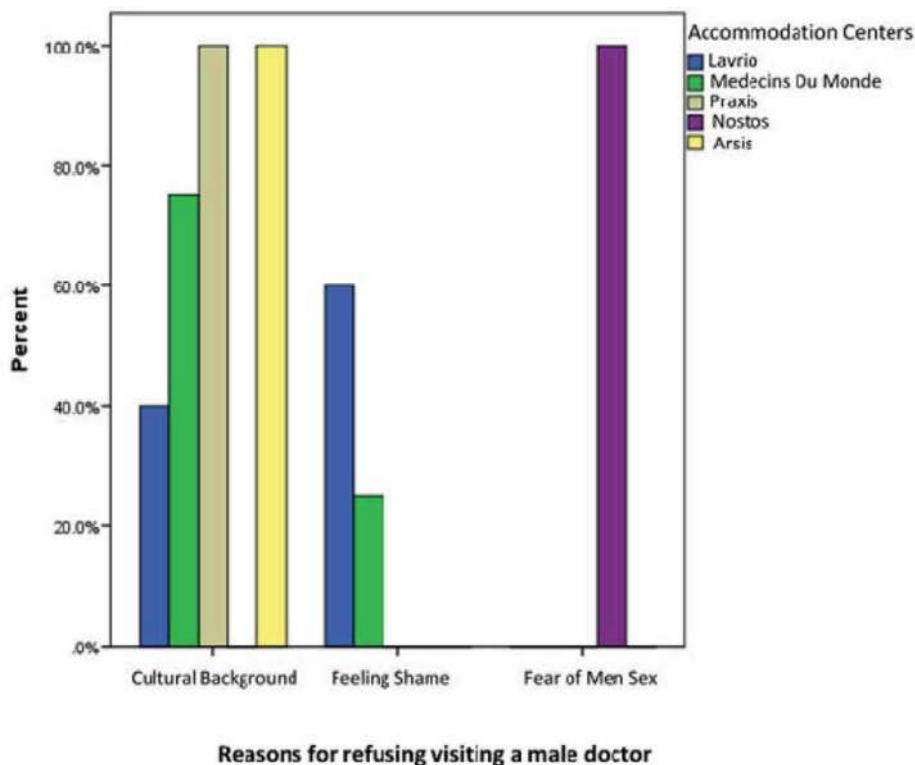


**Figure 5.** Question #15: At your knowledge, which one, if any, of the following type of psychological type of assistance has been recorded after a request from female asylum seekers hosted at the centre? Sample = 37 Service providers (Professionals).

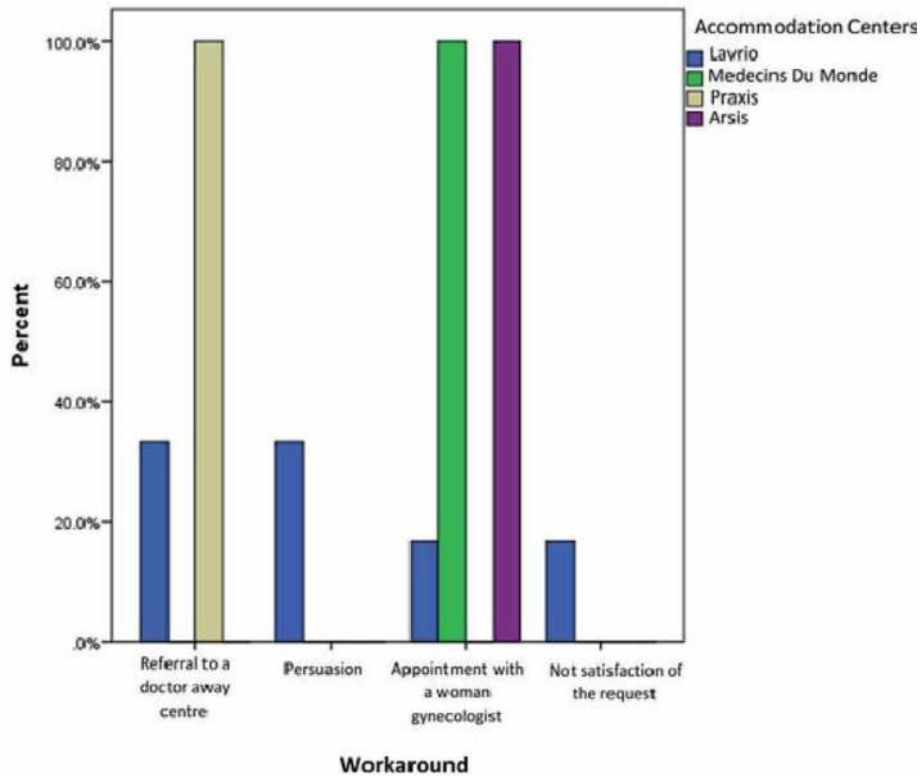
Professionals were, then, urged to indicate the reasons for women's refusal to visit a male doctor and identify the ways they handled such a phenomenon. Their responses were qualitatively processed and essentially involved the cultural background, fear of the male sex and shame. As for effective management ways, the latter encompass visiting a doctor outside the centre, persuasion procedures and appointments with female doctors and avoiding granting the request.

Cultural background emerges as the principal reason for refusing to visit a male doctor at 74% (**Figure 6**), while the typical approach towards handling refusal entailed female doctor appointment arrangements (54%). Not meeting the request only comes as a response from a single respondent at the Lavrion centre whereas fear of the male sex was only provided by a single respondent at the Nostos centre. Besides, as regards the Lavrion centre the most notable answers on handling the phenomenon were divided between the response provided by the external doctor and persuasion procedures (33% for each response, **Figure 7**).

Responses are principally related to different cultures and the ways disease is approached by immigrants and refugees, as well as to the different perceptions of the professionals' role in providing health services. Cultural differences among ethnic groups suggest that people perceive their physical and mental health in a different manner, potentially justifying differences in the exploitation of health services by immigrants. Quite often patients' religious and cultural identity is not respected. For instance, medical incidents occurring in Muslim women should be treated by female doctors or nurses. However, all necessary measures to meet women's demands appear to be taken at the structures in question.



**Figure 6.** (Footnote question #17) What is the reason female asylum seekers hosted ATE centres avoid/refuse to visit a male doctor? Sample = service provider (professionals).

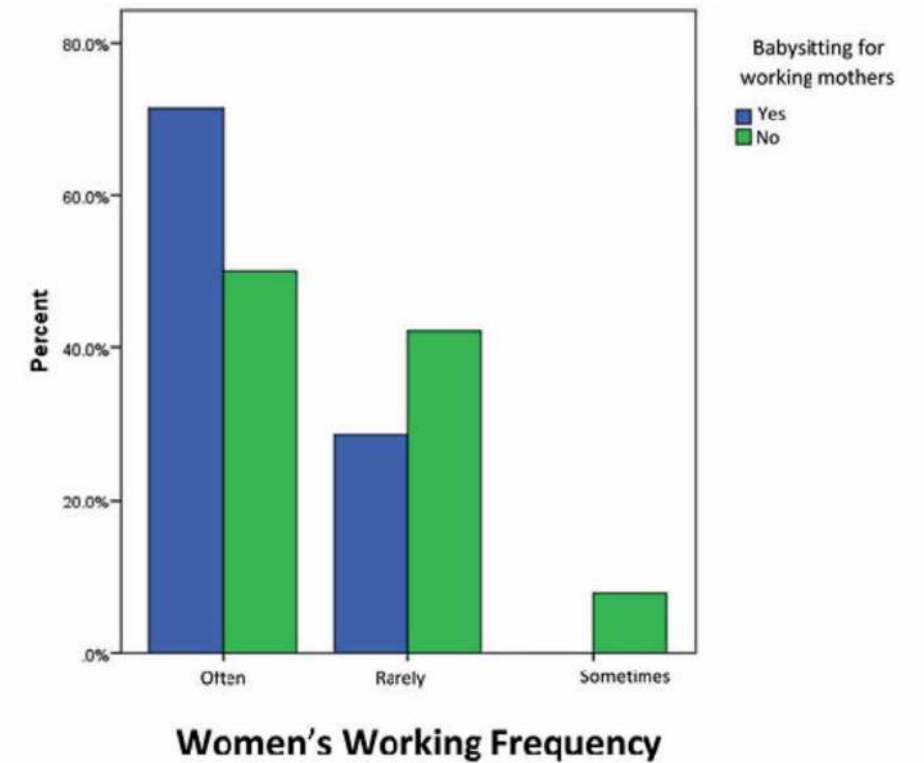


**Figure 7.** (Footnote question #18) What measures have been employed by centres to assist female asylum seekers who refuse to visit a male doctor? Sample = service provider (professionals).

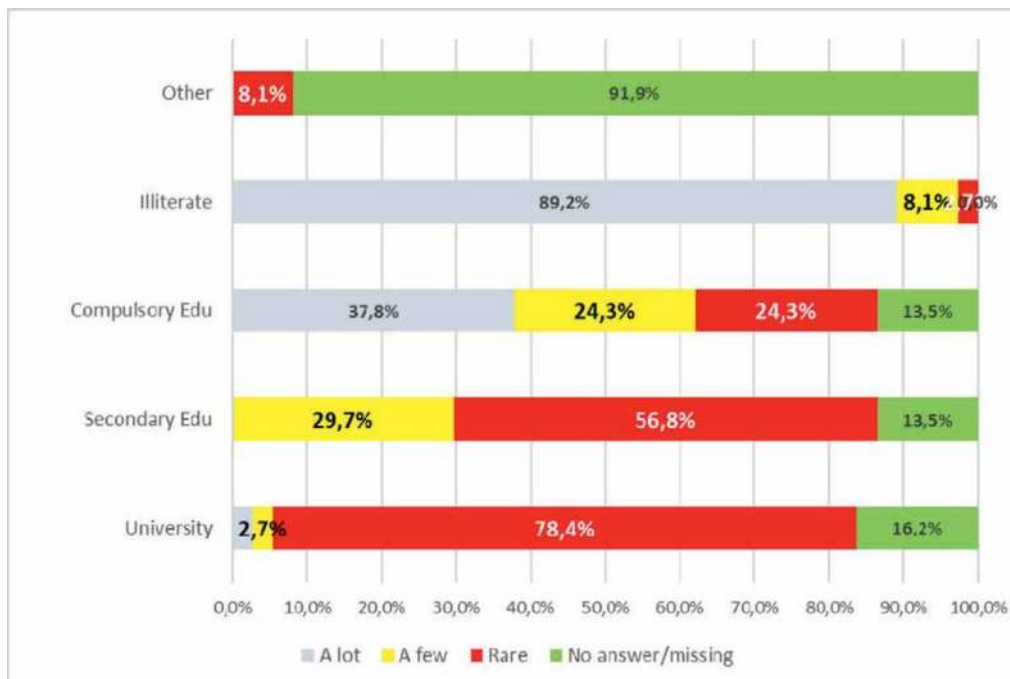
In addition, as far as provisions for looking after working mothers’ children are concerned, 76% responded that there are no childcare provisions while positive answers were provided by Praxis and Arsis. Through correlating childcare welfare with employment frequency within the structure, the existence of welfare in the cases of women who have never or rarely worked at the centre, as suggested by the respondents, was apparent (**Figure 8**). Therefore, the hypothesis that the lack of childcare provisions inhibits employment is confirmed.

As to the educational level of the majority of women hosted in the centre (university, secondary, compulsory education, illiterate, other), 2,7% of the Professional respondents maintain that only “few” women have obtained university education, 56.8% support that a limited/rare number of women have received secondary education, 37.8% suggest that several women have received compulsory education; 89.2% claim women to be illiterate and only 8.1% of respondents contend that a limited number of women have reached another education level (**Figure 9**).

It is, thus, accepted that the vast majority of female refugees ([3]: at a higher percentage than the one possessed by men refugees) are poorly educated, and cannot easily find a (legitimate) job—until after a long stay—basically get employed at the informal home-based work sector and/or at other marginalized sectors of the labour market. This is becoming more complicated due to bureaucratic, lengthy and costly recognition procedures of their Greek language knowledge, and due to the absence of stable skill certification schemes.

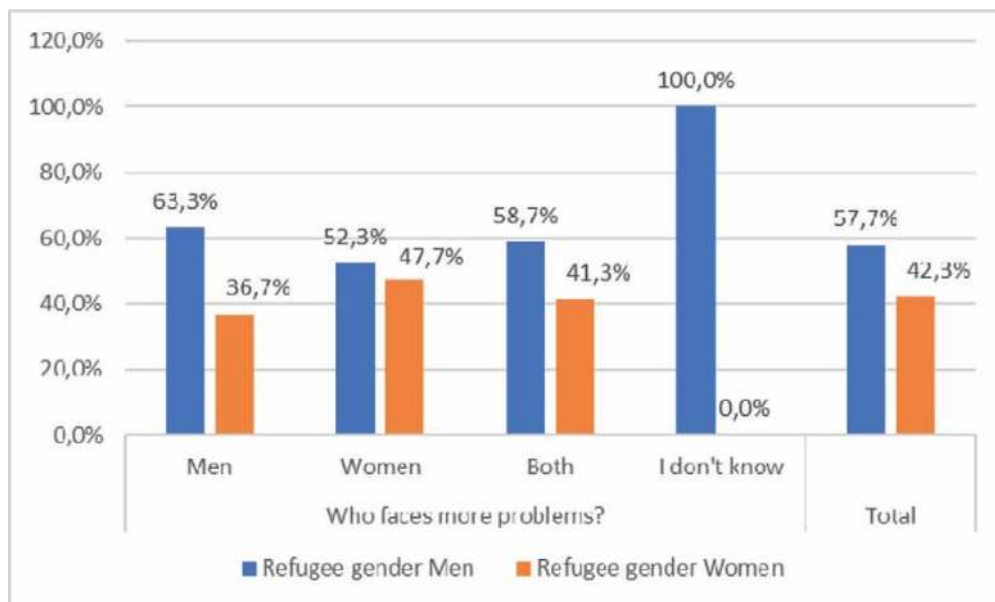


**Figure 8.**  
 (Footnote question #23) Do centres provide childhood provisions for working mothers and in what frequency?  
 Sample = service provider (professionals).



**Figure 9.**  
 Question #24: How many female asylum seekers hosted at centres, have received a University, a Secondary, a Compulsory none/Illiterate or other education level? Sample = 37 Service providers (Professionals).





**Figure 10.**  
Question #25: Who is facing the most problems? Sample = asylum seekers.

However, at this point it is worth noting that a Multicultural Centre was run under the auspices of the Red Cross at the Lavrion centre, hence contradicting the research of Tsovili and Voutira [3], which highlights the absence of intercultural sensitivity.

The last question asked to both men and women is about who they think has the most problems. From the respondents' answers, which were qualitatively processed, three options emerged, men, women and both in terms of the problems they face.

In particular, the answer that women have more problems was the most frequent answer.

As for those who said that men have more problems, the highest percentage of responses was from men. As regards those who answered that women have more problems, the highest percentage is again recorded among men, while as regards those who answered that both have problems; the highest percentage is again recorded among male respondents (**Figure 10**).

#### 4. Discussion

Research conducted by the Doctors without Borders [2] revealed the existence of different types of open centres for specific functions in some countries. In the meantime, no distinction has been drawn between reception and accommodation centres in Greece, as in other European countries.

It was then confirmed that stable, reliable and sustainable funding, as argued in the research of Tsovili and Voutira [3], as well as the lack of consistent funding bringing about changes heavily impacting the quality of services provided, are central issues all centres keep encountering. Moreover, the termination of welfare benefits for a long period of time and delays in asylum recognition procedures, perplexing staff lives in the structures, constitutes another critical issue.

As regards the participatory approach adopted within the framework of the centres' daily operation, it was found that the former is functional at an initial stage



at several structures, while in others, including the Lavrion centre, it is not applied, especially in terms of participation in food preparation, hence confirming the conclusion of non-participatory approach within the centres' daily function, drawn in the research of Tsovili and Voutira [3], thus complicating asylum seekers' lives and leading to exclusion at the same time.

The hypothesis that no centre has presented awareness-raising programs on intercultural issues or study courses, aimed at getting all guests involved and contributing to the fight against social exclusion, is refuted since a Multicultural Centre under the auspices of the Greek Red Cross was in operation until mid-2011 at the Lavrion centre.

Furthermore, women's participation in decision-making is almost non-existent at the centres examined, a fact that should not only be attributed to the lack of encouragement offered by the structures but also to each nationality's culture, verifying the initial hypothesis and the UNHCR research conclusion, along the lines of which women residing in the centres fulfill their "stereotypical" role: child care, cooking and cleaning; nonetheless, they are not encouraged towards decision making and holding central positions in other walks of life that are equally important, encompassing their education or their children's education, professional opportunities, etc.

The hypothesis that the lack of childcare services throughout the day largely prevents single women from attending language courses or other training and educational programs is confirmed, except for the Arsis NGO, where such a service is somewhat available.

Divergence of opinion between professionals and refugees as to whether women's specific health needs (gynecological, psychological) are only satisfied upon request, that is, when a woman residing in the centre is in need of a doctor or nurse, as the professionals mention that preventive control is carried out whereas the refugees support that this control takes place only in the event of being requested by women. Opinions are also divided as to the availability of informative material or training courses on health and hygiene issues.

At some centres, the existence of non-specially trained and soundly qualified in asylum issues (legal, social and psychological) staff but also the lack of knowledge of the refugees' actual needs and even difficulty in identifying violence and sexual abuse incidents have been revealed.

Controversy has arisen between refugees and professionals interviewed as to the spatial arrangements made and safeguarding women at the structures. The professionals responded that arrangements have been made so as to ensure women's protection but female asylum seekers maintain that they do not feel safe and that they face more problems than their male counterparts.

At the Lavrion centre both male and female asylum seekers are faced with the same problem, involving their reaction to being transferred to a centre just outside the city. Besides, it is confirmed that in a suburban area, such as Lavrio, women's employment/training as staff members is rare in comparison to employment opportunities offered at structures within urban centres, such as Athens [1]. The fact that employment opportunities are scarcer for female asylum seekers in semi-urban centres, such as the Lavrion centre, while the situation is the same for men regardless of their location, is also verified.

According to the staff at the structures examined, rarely has a female asylum seeker run the risk of being led to prostitution or trafficking; consequently, our hypothesis is refuted. However, as hypothesized, single women or minors are more susceptible to the risk of prostitution or trafficking. This is true for African and Afghan women at a particular structure, verifying the hypothesis of Foster, Micklin,

Newell, Kemp [4] who argue that women refugees constitute a high-risk group for violence, sexual abuse and rape. A considerable amount of women are being abused in the host country or are victims of forced prostitution (trafficking), while others have already experienced a similar personal tragedy. As stated in Mac Williams [5], women coming from countries with political or social problems, experience high levels of stress and undergo “triple victimization” by the perpetrator, the authorities (e.g. the police) and the state or other bodies, whose attitude lessens or downgrade the importance of violence episodes. Ellseberg et al. [6] report that the war in Nicaragua has led to a long history of physical violence against women, which constitutes a predictor of the victims’ subsequent emotional distress and psychological problems.

Female asylum seekers, sometimes, report experiencing physical assault, rape and threats to the staff, hence verifying our initial hypothesis; nevertheless, they have never or rarely mentioned kidnapping, provision of sexual services in exchange for receiving documents or other assistance, prostitution, child trafficking, violence associated with military authorities and finally, the mention of sexual harassment is almost unheard of, partly confirming our hypothesis.

It has been observed that women do often face psychological and adjustment problems, serious psychological problems usually as a result of torture or sexual abuse and rarely as a result of xenophobic and racist reactions. Some illustrative cases involve those of women suffering from psychological problems as an aftermath of sexual abuse and torture by military authorities during their escape, domestic violence and murder of their family members.

Furthermore, at all structures counseling services and psychological support are provided and are often used by asylum seekers while there is provision for women’s special health needs, related to gynaecologic control and pregnancy. In addition, updates on health problems can be provided according to the structures’ staff, contradicting our hypothesis.

It is confirmed that women often refuse, with minor deviations among structures, to visit a male doctor, primarily because of their cultural background and different cultural values, but also due to the fear of the male sex and feeling ashamed. On the social workers’ part, the typical way of handling women’s refusal to visit a male doctor involves setting an appointment with a female one, although persuasion procedures hold an important role in this research, especially at the Lavrion centre.

At all structures Greek language courses are provided often in collaboration with other NGOs; nonetheless, according to the staff at the structures, women enjoy equal access to educational or other programs, refuting the hypothesis that women and children do not generally have access to higher education or vocational training. Additionally, while conducting the present research, the poor educational level of women residing in the structures, as opposed to that of men, is revealed.

Finally, based on the views expressed by the staff, women, at all structures, are informed about their rights along the lines of international, European and national law structures according to the research of the Doctors Without Borders [2] no sufficient information is offered to newcomers about their legal status, the detention system and their rights, as well as the opportunity to apply for asylum at detention centres.

## **5. Conclusion**

The present research was conducted at asylum seekers’ accommodation centres during the period between November 2011 and March 2012 and has led to a series of

interesting conclusions about the gender dimension in the investigation of asylum seekers' needs.

From the perspective of the administrative and scientific staff of these structures, the lack of funding that perplexes the structures' financing, the lack of staff to some extent, the termination of welfare benefits and delays in asylum procedures constitute major problems all centres, both urban and suburban, are faced with.

The staff was not fully aware of the exact number of guests, the existence of specific provisions for women's special health needs and the free exercise of their religious duties. It was also reported that asylum seekers are rarely hired/trained in programs that benefit them directly and therefore the latter do not participate in decision-making processes.

At the Lavrion centre, women hold positions in active leading structures (such as the PKK). On all structures' premises, spatial arrangements have been made to ensure women's protection, who enjoy the same freedom as men and equal access to the bare necessities of life. The professionals do not consider women residing in the structures susceptible to prostitution and trafficking. However, minors, single women and women of African and Afghan origin run a higher risk. Additionally, women admitted to facing physical attacks when escaping their homeland.

Provisions for women's special health needs are limited to gynecological control and pregnancy but updates and informative material on hygiene issues are provided. For women not wishing to visit a male gynecologist, a visit to an external, female doctor is rescheduled. In addition, counseling services are available at all accommodation structures and are often used by women, who face a host of problems and adjustment difficulties, including psychological problems due to sexual abuse and torture by military authorities.

Moreover, child custody services are not available at the majority of hosting structures, yet Greek language courses are provided. Unemployed, poorly educated women enjoy equal access to educational programs as men. There is freedom in religious expression and women's meetings take place within the context of social groups. Their primary concern revolves around taking care of their children.

Finally, NGOs' role in providing humanitarian assistance and support is fairly positive with the majority of respondents suggesting that help in everyday life stems from donations.

In conclusion, it could be argued that the structures' role is extremely important in terms of providing assistance, counseling/psychological support, bare necessities and accommodation but the lack of knowledge evident in a small but significant proportion of professionals, the lack of childcare and work promotion services, as well as limited financing and the insufficient amount of staff employees need to be taken into consideration and addressed through new policies and proposals to the structures and the Greek state.

A number of critical suggestions associated with institutional reforms and services are mentioned below. The Greek state (and in particular the Ministry of Public Order and the Ministry of Health and Welfare) should:

- Take the minimum standards for asylum seekers' reception into consideration and turn them into international law along the lines of the EU Directive on the minimum asylum seekers' reception standards applying to Member States.
- Sign, validate and then implement European conventions and European Commission standards, while ensuring that detention procedures and asylum

seekers' reception comply with internationally recognized standards and the Greek law.

- Ensure compliance with international instruments for the protection of human rights. To further ensure the provision of statutory benefits such as the right to food, medical care, legal aid and access to interpretation services for all asylum seekers.
- Ensure the implementation of continuous updating procedures at a national level: keeping updated and educating the centres' staff on admission criteria at all entry points and reception centres.
- Provide systematic assessment and evaluation of reception conditions at the entry points of all detention and reception centres in Greece.
- Demonstrate particular interest in the growing number of African and other single female asylum seekers. Their needs should be continually evaluated and they should be supported by any means so that sexual exploitation and trafficking can be prevented.
- Adopt an approach focusing more on sex and age, during evaluation procedures and the provision of services for all asylum seekers, and on the principle of participation while exercising needs assessment.
- Recruit trained and soundly qualified in asylum issues (legal, social and psychological) staff at all reception and detention centres. Police authorities should only be accountable for ensuring security at detention centres and for receiving asylum-seeking applications; they should be properly trained to deal with asylum seekers at detention centres.
- Have the thousands of pending asylum applications settled by the newly founded Asylum Service, which should be staffed by experienced professional personnel. Refugee Committees should operate as a supplementary crisis body.

Special recommendations addressed to the Greek Government and NGOs running reception centres (minimum standards and related issues):

- Establish minimum operation standards for all centres: provision of accommodation, food, recruitment of a social worker, nurse, psychologist, access to education, entertainment, legal and health services (including dental care provisions).
- Establish structures, wherever a shortage of custody services is identified in order to unburden parents, especially mothers and allow them to claim jobs and seek learning opportunities.
- Adopt a participatory approach regardless of gender. Engage women in decision-making in order to promote gender equality and prevent social exclusion.


## **Author details**

Foteini Marmani  
Harokopio University, Athens, Greece

\*Address all correspondence to: [fondana1@yahoo.gr](mailto:fondana1@yahoo.gr)

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## **References**

[1] Kontis A, Petrakou I, Tatsis N, Chlepas N. European and Greek Asylum Policy, Central Refugee and Asylum Seekers with Rejections in Greece. Athens: Publications Papazisis; 2005

[2] Doctors without Borders. Research Undocumented Immigrants. Greece: Doctors without Borders; 2010

[3] Tsovili T, Voutira E. Practical Reception of Asylum Seekers in Greece with Special Emphasis on Mothers Alone, Single Women and Children Who Have Been Separated from Their Family. Athens: UNHCR; 2004

[4] Foster J, Micklin D, Newell B, Kemp C. Refugee women. 2002 Διαθέσιμο στην ιστοσελίδα. Available from: [www.baylor.edu/Charles\\_Kemp.refugee\\_women.htm](http://www.baylor.edu/Charles_Kemp/refugee_women.htm)

[5] Dobash E, editor. Rethinking Violence against Women. London: Sage Publications; 1998

[6] Ellseberg M, Caldera T, Herrera A, Winkvist A, Kullgren G. Domestic violence and emotional distress among Nicaraguan women: Results from a population – Based study. American Psychologist. 1999

# The Vicious Circle of Health Security: Vaginal Fistula in Conflict Settings and Its Interdependency with Female Oppression

*Isabella B. Metelmann and Alexandra Busemann*

## Abstract

The complex and multilayered interdependence of health and security gets exceedingly obvious in conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV); however, its scientific study is exceptionally invisible. Political unrest increases incidence of gender-based violence (GBV). Rapes, including gang rapes, and forced insertion into the female genitalia of foreign bodies such as bottles, sticks, and weapons can lead to injury of the vagina and the development of traumatic vaginal fistulas (TVF). This paper aims to give structure to the particular characteristics of traumatic vaginal fistula in conflict settings and its immanent linkage to human security. The authors reviewed all papers concerning prevalence and causes of CRSV-caused TVF (CRSV-TVF) that were available on PubMed and GoogleScholar in February 2021. Findings were integrated into feminist theory on CRSV to identify the connecting linkages of security, health, and gender equality. CRSV-caused TVF illustrate well the complex interdependences of health and security: (1) insecurity leads to a higher prevalence of sexual violence; (2) sexual violence can serve as a weapon of war; (3) insecurity prolongs sufficient medical care; (4) vaginal fistula impede female empowerment and societal development. The multiple threads of their connection reveal several implications for the prevention and treatment of TVF. The reciprocal connection of CRSV and security exemplifies a vicious circle of health security.

**Keywords:** vaginal fistula, traumatic fistula, gender-based violence, conflict-related sexual violence, health security, gender equality

## 1. Introduction

During the past years, health security underwent a remarkable upswing especially triggered by the prominent link of infectious diseases' outbreaks and their impact on political peace and stability. Its strong recognition was additionally fanned by the pandemic of SARS CoV-2. In contrast to that, the early literature on health security mainly focused on the unidirectional link of how conflicts directly and indirectly

cause health problems [1]. Today's recognition of health security has broadened its understanding and emphasizes the mutual impact of health and security. The complex and multilayered interdependence of health and security gets exceedingly obvious in conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV); however, its scientific study is exceptionally invisible.

Political unrest increases the incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) and its physical and mental consequences while simultaneously hindering timely medical treatment. Rapes, including gang rapes, and forced insertion into the female genitalia of foreign bodies such as bottles, sticks, and weapons can lead to injury of the vagina and the development of vaginal fistulas (VF). VF are abnormal openings between the vagina and the urogenital tract and/or rectum and allow uncontrolled and constant outflow of urine and feces through the vagina. In addition to the physical consequences, women and girls with VF also must cope with psychological and social burdens of stigmatization and social isolation. Encouragingly, awareness and measures on VF increased have during the last years, not least because of several international initiatives such as the *United Nations Population Fund* campaign to "End Fistula" [2] and the adoption of a United Nations (UN) resolution in 2016 [3]. However, most endeavors target the characteristics of obstetric VF (OVF), while specifics in the prevention and therapy of traumatic VF (TVF) in terms of medical, legal, social, and psychological aspects are not met. CRSV-caused TVF (CRSV-TVF) exemplify the particular interdependence of security and health. Today, with the means of modern medicine, fistulas are both essentially avoidable and easy to treat. There also does not appear to be a significant incidence of TVF outside of regions of armed conflict [4].

There is no clear consensus on the terminology of conflict-related settings. In this study, the term is used to describe situations of basic insecurity before, during, or after a political or ethnonational conflict with a low threshold of armed force and interruption of law and justice.

This study integrates findings from a systematic review of the prevalence of CRSV-TVF into feminist theory of International Relations (IR). Thus, the methodological approach is two-part and marks the research as a translational project between medicine and political science.

## **2. Prevalence of CRSV-TVF**

Prevalence of CRSV-TVF was systematically reviewed and findings embedded into feminist theory on CRSV to identify the connecting threads of TVF, conflict, security, health, and gender equality.

### **2.1 Eligibility criteria**

Types of studies: All publications studying prevalence and causes of CRSV-TVF. CRSV-TVF was defined as vaginal fistula that resulted directly from rape, gang-rape, or forced insertion of foreign bodies into the female genitalia. VF resulting from inappropriate abortion or prolonged labor from an unwanted pregnancy after CRSV were not included as well as VF that already existed when CRSV happened. Indicating symptoms, that is, leakage of urine or feces, were interpreted as VF. Only studies written in English, French, or German were included.



## 2.2 Information sources

Eligible publications were identified by searching electronic databases, publication lists of included authors, and reference lists of articles. This search was applied to PubMed (2000-present) and GoogleScholar (1962-present). The search was completed on 15 February 2021. Search items used were “traumatic vaginal fistula,” “vaginal fistula,” “prevalence traumatic vaginal fistula,” and “vaginal fistula conflict”.

## 2.3 Study selection

Papers were excluded when their title indicated a sole focus on obstetric fistula or medical treatment of VF. All other manuscripts were screened by abstract. Suitable papers were reviewed full paper and, if appropriate, included in qualitative analysis. After a thorough selection, seven studies were included for qualitative analysis. Search of PubMed and GoogleScholar produced 257 search results. Seven additional manuscripts were identified through publication and reference lists. Two hundred and sixty-four studies remained after duplicates were removed. Of these, 218 were excluded since their title indicated that they did not meet the eligibility criteria. Abstracts of 46 manuscripts were reviewed for suitability. Twenty-five studies were examined full text. The study selection process is documented in **Figure 1**.

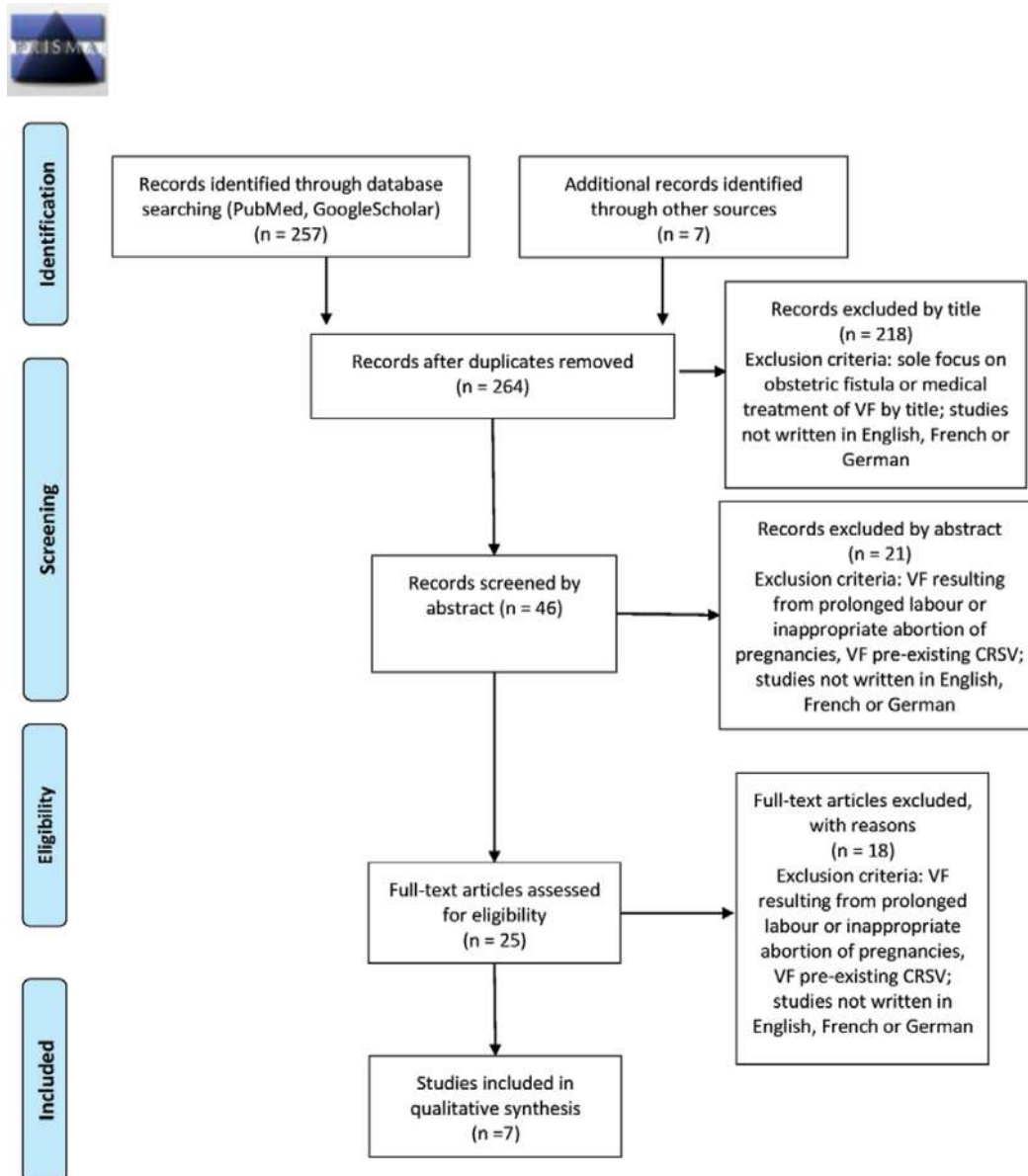
## 2.4 Study characteristics, results of individual studies, and synthesis of results

**Table 1** summarizes study results.

Most studies were done in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [11]. Study designs ranged from case series [7, 8, 10] to cross-sectional surveys [5, 6, 11]. One study was designed as retrospective analysis of hospital records [9]. Fieldwork was done between 1999 and 2012, and results were published 2 to 5 years later. All studies included more than 300 subjects. The number of subjects varied between 320 and 7519. Age of subjects was not reported in all studies but ranged between 3 and 45 years when reported. The total prevalence of VF (including for example obstetric) was only given in three studies [9–11]. Prevalence of CRSV-TVF varied substantially. The highest prevalence was 63.4% [10]. The lowest prevalence was 0.8% [9]. All studies, however, agree that CRSV-TVF is an independent medical condition that results directly from CRSV. It occurs under particular circumstances and does not correspond to other forms of VF or intimate sexual violence. All studies deduce relevant socio-economic consequences from CRSV-TVF.

## 2.5 Risk of bias in individual studies

We acknowledge that findings are probably biased by missing or little robust data. All studies are also susceptible for underreporting: subjects may not report their assault due to shame and stigmatization fears. Data were collected retrospectively from medical reports [7–10] or structured interviews [5, 6, 11]. Association to CRSV was recorded by patients’ statements, which may impair its reliability. Studies reporting data from medical reports only include women that were treated in hospitals and are not representative of the population. Additionally, these studies report on cases that were medically diagnosed and treated and may miss cases that were left



**Figure 1.** PRISMA 2009 flow diagram on study selection process.

undiagnosed or untreated. The selection of interviewees was done by the snowball technique [5], personal contacts [6] or as a structured screening questionnaire as part of a medical intervention in two internally displaced persons camps [11]. These selections are prone to selection biases especially for reasons of shame and stigmatization. Dossa et al. discuss their weak representativeness as a major limitation but describe their sample to be similar to the target population [6]. Another risk of bias arises from the origin of data. Most studies assumed VF when indirect symptoms such as vaginal leakage of urine or feces were reported [5, 6, 11]. Two studies do not explicitly state how VF was diagnosed [7, 10]. Gynecological examination is the only suitable measure for a reliable assessment of prevalence but is hardly feasible under logistical, social, political, and cultural circumstances in the areas and populations of interest.

Study No.	Country, authors, year of publication	Fieldwork setting and date	Study design	Number of female subjects	Number of people suffering from VF/TVF	Prevalence of CRSV-caused TVF	Mean and range of age
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)							
1	RFDA et al. [5]	South Kivu 15 Sep - 15 Dec 2003	Cross-sectional survey and focus groups	492	n.a./200	40.7%	32 [12–70]
2	Dossa et al. [6]	Goma Jul - Aug 2012	Cross-sectional	320	n.a./99	24%	27.7 [15–45]
3	Mukwege and Nangini [7]	Panzi Hospital, South Kivu 1999 - Aug 2006	Case series	7519	n.a./1225	16.3%	n.a
4	Baelani and Dunser [8]	Goma (DOCS Hospital) Jan 2009 - Oct 2010	Case series	1343	n.a./121	9%	n. a
5	Onsrud et al. [9]	Panzi Hospital, Bukavu Nov 2005 - Nov 2007	Retrospective Analysis of Hospital Records	604	604/5	0.8%	17.2 [3–37]
6	Longombe et al. [10]	Goma (DOCS Hospital) Apr 2003 - Jul 2006	Case series	4715	702/445	63.4%	n.a.
Uganda							
7	Kinyanda et al. [11]	Northern Uganda 2005	Cross-sectional	573	114/34*	5.9%	89% were 24 years or more

\*Leakage of urine and stool as symptom of vaginal fistula.

**Table 1.**  
 Characteristics of included studies and prevalence of CRSV-caused TVF.

### **3. CRSV-TVF in the realm of feminist theory**

Scientific discourse on whether, how, and why concepts of gender influence IR became prominent in late 1980s, especially in the realm of feminist scholars. One theoretical core is the distinction between sex (in its biological meaning) and gender (being socially constructed) [12]. Feminist theory debates on gender as an organizing principle in private as well as public and argues on gendered power in IR. CRSV is a central subject of research [12]. Feminist scholars identified CRSV as an instrument for maintaining hegemonic masculinity or rather patriarchal hierarchies [13–16]. Feminist theoretical explanations of wartime rape can be divided into three main epistemological strains: essentialism (women get raped to manifest the concept of militaristic masculinity), structuralism (women get raped as an attack against their ethnic, cultural, religious, and/or political group), and social constructivism (women or men get raped and are thereby feminized, while the perpetrators become masculinized) [14, 15, 17–19]. The shattered social and hierarchical structures in phases of political unrest accelerate strategies such as CRSV to reaffirm gender roles and their societal order, more specifically subordination of women [15, 16].

The systematic review identified the particular circumstances facilitating CRSV-TVF. Embedding these into feminist theory reveals the complex interdependence of security and health displaying multiple threads of their connection: (1) insecurity leads to a higher prevalence of sexual violence; (2) sexual violence can serve as a weapon of war; (3) insecurity prolongs sufficient medical care; (4) vaginal fistula impede female empowerment and societal development.

### **4. Insecurity leads to a higher prevalence of sexual violence**

Prevalence of sexual violence and the associated health and social consequences for the survivors increase significantly during violent political conflicts [5–11, 20]. Symptoms that lead back to GBV are substantially more common in conflict-affected countries, such as DRC [21]. Collapsed health systems lead to reduced surveillance of illnesses, and clinical data are often not accessible. Additionally, insecurity reduces the collection and availability of epidemiological data. Thus, conflict-affected contexts create an obstacle to assess the significance of the disease for society. Ground-breaking work was done by Maheu-Giroux et al., who estimated the prevalence of VF in 19 sub-Saharan African countries by using data from demographic and health surveys [21]. The questionnaires were answered during a face-to-face interview of fertile women and included questions on symptoms of urine and stool leakage and the reasons for this condition. The study group found a lifetime prevalence of 0.3% for VF-symptoms for fertile women in sub-Saharan Africa [21].

While CRSV-TVF may account for only a small proportion of VF, its association to political unrest is significant. Dossa et al. were able to show that CRSV led six times more often to TVF than non-conflict-related sexual violence [6]. This indicates that not only GBV is more common in conflict-related settings, but the medical consequences of CRSV are also more severe.

### **5. Sexual assault as a weapon of war to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity**

In situations of armed conflict, sexual violence can be used for strategic purposes as a means of exerting power with the aim of punishing both enemies and collaborators

and committing acts of terror and discrimination, particularly against ethnic minorities, or simply for personal satisfaction and reward, which depends largely on the organizational structure of the armed groups and security forces and their central command's level of control and delegation [5, 22, 23]. In some cases, girls and women are abducted and abused as sexual slaves [5, 23, 24]. Some rebel organizations, such as the Lord's Resistance Army or Boko Haram, heavily rely on the abduction of child soldiers as well as on forced marriages [25–27]. Armed conflict during the Second Congo War (1998–2003) and its aftermath gained sad notoriety by its extreme forms of sexual violence [5, 8, 10, 28]. Yet, its attribution to conflict is disputed, since prevalence of sexual violence is high even during relatively peaceful periods [29]. The atrocities of the self-titled Islamic State structurally include sexual slavery and CRSV as a tactical weapon of war, aiming for religious cleansing and populating their territory [24]. Yazidi (non-Muslim) women get impregnated with “Muslim” fetuses to eradicate the enemies' population while simultaneously expanding their own [24]. Pregnant women held as sex slaves suffer forced abortion since sex with enslaved pregnant women is religiously not allowed [24]. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda defined the cruelty of GBV during the many years of conflict in Rwanda as an integral part of genocide [30]. This was the first time of political-institutional recognition of this strong feature of GBV. However, scientific consideration of CRSV as genocide got prominent long before during the scientific reappraisal of the civil war in former Yugoslavia [15, 17, 18]. Multiple cases of structural forced impregnation of imprisoned women in “rape camps” are documented and hint to the special role of women as biological reproducer of the targeted population [15, 17, 18]. Women are seen to play a key role in reproducing ethnonational identity by constructing and maintaining collectivity and culture [13]. Hence, CRSV on women is not indiscriminate but serves as a weapon of war to attack the reproduction of ethnonational groups [13]. These strategic purposes of GBV in conflict-related settings emphasize its significance as a weapon of war.

## **6. Insecurity prolongs sufficient medical treatment**

Traumatization of these crimes are profound and significantly affect physical and mental health likewise [20, 31]. From a medical point of view, VF is a curable condition. If patients can be operated in time, their chances of physical cure are high. Prompt surgical closure of the defect is the only possible form of treatment and way to avoid further complications. With the means of modern medicine, it is currently possible to achieve permanent physical cure of VF in approximately 90% of fistula patients [32]. Political unrest makes it more difficult for survivors to access effective medical care. Access to adequate medical care can be assumed to be delayed in the majority of cases [4]. Women in the DRC received treatment with an average delay of 2 years after the development of their VF, and in some cases, they had to wait as long as 5 years [9]. This is partly due to the fact that access to medical services is usually more difficult during times of social unrest. The necessary healthcare structures may be completely non-existent; the women may not know about the services, or they may be inaccessible to them, or they are unable to pay for them [2, 4, 8]. The surgical repair and postoperative care of each patient costs about \$300 [4] to \$400 [2].

Women who become survivors of sexual violence are not only exposed to the risk of developing VF but also at an increased risk of contracting sexually transmittable diseases (STD) such as HIV/AIDS. Early diagnosis and treatment of these diseases is

highly important, not only for the individual patients but also in order to prevent the infections from spreading further. Therapeutic interventions for CRSV-TVF must therefore also include diagnostic and treatment of infectious diseases. Enabling easy access to post-exposure medication should be an essential element of international efforts.

Unwanted pregnancies can result in an additional psychological burden for the women, who are frequently unable to identify with the fetus. If they perform an abortion themselves, there is a high risk of injury to the genital tract and development of VF. Where pregnancies are carried to term, women are frequently left on their own without medical care, since their families have abandoned them [10]. This increases the risk of OVF. At the same time, existing VF can lead to infections of the womb or the urinary or intestinal tracts, thus endangering the health of both mother and child. Without adequate medical care, terminating a pregnancy for medical reasons, for example, because the mother is too young, may result in the development of VF [9] as well as presents a great risk to the health of the mother. Humanitarian interventions should therefore also promote broad access to (post-coital) contraception to avoid unwanted pregnancies and the associated complications. This can also be supported by awareness-raising campaigns to protect women and girls from unwanted pregnancies. However, it is also important to make provision for legal and safe abortions. Women who have become pregnant against their will must have the right to terminate these pregnancies without being at risk of prosecution. Provision must also be made for women to carry their pregnancies to term safely and with the support of medical care, irrespective of whether they have been cast out by their families. Thus, in order to improve treatment opportunities for women with CRSV-TVF, it is first necessary to maintain or render possible access to healthcare services in conflict situations. In addition, there is also a need for information on existing healthcare services, awareness campaigns, to reduce stigmatization and efforts to promote women's reintegration into society.

## **7. Vaginal fistula maintain female oppression by impeding female empowerment and societal as well as economic development**

As described above, CRSV serves as an appropriate weapon to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity during conflict. Meger suggests to analyze perpetrator's motivations from three different levels: individual, sociocultural, and structural, with the latter focusing on maintaining power and control over productive resources [33]. According to Meger, globally disadvantaged men are motivated to enter into forces and participate in sexual assault to regain hegemonic masculinity through economic gain by exploitation of raw materials [33]. We argue that hegemonic masculinity or rather female oppression is additionally maintained by CRSV through the social and economic exclusion of victimized women by stigmatization, discomfort, and the medical condition itself.

Women who suffer from CRSV are especially socially disadvantaged and stigmatized [4]. The patients are isolated due to both their physical condition, since social intercourse is difficult due to their urinary and faecal incontinence, and the associated problems of hygiene and the smell. Moreover, in some societies, fistulas are considered to be a punishment for immoral sexual behavior or to have been caused by witchcraft [9]. The women are also stigmatized by their role as victims of a

sexual offense. As a result of the rape, they are often abandoned by their partners and families and marginalized by society [10].

In addition to the treatment of physical and psychological sequelae, patients should be provided with support for their legal claim. In most situations, the survivors have no claim to damages, and the perpetrators are never legally prosecuted for their crimes: in some cases, the rapes are not even punishable by law [4, 34]. This impunity promotes the continuation of gender-based violence. In a similar way, Boesten describes a “continuum of violence” that connects GBV in peacetime settings with CRSV and acknowledges its mutual roots such as structural misogyny and gender inequality [35]. This goes along with an assumption of Meger: “Until the structure of gender hierarchy is addressed, the culture of GBV is at risk of persisting long after the conflict ends.” [33]. Meger argues that CRSV manifests the economic and political inequalities of women by reproducing intergender relations [33]. CRSV-TVF symbolize how a medical condition derived from CRSV perpetuates economic inequality: women suffering from VF are naturally unable to become economically independent. CRSV hinders gender equality not only from a structural or epistemological perspective but also directly by causing medical conditions like TVF.

## 8. Discussion

Considering the results of the systematic review in the light of feminist theory on CRSV reveals multiple linkages of security, health, and gender, stressing the health security dimension of CRSV. Individual security, law, and justice are lowered in conflict-affected settings, leading to reduced threshold of armed force. Additionally, experienced trauma of conflict parties may increase the brutality of sexual assaults. Simultaneously and to the authors’ view foremost, CRSV can be used as a strategic means of war. In contrast to non-CRSV, political or ethnonational motivation of GBV may be used systematically and with the aim to destroy the enemy’s population. It thereby highlights how physical injury can serve as a matter of people’s security. The insecure conditions of conflict settings impede early medical treatment of health effects, which as well stresses how insecurity impairs people’s health. In the aftermath, health consequences of CRSV, such as TVF, hinder victims from reintegration in society, underlining the long-time effect of CRSV on human security. On a structural level, CRSV serves as a strategic measure to perpetuate female oppression and patriarchal hierarchies by disabling victimized women from societal, political, and economic development and thus impairs human security.

While it is scientifically well known that the attempting idea that women are inherently more peaceful than men is simply not true [36, 37], Caprioli and Boyer were able to prove via multivariate regression that higher levels of gender equality go along with lower levels of violence during crises [37]. Subsequently, gender equality may help prevent TVF not only through less violent conflicts but, as described above, also through a changed epistemological understanding of femininity and masculinity.

Emphasizing the multifaceted links between health security and CRSV has limitations. Securitized CRSV may lead to more political attention and raise awareness as well as global funds but carries the risk of simplification and short-sighted programming [38]. Carpenter has drawn important conclusions about CRSV against men and boys and its implication for human security [39]. This is a significant aspect of GBV and must not be disregarded.

## **9. Conclusion**

CRSV and its medical consequences shed light on the many facets of health security. The complex interdependence of CRSV and health security reveals several implications for the prevention and treatment of TVF, asking for holistic programs that address the particular linkage of medical, legal, and social requirements. Patients need access to medical programs that offer timely and safe treatment of TVF as well as prevention and treatment of STDs, unwanted pregnancies, improved birth control, and safe abortions as well as psychological support. Legal endeavors need to reduce the incidence of sexual violence by enhancing and promoting the legal claim of patients and stopping the impunity of the perpetrators. Holistic programs need to include social services and educational programming related to the reasons, consequences, and treatment of TVF to prevent stigmatization and support patients that are abandoned by their families and work and peer groups and are unable to make a living due to their illness. In sum, the prevention and treatment of TVF is strongly connected to gender equality and the role of women in societies referring back to human security and exemplifies a vicious circle of health security. Further research needs to be done to quantify the burden of TVF in ongoing conflicts and by that enhance its political recognition and provide evidence for urgent international action.

## **Acknowledgements**

Supported by the Open Access Publishing Fund of Leipzig University.

## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## **Author details**

Isabella B. Metelmann<sup>1\*</sup> and Alexandra Busemann<sup>2</sup>


1 Department of Visceral, Transplant, Thoracic and Vascular Surgery, University Hospital of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany

2 Department of General, Visceral, Thoracic and Vascular Surgery, Universitaetsmedizin, University of Greifswald, Greifswald, Germany

\*Address all correspondence to: [isabella.metelmann@medizin.uni-leipzig.de](mailto:isabella.metelmann@medizin.uni-leipzig.de)

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 



## References

- [1] Health MIC. In: Williams PD, McDonald M, editors. *Security Studies: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. Milton: Taylor and Francis; 2018. pp. 541-555
- [2] Campaign to End Fistula. What is Fistula? 2016. Available from: <http://www.endfistula.org/what-fistula>. [Accessed 6 Feb 2021]
- [3] UN General Assembly (Third Committee). Intensification of efforts to end obstetric fistula: A/C.3/71/L.16/Rev.1. 2016
- [4] Pinel A, Bosire LK. Traumatic fistula: The case for reparations. *Forced Migration Review*. 2007;**27**:18-19
- [5] Réseau des Femmes pour un Développement Associatif, Marie Claire Omanyondo Ohambe, Jean Berkman Bahananga Muhigwa, Barnabé Mulyumba Wa Mamba: *Women's Bodies as a Battleground: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls During the War in the Democratic Republic of Congo: South Kivu (1996-2003)*; *International Alert*. 2004
- [6] Dossa NI, Zunzunegui MV, Hatem M, Fraser W. Fistula and other adverse reproductive health outcomes among women victims of conflict-related sexual violence: A population-based cross-sectional study. *Birth*. 2014;**41**:5-13. DOI: 10.1111/birt.12085
- [7] Mukwege DM, Nangini C. Rape with extreme violence: The new pathology in south Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo. *PLoS Medicine*. 2009;**6**:e1000204. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1000204
- [8] Baelani I, Dünser MW. Facing medical care problems of victims of sexual violence in Goma/eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Conflict and Health*. 2011;**5**:2. DOI: 10.1186/1752-1505-5-2
- [9] Onsrud M, Sjøveian S, Luhiriri R, Mukwege D. Sexual violence-related fistulas in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *International Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics*. 2008;**103**:265-269. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijgo.2008.07.018
- [10] Longombe AO, Claude KM, Ruminjo J. Fistula and traumatic genital injury from sexual violence in a conflict setting in eastern Congo: Case studies. *Reproductive Health Matters*. 2008;**16**:132-141. DOI: 10.1016/S0968-8080(08)31350-0
- [11] Kinyanda E, Musisi S, Biryabarema C, Ezati I, Oboke H, Ojiambo-Ochieng R, et al. War related sexual violence and its medical and psychological consequences as seen in Kitgum, northern Uganda: A cross-sectional study. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*. 2010;**10**:28. DOI: 10.1186/1472-698X-10-28
- [12] Smith S. *Introducing Feminism in International Relations Theory*. Bristol, United Kingdom: E-International Relations; 2018. Available from: <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/01/04/feminism-in-international-relations-theory/>
- [13] Alison M. Wartime sexual violence: women's human rights and questions of masculinity. *Review of International Studies*. 2007;**33**:75-90. DOI: 10.1017/s0260210507007310
- [14] Žarkov D. War rapes in Bosnia: On masculinity, Femininity and power of the rape victim identity. *Tijdschrift voor Criminologie*. 1997;**39**:140-151

- [15] Skjelsbæk I. Sexual violence and war. *European Journal of International Relations*. 2001;7:211-237. DOI: 10.1177/1354066101007002003
- [16] Leatherman JL. *Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict*. 1st ed s.l.: Polity. Hoboken, New Jersey, USA: John Wiley & Sons; 2013
- [17] Fisher S. Occupation of the womb: Forced impregnation as genocide. *Duke Law Journal*. 1996;46:91-133
- [18] Goldstein A. Recognizing Forced Impregnation as a War Crime under International Law: A Special Report of the International Program. New York: Center for Reproductive Law and Policy; 1993
- [19] Seifert R. War and rape: A preliminary analysis. In: Jamieson R, editor. *The Criminology of War*. London: Routledge; 2017. pp. 307-325. DOI: 10.4324/9781315086859-15
- [20] Ba I, Bhopal RS. Physical, mental and social consequences in civilians who have experienced war-related sexual violence: A systematic review (1981-2014). *Public Health*. 2017;142:121-135. DOI: 10.1016/j.puhe.2016.07.019
- [21] Maheu-Giroux M, Filippi V, Maulet N, Samadoulougou S, Castro MC, Meda N, et al. Risk factors for vaginal fistula symptoms in sub-Saharan Africa: A pooled analysis of national household survey data. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*. 2016;16:82. DOI: 10.1186/s12884-016-0871-6
- [22] Butler CK, Gluch T, Mitchell NJ. Security forces and sexual violence: A cross-National Analysis of a principal—Agent argument. *Journal of Peace Research*. 2007;44:669-687. DOI: 10.1177/0022343307082058
- [23] Wood EJ. Variation in sexual violence during war. *Politics and Society*. 2006;34:307-342. DOI: 10.1177/0032329206290426
- [24] Al-Dayel N, Mumford A, Bales K. Not yet dead: The establishment and regulation of slavery by the Islamic state. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. 2020;45(11):929-952. DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2020.1711590
- [25] Baines E. Forced marriage as a political project. *Journal of Peace Research*. 2014;51:405-417. DOI: 10.1177/0022343313519666
- [26] Vinci A. The strategic use of fear by the Lord's resistance Army. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*. 2005;16:360-381. DOI: 10.1080/09592310500221336
- [27] Zenn J, Pearson E. Women, gender and the evolving tactics of boko haram. *Journal of Terrorism Research*. 2014;5(1):46-57. DOI: 10.15664/jtr.828
- [28] Bartels SA, Scott JA, Mukwege D, Lipton RI, Vanrooyen MJ, Leaning J. Patterns of sexual violence in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Reports from survivors presenting to Panzi hospital in 2006. *Conflict and Health*. 2010;4:9. DOI: 10.1186/1752-1505-4-9
- [29] Duroch F, McRae M, Grais RF. Description and consequences of sexual violence in Ituri province, Democratic Republic of Congo. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*. 2011;11:5. DOI: 10.1186/1472-698X-11-5
- [30] International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. *Prosecution of Sexual Violence: Best Practices Manual for the Investigation and Prosecution of Sexual Violence Crimes in Post-Conflict Regions: Lessons Learned from the Office of the Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for*

Rwanda. 2014. Available from: [https://unictr.irmct.org/sites/unictr.org/files/legal-library/140130\\_prosecution\\_of\\_sexual\\_violence.pdf](https://unictr.irmct.org/sites/unictr.org/files/legal-library/140130_prosecution_of_sexual_violence.pdf). [Accessed 14 Feb 2021]

[31] Kizilhan JI, Steger F, Noll-Hussong M. Shame, dissociative seizures and their correlation among traumatised female Yazidi with experience of sexual violence. *The British Journal of Psychiatry: The Journal of Mental Science*. 2020;**216**(3):138-143. DOI: 10.1192/bjp.2020.2

[32] EngenderHealth. *Fistula*. 2016. Available from: <https://www.engenderhealth.org/our-work/maternal/fistula>. [Accessed 6 Feb 2021]

[33] Meger S. Toward a feminist political economy of wartime sexual violence. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. 2015;**17**:416-434. DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2014.941253

[34] EngenderHealth/ACQUIRE Project. *Traumatic gynecologic fistula: A consequence of sexual violence in conflict settings: ACQUIRE report*. 2006. Available from: <https://www.engenderhealth.org/files/pubs/maternal-health/tf-report-english.pdf>. [Accessed 14 Jan 2021]

[35] Boesten J. Of exceptions and continuities: Theory and methodology in research on conflict-related sexual violence. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. 2017;**19**:506-519. DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2017.1367950

[36] Alison M. *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict*. London: Routledge; 2010

[37] Caprioli M, Boyer MA. Gender, violence, and international crisis. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 2001;**45**:503-518. DOI: 10.1177/0022002701045004005

[38] Houge A, Skjelsbaek I. Securitising sexual violence: Transitions from war to peace. In: Fitz-Gibbon K, Walklate S, McCulloch J, Maher J, editors. *Intimate Partner Violence, Risk and Security: Securing Women's Lives in a Global World*. Milton: Routledge; 2018. pp. 19-33

[39] Carpenter RC. Recognizing gender-based violence against civilian men and boys in conflict situations. *Security Dialogue*. 2006;**37**:83-103. DOI: 10.1177/096701060606064139



# Causes and Consequences of Toxic Masculinity: Can HeForShe Be a Solution for Gender-Based Violence?

*Monument Thulani Bongani Makhanya*

## Abstract

Aggression and violent behavior are caused by the feeling that a man has to live up to society's expectations of masculinity which is what makes a good man, and that a man ought to be physically fit, have a large penis, protect himself, and uphold the honor of his family and peers, remain true to his convictions, partake in male-oriented activities like behavior sports and drinking, be sexually virulent, and succeed in everything he sets out to do. In order to overcome these preconceived ideas, this article provided an alternative to inculcate positive masculinity which is the HeforShe approach that supports boys and men in achieving equality by opposing negative gender norms and practices. Individuals around the world are encouraged to come together as equal partners to develop a shared vision of a society that values gender equality and to put that vision into action by putting locally suitable solutions into place. Secondary data analysis was used as the data-gathering instrument. To select suitable studies, an inclusion and exclusion criterion was followed. Only peer-reviewed journals were used and web sources and articles from non-peer-reviewed journals were excluded.

**Keywords:** heforShe, masculine attitudes, positive masculinity, stereotypes, gender-based violence

## 1. Introduction

When attempting to understand the causes of violence in society, it has been discovered that young males are disproportionately both offenders and victims of violence [1]. This aggression and violent behavior is caused by the feeling that a man has to live up to society's expectations of masculinity which is what makes a good man; that is a man ought to be physically fit, have a large penis, protect himself, and uphold the honor of his family and peers, remain true to his convictions, partake in male-oriented activities like behavior sports and drinking, be sexually virulent, and succeed in everything he sets out to do. Despite the wide variety of masculinities, there is a type of hegemonic masculinity that predominates in a particular society [2]. Other meanings are marginalized by this dominant masculinity in society. Hegemonic masculinity

tends to exclude nonwhites, nonheterosexuals, and working-class males, dividing the benefits of patriarchy that these masculinities can access from those that hegemonic masculinity can [3]. Misogyny, homophobia, racism, and forced heterosexuality are all consequences of hegemonic masculinities. Despite this, societal institutions such as corporate culture, governmental authority, and the media all work to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity [4]. When males try to excessively assert their masculinity to make up for their unsure gender identity, they are said to be acting in a hyper-masculine manner. This definition of masculinity emphasizes dominant males who see aggression and violence as acceptable forms of self-expression, power assertion, and conflict resolution. Hypermasculine guys should always be prepared to fight, never exhibit signs of fear or discomfort, and always project an air of authority [5]. Protest masculinity is another significant style of masculinity that should be mentioned in any context. Poor, working-class men who exhibit hyper-masculine behavior as a narcissistic manner of coping with the sense of helplessness and insecurity that results from their low-socioeconomic station in society have been characterized as exhibiting protest masculinity. When a man's perceptions and ideals of what it means to be a man have negative effects on him and/or those around him, this is referred to as toxic masculinity. The dominance of women unites most masculinities [6], and toxic masculinity is one of the main causes of sexual and gender-based violence. Toxic masculinity is when all of the aforementioned stereotypes of men as aggressive, emotionless, and sexually violent have a negative effect on both society and the person. Overcoming these societal pressures and preconceptions that claim values and emotions are "masculine" or "feminine" could be termed positive masculinity [7]. Positive masculinity asserts that while men can be tough and competitive, they can also cry, be sympathetic, be emotionally genuine, take care of their skin, and be mindful of their mental health [8]. It is against this background that this contribution sets out to look at the causes and consequences of toxic masculinity (both for women and men themselves), and suggest an approach, that is, HeForShe movement as a tool for eliminating gender-based violence by transforming toxic masculinity into positive masculinity.

## **2. Methodology**

Secondary data were used as a research strategy. This is usually data that have already been gathered and analyzed by another party. It is a strategy that shows there is already a public record of this information easily obtainable by using appropriate methods of research. Whenever a researcher wishes to use secondary data, they must seek a range of sources to find them. The difficulties that are commonly associated with the collecting of original data are clearly absent in this situation for the researcher. Secondary data may be both published and unpublished. Reviews, criticisms, editorials, analyses, histories, and comments are a few examples of secondary sources that are printed or electronic [9]. Doing a secondary analysis of qualitative data might be helpful for the researcher who wants to reexamine the opinions and experiences of a target audience or answer open-ended research issues [10]. Through secondary research, information on the topic at hand was obtained.

### **2.1 Inclusion criteria**

To select suitable studies, an inclusion criterion was followed. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in the last ten years and a select few dated back to 2009

were used to give more recent data that could illustrate the impact of toxic masculinity. Additionally, articles covering positive masculinity and the HeforShe movement published in English were used in the study.

## **2.2 Exclusion criteria**

Web sources and articles from nonpeer-reviewed journals were excluded from the research. Also, articles published in other languages except for English and very old sources were not used for this article.

## **3. The causes of toxic masculinity**

It has been discovered that toxic masculinity develops for a variety of reasons, including the temperament and character of the individual in question. For instance, a boy who had an abusive father as a child can opt to change from the abusive pattern to be better than his father or replicate the patterns of violence (Safer spaces). Hypermasculinity occurs in two forms, first, is when males are more inclined to want to show their manhood by sticking to stricter, more extreme exhibits of traditional masculinity when they are denied full access to patriarchal privileges because they do not conform to hegemonic ideals of masculinity. Second, males who live or associate most frequently with other men exhibit excessive conformance to traditional male role norms. In order to compete with their peers, those who spend most of their time with men tend to try to be rougher and manlier more frequently. There are several reasons why toxic masculinity exists, but only three of them will be emphasized: socialization, family structure, and shifting gender roles [11].

## **4. Socialization**

Males are frequently socialized to believe that they should lead in every aspect of life (income, relationships, workplace relations, etc.). Even schools are promoting specific gender roles where boys do not need to be emotionally stable, implicitly subscribing to and embracing hegemonic forms of masculinity (Safer spaces). In this approach, some schools support the attitude that men are entitled to more and are more importance than women. In favor of harsh discipline and control, many schools forgo teaching emotional responsibility and discourage empathy, compassion, and nurturing behaviors. Boy conversation is discouraged by society [12]. Fathers are frequently less forgiving, less tolerant, and more unreasonable than moms at home. Discussing sex, HIV/AIDS, condom use, and other risky behaviors with their sons can be challenging for fathers as well (Safer spaces). Males frequently have narrow perspectives on instruction concerning harmful behavior, as well as on introspection and societal reflection. Boys have been socialized to believe that they should not be punished for misbehavior and that they do not often have to take responsibility for their conduct. Girls are trained from a young age to “act like a lady” when they do something wrong, while when males are at fault, they are told “boys will be boys.” Boys are socialized to believe in their own superiority not only in schools and at home but also through peer pressure, media, military influences, and political influences, all of which lead to the belief that violence is acceptable behavior in men (Safer spaces).

## **5. Dysfunctional family situation**

The idea of family has always been a significant subject in philosophical discussions, and the most prevalent idea that comes to mind when considering the family structure is that of the “nuclear family.” This family unit consists of two parents of opposing sexes and their offspring. It has been portrayed in this manner ever since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries since it was crucial for the spread of the white Western worldview throughout the expansion of colonialism [13]. The way that families are portrayed has started to alter in the twenty-first century and an increasing number of people who reject these conventional ideals are being represented. Because of “shifts in the roles of fathers, mothers, and the increasing emphasis on children’s television programming” and “changing demographics,” families are more diverse than ever before, and customers are represented by real families that can be found in today’s society [14]. Even though the definition may have shifted from what it used to be, some families are dysfunctional, and this can be seen by the revealing patterns of conduct rather than by any physical traits. One is that tough laws are usually upheld. Laws do not challenge the status quo, do not feel your emotions, and do not ask questions are a few examples. These strict family rules, which are undoubtedly unhealthy, might make vulnerable family members feel abandoned or unsupported emotionally [15]. The child’s family life may later have a negative impact on all facets of their development. Growing up in a dysfunctional environment could make it tough to transition into adulthood, lose jobs frequently, and have inadequate boundaries in relationships. Families mired in a cycle of dysfunction frequently deal with severe abusive problems such as drug and alcohol misuse, domestic abuse, physical and sexual assault, and emotional abuse. Children can become poisonous in this kind of setting, and regrettably, family issues never go away [16]. The dysfunctional cycle often continues throughout the lives and households of the children of dysfunctional families. In pathological families, at least one parent engages in drug or alcohol misuse or has a mental disease, rendering them dysfunctional and damaged. A child of an alcoholic or an abusive parent is more likely to experience unmet basic physical and emotional needs. In these families, the roles are typically reversed [17]. Because their dysfunctional parents are unable to manage their daily lives, children become more responsible for them. A dictator parent who disregards the desires or sentiments of the other family members rules a dominant-submissive household. While being demanding, the dominant parent offers little in the way of affection, assistance, or constructive criticism. The children frequently experience harsh repercussions for their errors and failings, such as scolding and spanking. There are no middle-ground rules in this kind of home; it is either the parents’ way or the highway [18]. Arguments and conflicts are commonplace in a household that experiences frequent conflict. Families frequently quarrel in hurtful ways that leave wounds open and foster a climate of severe antagonism. Conflicts, arguments, fighting, resentment, and stress result from poor communication and an inability to handle difficulties, which wreak havoc in the household. Some homes are chaotic; the only thing that never changes is chaos. Parents constantly come and go, and there are no set family rules or expectations (moving in and moving out of the home or being incarcerated). When they are present, either their parenting abilities are poor, or they are damaging the kids. Children frequently suffer from abuse, neglect, or both [19]. In some households, children are not exposed to warm displays of affection from their parents. Families like these avoid discussing feelings. Normally, parents are emotionally unavailable, cold, and aloof. Children are taught to suppress their own feelings. Children develop low self-esteem and emotions of



unworthiness due to the lack of emotional and physical affection. Social or cultural background is frequently linked to these kinds of dysfunctional households. This dysfunctional type can be the least obvious and least researched [20].

## **6. Mental health**

The traditional parental or guardian roles are frequent where toxic masculinity is developed, and if it is not addressed, it can be passed down from one generation to the next [21]. It is important to address how masculinity continues to exacerbate mental health issues despite efforts by society to eradicate harmful stereotypes and preconceptions about gender-defined thinking. A toxic masculinity mentality holds that asking for help or direction might make one appear weak. It also involves a mentality that ignores psychological distress because admitting to stress can come off as a weakness [22]. When emotions are disregarded frequently, a person learns to completely shun them. They also learn to hold their emotions inside rather than express them, which leads to internalized discomfort. Long-term melancholy is likely to result in depression and inappropriate emotional expression [23]. Exaggerated self-sufficiency brought on by toxic masculinity can also cause a host of mental health issues, particularly when it comes to social interaction. Men's capacity for interdependence in intimate relationships now is impacted by the historical sexist dynamic that emerged from traditional relationship norms. This could seem as unhealthily dominating behavior in interpersonal relationships, showing signs of narcissism or other personality disorders. When dysfunctional masculinity is not treated, this may manifest as violence and hostility [24].

## **7. Shifting gender roles**

The notion of leadership that males have inherited is, however, under threat from several social, economic, and political changes that have taken place during the past fifty years. These modifications consist of the liberation and empowerment of both men and women who are thought to exhibit nonhegemonic masculinities. Young men today are caught between what they have learned from their parents, guardians, and societal role models about what it means to be a man and the shifts in gender relations that are taking place in today's society (Safer spaces). This is particularly common when it comes to income and status as the primary provider. Employment and earning money are essential components of manhood because they meet both tangible necessities and sentiments of self-worth [25]. When women and men with nonhegemonic masculinities replace men with hegemonic masculinities as the primary breadwinners in societies where unemployment is high, wages are low, and there are few possibilities to fulfill the obligations of masculinity, this can cause resentment. Salary work and wealth can be utilized to maintain the subjugation of women to men according to several masculine ideologies. Due to this, nations with high rates of unemployment and income inequality are probably more likely to experience excessive male aggression and toxic masculinity [26].

## **8. The hazardous effects of masculinity**

Traditional masculinities are implicated in a variety of damaging impacts on men's lives and the lives of others [27]. Here are some examples:

### **8.1 Overcompensation by engaging in dangerous behavior**

Males that exhibit toxic masculinity frequently avoid acting in any way that could be viewed as feminine because they are afraid of femininity. Because being gay is often associated with being feminine, this concern is frequently expressed as homophobia. If men are terrified of being viewed as gay, they may overcompensate in order to demonstrate that they are, in fact, straight [28]. They become bold and aggressive. They do not back down if their dignity or manhood is violated. They do not tolerate insults to their partners or their mothers [29]. Kroeper et al. [30] assert that these men exhibiting masculinity believe in obligatory heterosexuality, in which the compulsion to have sex frequently serves as a means of affirming one's manhood, resulting in risky behavior. When compared to their less traditional friends, men who hold more conventional views of masculinity report greater rates of unsafe sexual behavior, binge drinking, and car accidents.

### **8.2 Competitiveness because of scarce resources**

In the situation of low resources, male fragility is heightened. In a study by Falk [31], on why men end up emasculated, she discovered that many males are angry at women for anything they perceive to be emasculating, such as women becoming breadwinners or getting promoted ahead of them at work. These social changes brought about by women's empowerment and persistent "invasion" into traditionally male sectors have resulted in what scholars refer to as "threatened masculinity" [32]. Men began to worry more and more about their physical appearance at this point because the male physique and muscularity were among the last remaining symbols of masculinity. As a result, among adolescent boys, support for traditional masculine values is frequently linked to a desire for a bigger, more muscular body [33]. Men who experience body image issues frequently experience depression, low self-esteem, poor weight management, steroid use, and a host of other detrimental effects. Yet there is also competitiveness among males, and it is frequently encouraged [34]. Males are frequently exhorted to pursue domination, power, riches, and success. This competition is typically held in an effort to "win" resources and women. Normal expectations of manhood include the pressure to compete and win; failing to do so will make you appear cowardly [35]. As a result, Matlon [36] argues that dominant masculine notions of urbanity are idealized, with several sexual partners and overt economic power as defining traits. Hegemonic masculinity is shaped by the idea of "the player," a man with money and a woman who positions men in society. Women must be dehumanized in order for men to attain this status and maintain and restore their superiority [37].

### **8.3 Ineffective dispute resolution techniques**

Traditional masculine adolescent boys are less adept at handling conflict, and their approaches are typically marked by high levels of anger, withdrawal, denial avoidance, and minimal concern for other people's needs [38]. In comparison to girls, they are also more likely to get into disputes over status and power. They prefer to steer clear of approaches to dispute resolution that are seen as feminine. Toughness, dominance, and a readiness to use violence to settle disputes with others are viewed as essential components of the masculine identity (Safer spaces). Boys participate

in more delinquent behavior than girls due to the internalization of masculinity that frequently occurs during puberty. This internalization frequently persists throughout adulthood, when males are expected to be strong, independent, in control, emotionless, and show no signs of vulnerability [39]. For “genuine” men, seeking assistance or guidance for pain symptoms or mental discomfort is seen as a show of weakness. So it should come as no surprise that males are very hesitant to seek medical care or consult a therapist [40]. Men who have internalized the concept of masculinity consider themselves as the providers for their wives and children, believing that they are not to be dependent on others or cared for by others. In other words, boys and men typically have very inadequate coping mechanisms for addressing tension and conflict inside themselves as well as between themselves and others without resorting to violence [41].

#### **8.4 Domestic abuse and power dynamics**

According to Schuler et al. [42], women are frequently seen as excessively powerful and unreliable by males because they have been socialized to believe that the leadership mantle belongs exclusively to them. Many males feel alienated and powerless in sexual interactions as a result of the liberty and empowerment of women. Together with societal changes, unemployment, poverty, and low self-esteem, this perceived disempowerment of men has given rise to dominant masculinities marked by extensive sexual networks, and in some extreme cases, the need to exert more control over women [43]. According to research, Shai et al. [44] assert that males always make the decisions about when, where, and how to have sex as well as whether or not a woman should try for a baby and whether or not condoms will be used. Because of men’s demand for control, many women are unable to protect themselves from STDs, pregnancy, and unwanted sexual advances. Men are in charge of condom use, which implies that they decide on safer sexual behavior and have a big impact on both partners’ risk of contracting HIV. de Shong [45] adds that males frequently utilize the perception of women’s alleged incapacity to self-regulate as a justification for using different forms of control, coercion, and violence. In this regard, de Shong [45] states that male’s continuous controlling of women’s movements is sometimes seen as defending the physical safety and reputation of women, lest they become known as “Jezebels” and “street women.” Violence and control are strategies to thwart and punish opportunities for infidelity since it is seen as emasculating. Maleness is associated with the public sphere, while femininity is associated with the private sphere. Indoctrination into a patriarchal culture has contributed to the socialization of gendered ideas of male authority and control, where violence is employed to affirm masculinity. Under this system, men are taught to be domineering and aggressive, and women are taught to be victimized and subservient [46].

#### **8.5 Sexual assault**

According to Jaffe et al. [47], relationships frequently involve rape and assault. This is a result of the previously mentioned uneven power relationships between men and women. Many people have highlighted the connections between toxic masculinity and rape as being brought on, among other things, by men’s thirst for dominance, power, and misogyny by punishing women for emasculating them [48]. Norman Kujat [49] brings another important dimension when he states that as a

result of toxic masculinity, male rape is frequently rejected and ignored in society. Because fragility is built into gendered conceptions of femininity, male rape is largely unreported. Because being the victim of rape is seen as a show of femininity and undermines a male's claim to being a man, many male rape victims are too ashamed to report their rapes [50]. This violence promotes the perpetrator's masculinity while denying the victims. The overwhelming stigma and guilt that prevents most victims from seeking help are mostly caused by the sensation of destroyed masculinity and imposed "womanhood" [51]. In jails, the distinction between homosexuality and male rape is blurred, and instead, it becomes a matter of power and rivalry. Because of this, male-on-male intercourse is most prevalent in jails, yet most inmates nevertheless maintain a fundamentally homophobic mindset. Prison "masculinity" is associated with the ability to use specific forms of violence and the ability to withstand them, as well as the idea that once manhood is gone, it can be reclaimed through violence [52]. When inmates who are treated as "women" in jail want to be promoted back to being men, they frequently must stab another prisoner. Male victims may engage in violent compensatory behavior as a result, both inside and outside of prisons. When freed, they frequently explode in fury, trying to regain their manhood by raping again [53].

### **8.6 Positive masculinity**

Positive masculinity is a perspective that has utilized the engagement of men and boys to help the larger movement for gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). Gender transformational approaches have increasingly sought to question and understand males and masculinities, as well as analyze the experiences, attitudes, duties, and responsibilities of men and boys, and how they influence behavior, societal norms, policymaking, and gender equality in general. Positive masculinity has been demonstrated to be critical in eradicating all sorts of violence and prejudice against women and girls [54]. Positive masculinities, on the other hand, provide a critical perspective through which to transform masculinities in ways that promote healthy, peaceful, individual, and social well-being for all [54]. It allows men to appreciate their physical bodies rather than comparing them to the media's portrayal of muscularity and sex appeal. Respect women with dignity. Utilize their masculinity to advocate for women and others. Make and keep friendships. Demonstrate to people that you are emotionally expressive and available to both males and girls. Recognize that rage is not an excuse for violence or abuse. Feel and enjoy touch and tenderness from other males. Instead of destroying and damaging, create and build. Positive masculinity entails males being open and honest about their feelings and desires. It also entails men treating others with kindness and respect rather than utilizing their might to dominate or mistreat them [55].

### **8.7 HeforShe approach**

HeForShe is a social movement project that gives men and boys a systematic approach and targeted platform through which they may influence change in the direction of the realization of gender equality. A comprehensive strategy that acknowledges men and boys as allies in the fight for women's rights as well as how they stand to profit from greater equality is necessary, according to UN Women, in

order to achieve gender equality (HeforShe). The campaign was launched in 2014 by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson, who rallied hundreds of thousands of individuals to support it, including celebrities Matt Damon and Barack Obama. At the start of the campaign, UN Women made a call to organize the first 100,000 men, a goal that was accomplished in just three days! HeForShe, which is now four years old, has received almost 1.3 billion promises, a statistic that is continually growing. In the United States alone, 141,000 promises have been made, with men making the vast majority of them (HeforShe). “Accelerate women’s economic development, enhance women’s participation in peacekeeping and security processes, increase women’s political engagement and leadership, and eradicate gender-based violence,” are the movement’s four main objectives (HeforShe). In the fall of 2015, HeForShe launched IMPACT 10X10X10 after seeing success in its first year. The HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 program, which aims to drive change from the top down, involves influential decision-makers from governments, corporations, and academic institutions throughout the globe. The IMPACT Champions, who have developed three bold, paradigm-shifting promises to advance and achieve gender equality for all, are putting the HeForShe concept into action. The UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5, which stands for gender equality, are furthered by taking the HeForShe pledge. The SDGs, which went into effect throughout the UN system in 2015, were derived from the Millennium Development Goals, a series of eight worldwide development goals that were in force between 2000 and 2015 which put a focus on three areas: human capital, infrastructure, and human rights. Comparatively, each of the 17 SDGs maintains a list of 169 targets, making them comprehensive and interrelated. Both social and economic development issues are addressed by these aims. SDG 5 places gender equality at the forefront of this new UN development strategy by interspersing the other 16 goals with multiple improved gender equality targets (HeforShe). UN Women has given Goal 5 high commendation for addressing fundamental barriers to gender equality and women’s empowerment. We cannot build the world that women and girls need by continuing on as we have been or by making incremental improvements. Only drastic and fearless changes will do (HeforShe).

## **9. Contexts where HeforShe has had a positive impact**

Heforshe has had a positive effect in some contexts, below is an example of two of those contexts.

### **9.1 HeforShe in Lesotho**

HeforShe takes the shape of males banding together to launch replies against GBV at their places of employment as well as Institutions of Higher learning, as was previously stated. There are numerous instances of conferences organized by the larger group to confront the plague and to recruit males to aid in its eradication. Lesotho’s Symposium of Traditional Leaders and Religious Leaders was held on June 30, 2022, at Maseru’s Lehakoe Recreational Complex, with the purpose of fostering a rich and dynamic working partnership between the Principal Chiefs and Faith Leaders. The symposium was organized with the assistance of “Man Up Lesotho,” a nonprofit organization that mobilizes men to address HIV susceptibility and sexual gender-based

violence (SGBV). The “Man Up” initiative encourages men to reconsider their positions in society as partners, protectors, and not perpetrators. Traditional leaders are active as protectors of culture and the fabric of Basotho heritage because it touches on the core values of manhood in society. The initiative has created a space for men, particularly men of influence (religious and traditional leaders), to discuss their experiences. These programs include giving immediate and long-term care help to victims of violence (HeforShe, Lesotho). These also include measures to address societal and cultural norms, gender imbalance systems, and general acceptance of VAWG. Throughout the one-day symposium, guests had the opportunity to reflect through participatory lectures on their own concerns and experiences from their time in the office. These conversations called into question the way things were done as well as the damaging attitudes and behaviors. This made it easier to focus on analyzing, sharing, and increasing understanding about core teachings, practices, and hence lessons learned from grassroots people. According to the symposium’s conclusions, GBV is encouraged by unfavorable social norms that stress men’s honor over women’s safety, prioritize men’s ability to discipline both women and children, and elevate women’s sexual purity above all else. The team sought to work with traditional leaders to develop laws that would challenge harmful social mores and individual viewpoints that support and condone sexual assault and other forms of GBV against women and girls in Lesotho (HeforShe, Lesotho).

## **9.2 HeforShe in Brazil**

For Brazil to attain gender equality, it was important to remove the obstacles that continue to place women at a disadvantage in all areas of society. In Brazil, systems of violence and discrimination against women coexist alongside laws improving women’s rights. Since the 1980s, Brazilian colleges have been doing studies on violence against women, and the results have helped create municipal and national legislation to address the problem. Due to allegations of sexual assault on the university campuses, universities have recently begun to recognize gender-based violence in the classroom. The invitation from USP to participate in the HeForShe Champions program contributed to creating the most favorable conditions for addressing all forms of violations of women’s rights [56–58]. The initial priority of HeForShe was to overcome the stigma attached to violence and the anxiety of being exposed. Both inside the university and in the greater community, they implemented several parallel tactics. In addition to holding lectures on the challenges USP confronts in addressing violence against women and the Maria da Penha Law on Domestic and Family Violence, 5000 copies of the Gender Violence in the University booklet were distributed. They participated in 15 activities, some of which were featured in the USP Newspaper, both inside and outside the university. In addition, 33 regional human rights commissions were mapped along with the procedures for establishing and running them. A total of 30 media interviews were also done. They organized working groups, trained members of the committee against gender violence, and established a center at USP for the care of victims of gender-based violence. The university’s Code of Ethics was revised, and appropriate sanctions were discussed in addition to methods for dealing with victims of abuse in residence halls. The university’s zero-violence policy is overseen by the president’s office and is discussed during first-year student orientation, at University Council meetings, and through videos [56]. They supported a variety of programs at the university, including those in the Sociology Department, the Women’s Office, the Information Technology Office, student organizations, and research initiatives like

our successful “Interactions at USP” study. HeforShe conducted an online poll that was accessible to all undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at USP in 2017; 13,377 out of 78,984 participants, or 17% of the student body, responded. The survey contained 45 questions concerning demographics and 75 questions about students’ experiences at USP, including violence, physical and mental health problems, and other encounters. The poll also included important information on gender- and race-based human rights violations. The results show how serious the issue is at the university and how urgently more targeted, effective action has to be taken [56]. New protocols and practices were created in response to the findings. HeforShe made decisions for the subsequent stages of their journey using information from the “Social Interactions at USP” study and assistance from human rights commissions at universities and other institutions. In addition to creating service centers focused on the welfare of students, they increased the number of Human Rights Commissions for the 42 USP faculties and institutes. They also established service standards and protocols for the training of professionals who work with students. Men’s involvement in the effort to end violence against women is still a delicate topic. The HeForShe movement at the university has expanded as a result of the President, Pro-Rectors, and male lecturers’ involvement as HeForShe Champions. The HeforShe movement, which is supported by the university’s male officials who are also Champions of HeforShe, is challenging the institution’s male domination, which is supported by patriarchal principles [56].

## **10. Conclusion**

Young men typically cite violence as an important tactic they use to establish their control and show their masculinity in their society. Males are believed to have a certain behavioral standard, perpetuated by masculine ideas enforced by stereotypes. As a result of preconceived notions about what makes a good man; they think a man should be physically fit, have a large penis, protect, and uphold the honor of his family and peers, remain true to his convictions, partake in male-oriented activities like behavior sports and drinking, be sexually virulent, and succeed in everything he sets out to do. A conclusion could therefore be drawn that the HeforShe approach could be used which supports boys and men in achieving equality by opposing negative gender norms and practices. Individuals around the world would be encouraged to come together as equal partners to develop a shared vision of a society that values gender equality and to put that vision into action by putting locally suitable solutions into place. The approach will automatically inculcate positive masculinity, which deems that while men can be tough and competitive, they can also cry, be sympathetic, be emotionally genuine, take care of their skin, and be mindful of their mental health.

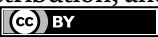
### **Author details**

Monument Thulani Bongani Makhanya  
University of Zululand, South Africa

\*Address all correspondence to: makhanyamt@unizulu.ac.za

### **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 



## References

- [1] Heber A. "You thought you were superman": Violence, victimization and masculinities. *British Journal of Criminology*. 2017;57:61-78. DOI: 10.1093/bcj/azv117
- [2] Hall M. 'It's a metrosexual thing' A discourse analytical examination of masculinities. Unpublish PhD dissertation. 2014
- [3] Javaid A. *Violence in Everyday Life: Power, Gender and Sexuality*. Bloomsburg, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing; 2020
- [4] Abelson MJ. *Men in Place: Trans Masculinity, Race, and Sexuality in America*. Minnesota, USA: University of Minnesota Press; 2019
- [5] Ratele K. Analysing males in Africa: Certain useful elements in considering ruling masculinities. *African and Asian Studies*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers. 2008;7(4):515-536. DOI: 10.1163/156921008X359641
- [6] Morrell R. Of boys and men: Masculinity and gender in southern African studies. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 1998;24(4):605-630. DOI: 10.1080/03057079808708593
- [7] Moore I. The influence of hegemonic (toxic) masculinity on leadership behaviors of black men. In: *Handbook of Research on Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Managerial and Leadership Psychology*. Pennsylvania, USA: IGI Global; 2021. pp. 385-395
- [8] Coen SE, Davidson J, Rosenberg MW. Towards a critical geography of physical activity: Emotions and the gendered boundary-making of an everyday exercise environment. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 2020;45(2):313-330
- [9] Johnston MP. Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*. 2014;3(3):619-626
- [10] Sherif V. Evaluating preexisting qualitative research data for secondary analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 2018;19(2):26-42
- [11] Jewkes R, Morrell R, Hearn J, Lundqvist E, Blackbeard D, Lindegger G, et al. Hegemonic masculinity: Combining theory and practice in gender interventions. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2015;17(sup2):S112-SS27. DOI: 10.1080/13691058.2015.1085094
- [12] Levit N, Verchick RR, Minow M. *Feminist Legal Theory: A Primer*. Vol. 74. New York: New York University Press; 2016
- [13] Abraham H. A family is what you make it: Legal recognition and regulation of multiple parents. *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy and the Law*. 2017;25:405
- [14] Faulkes JE. *Millennial Television: The Representation of Dysfunctional Parenting in Rick and Morty (2013-)*. Memòria del Treball de Fi de Grau. Illes Balears, Spain: Universitat de les illes Balears; 2018
- [15] Lev E. *Dysfunctional family dynamics*. 2020. Available from <https://www.talkspace.com/blog/dysfunctional-family-definition-guide-what-is/> [Accessed on February 24, 2023]
- [16] Sandstrom H, Huerta S. *The Negative Effects of Instability on Child Development: A Research Synthesis*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute; 2013

- [17] Tedgård E, Råstam M, Wirtberg I. An upbringing with substance-abusing parents: Experiences of parentification and dysfunctional communication. *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. 2019;**36**(3):223-247. DOI: 10.1177/1455072518814308
- [18] Matejevic M, Todorovic J, Jovanovic AD. Patterns of family functioning and dimensions of parenting style. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 2014;**141**:431-437. DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.075
- [19] Rodriguez N, Smith H, Zatz MS. Youth is enmeshed in a highly dysfunctional family system: Exploring the relationship amongst dysfunctional families, parental incarceration, and juvenile court decision making. *Criminology*. 2009, 2009:177-208. DOI: 10.1111/j.1745-9125.2009.00142.x
- [20] Sturge-Apple ML, Davies PT, Winter MA, Cummings EM, Schermerhorn A. Interparental conflict and children's school adjustment: The explanatory role of children's internal representations of interparental and parent-child relationships. *Developmental Psychology*. Nov 2008;**44**(6):1678-1690. DOI: 10.1037/a0013857. PMID: 18999330; PMCID: PMC3228250
- [21] Brown DL. "Oh for the days when men were men": Constructing, defending and justifying masculinity in newspaper comment forums—a critique. *Feminist Media Studies*. 2021;**2021**:1-16
- [22] Powell D. Speaking of psychology: How masculinity can hurt mental health. 2023. Available from <https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/men-boys-health-disparities> [Accessed on February 28, 2023]
- [23] Coates D, Wortman CB. Depression maintenance and interpersonal control. In: *Advances in Environmental Psychology*. Maryland, USA: Psychology Press; 2013. pp. 149-182
- [24] Messerschmidt JW. *Masculinities in the Making: From the Local to the Global*. Rowman & Littlefield; 2015
- [25] Finch J, Groves D. *A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring*. Milton Park, Oxford: Taylor & Francis; 2022
- [26] Strier R, Perez-Vaisvidovsky N. Intersectionality and fatherhood: Theorizing non-hegemonic fatherhoods. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*. 2021;**13**(3):334-346
- [27] Bridges T, Pascoe CJ. Hybrid masculinities: New directions in the sociology of men and masculinities. *Sociology Compass*. 2014;**8**(3):246-258
- [28] Matheson L, Ortiz DL, Hoskin RA, Holmberg D, Blair KL. The feminine target: Gender expression in same-sex relationships as a predictor of experiences with public displays of affection. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*. 2021;**30**(2):205-218
- [29] Mohlamonyane NN. Gender Stereotypes in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. Polokwane: University of Limpopo; 2021
- [30] Kroeper KM, Sanchez DT, Himmelstein MS. Heterosexual men's confrontation of sexual prejudice: The role of precarious manhood. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association. 2014;**70**(1-2):1-13. DOI: 10.1007/s11199-013-0306-z
- [31] Falk C. "And I mean is it any wonder all the men end up emasculated?" post-war masculinities in Richard Yates's revolutionary road and John Braine's

room at the top. In: *Post-World War II Masculinities in British and American Literature and Culture*. Milton Park, Oxford: Routledge; 2016. pp. 55-68

[32] Hollander T. Men, masculinities, and the demise of a state: Examining masculinities in the context of economic, political, and social crisis in a small town in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Men and Masculinities*. 2014;**17**(4):417-439

[33] Rosenmann A, Kaplan D, Gaunt R, Pinho M, Guy M. Consumer masculinity ideology: Conceptualization and initial findings on men's emerging body concerns. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*. 2018;**19**(2):257

[34] Börjesson A, Ekebergh M, Dahl ML, Ekström L, Lehtihet M, Vicente V. Men's experiences of using anabolic androgenic steroids. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*. 2021;**16**(1):1927490

[35] Halford S. *Gender, Power and Organisations: An Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing; 2018

[36] Matlon J. Racial capitalism and the crisis of black masculinity. *American Sociological Review*. 2016;**81**(5):1014-1038

[37] Lockhart EA. *Nerd/geek masculinity: Technocracy, rationality, and gender in nerd culture's counter masculine hegemony* (Doctoral dissertation). 2015

[38] Geldard K, Geldard D, Foo RY. *Counselling Adolescents: The Proactive Approach for Young People*. California, USA: Sage; 2019

[39] Rosen NL, Nofziger S. Boys, bullying, and gender roles: How hegemonic masculinity shapes bullying behavior. *Gender Issues*. 2019;**36**(3):295-318

[40] Vickery A. Men's help-seeking for distress: Navigating varied pathways and practices. *Frontiers in Sociology*. 2021;**6**:724843. DOI: 10.3389/fsoc.2021.724843

[41] Damien WR. Wearing the pants? Men's accounts of becoming fathers. In: *Diverse Pathways to Parenthood*. Massachusetts, USA: Academic Press; 2020. pp. 127-137. DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-12-816023-7.00011-4

[42] Schuler SR, Lenzi R, Badal SH, Nazneen S. Men's perspectives on women's empowerment and intimate partner violence in rural Bangladesh. *Cultural Health Sex*. 2018;**20**(1):113-127. DOI: 10.1080/13691058.2017.1332391

[43] Lwambo D. Before the war, I was a man': Men and masculinities in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. *Gender and Development*. 2013;**21**(1):47-66. DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2013.769771

[44] Shai NJ, Jewkes R, Nduna M, Dunkle K. Masculinities and condom use patterns among young rural South Africa men: A cross-sectional baseline survey. *BMC Public Health*. 2012;**12**(1):1. DOI: 10.1186/1471-2458-12-462

[45] de Shong H. Policing femininity, affirming masculinity: Relationship violence, control and spatial limitation. *Journal of Gender Studies*. 2015;**24**(1):85-103

[46] Pease B. *Facing Patriarchy: From a Violent Gender Order to a Culture of Peace*. London: Zed Books Ltd.; 2019

[47] Jaffe AE, Steel AL, DiLillo D, Messman-Moore TL, Gratz KL. Characterizing sexual violence in intimate relationships: An examination of blame attributions and rape acknowledgement. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 2021;**36**(1-2):469-490

- [48] Banet-Weiser S. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press; 2018
- [49] Norman Kujat C. *Gendered Violence in the Socio-Legal Context: When your Sex Defines whether you Can be a Perpetrator or a Victim: The Problem of Heteronormativity and Masculinity in the Context of Male Rape: in India*. Umeå Sweden: Umeå University; 2017
- [50] Struve J, Colrain J. *Clinical Perspectives About Male Sexual Victimization: The Cultural and Historical Context of Gender*. In: Geffner R, White JW, Hamberger LK, Rosenbaum A, Vaughan-Eden V, Vieth VI, editors. *Handbook of Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Across the Lifespan*. Cham: Springer; 2020. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-62122-7\_309-1
- [51] Féron É. *Wartime Sexual Violence against Men: Masculinities and Power in Conflict Zones*. Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield; 2018
- [52] Booyens K, Bezuidenhout C. An exploratory study of sex and rape behind bars in a south African prison. *International Criminal Justice Review*. 2014;**24**(4):377-391
- [53] Jackson NA, Pate M, Campbell KM. Prison and post-release experiences of innocent inmates. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*. 2021;**30**(10):1347-1365
- [54] African Union. *Advancing actions and promoting positive masculinity to end violence against women and girls*. 2022. Available from [https://au.int/en/newsevents/20221110/2nd-mens-conference-positive-masculinity#:~:text=Positive%20masculinity%20is%20a%20perspective,and%20women's%20empowerment%20\(GEWE\)](https://au.int/en/newsevents/20221110/2nd-mens-conference-positive-masculinity#:~:text=Positive%20masculinity%20is%20a%20perspective,and%20women's%20empowerment%20(GEWE)) [Accessed on February 23, 23, 2023]
- [55] Badaszewski PD. *Beyond the Binary: How College Men Construct Positive Masculinity*. Athens, USA: University of Georgia; 2014
- [56] HeforShe. *Emerging Solutions for Gender Equality*. New York: UN Women; 2018
- [57] HeforShe. *Addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) & HIV vulnerability through mobilising men in Lesotho*. 2023. Available from <https://www.heforshe.org/en/addressing-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-sgbv-hiv-vulnerability-through-mobilising-men-lesotho> [Accessed on February 24, 2023]
- [58] Safer spaces. *Toxic Masculinity and violence in South Africa*. 2023. Available from <https://www.saferpaces.org.za/understand/entry/toxic-masculinity-and-violence-in-south-africa> [Accessed February 24, 2023]

---

Section 5

Portrayals of Women

---



# Sexism, Language, and Women: A Study of Some Proverbial Expressions Used in the Barpeta District of Assam, India

*Prasenjit Das*

## Abstract

Today, issues related to gender and sexism in language have received unprecedented critical attention, because the language used to represent women in our society is typically gendered. A woman often faces different nuances of gender stereotyping to which one is exposed since one's childhood—at home, in the locality, in schools and in the day-to-day social exchanges. Hence, there is an urgent need to explore the emotional, domestic, cultural and social territories as well as the personal spaces of women and discuss how in our society, the politics of language influences our perceptions about women. This paper is based on an area specific research conducted on the sexist proverbial expressions on women by the Assamese speaking people of the Barpeta district of the state of Assam, India. The research is based on locally available secondary sources. Proverbial expressions treating women negatively are only used as part of the research. The important finding of the research is that the embodiment of sexism in the proverbial expressions in Assam often assign an inferior status to women and that, from local to global, biasness against women is still widespread despite rising awareness about the politics of language in a homosocial world.

**Keywords:** sexist language, gender, Assamese women, proverbs on women, politics of language

## 1. Introduction

When we use language, besides communicating our individual thoughts, beliefs, and practices, it also reflects our social life, character, beliefs and practices of the community to which we belong. It is also through language that we express our attitudes, manners, likes, and dislikes as well as the different social norms to which we must conform. It is however not for nothing that our “cultural literacy” often essentializes verbal harassments and abuse of women on the basis of sex, leading to the use of certain stereotypical terms against woman. For example, expressions like crazy woman, fallen woman, flaunting woman of bold spirit but lose moral, woman of dangerous blandishments, woman of villainous and ungovernable temper, debauched woman,

woman disdaining all womankind, infamous woman, slovenly woman, spiteful-violent-tyrannical woman, dragoness and what not are most common across all languages and cultures. The debateable point is that such expressions are systematically used to deprive the women folk of certain privileges and even to deny their rightful place in the social hierarchy. The French feminist critic Luce Irigaray, in around 1970s, popularized the concept of linguistic sexism and since then there developed a more complex view of gender as “socially constructed” and as a set of relationships between men and women.

Even today, the proverb “Frailty, thy name is woman!” from Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* is used to mean that women are weaker than or inferior to men because they are frail. Similarly, a woman is likened to a walnut tree as can be found in the common proverb—“A woman, a spaniel, and a walnut tree.” The pervasive belief is that the walnut tree thrives best if the nuts are beaten off with sticks or are to be manured by beating, or else would not bear fruits. However, the point is that such a view also implies the politics of male dominance and male chauvinism in linguistic exchanges in various walks of life. In the German language, there is a common saying that “As the country so the proverbs” which means that the geographical location, religious customs, psychology of the people concerned, economic, social and cultural setup of a place, etc., immensely influence the development of language as well as the use of proverbial expressions. However, the point I am trying to make in this paper is that many proverbs on women and womanhood in the Assamese society, like in case of many other societies and cultures across the world, are innately gendered.

## **2. Methodology**

This paper is based on an area-based study of how sexist language is so blatantly used in Barpeta—a district of lower Assam, although the focus of the paper shall be on certain specific social contexts of proverbial expressions where women are negatively implicated and where specific proverbs are purposively used to negate the position of women as a whole in the Assamese society. While writing this paper, some secondary sources were consulted and efforts had been made to check how gender discrimination in terms of language finds expression in two different ways—through the proverbial languages used by women and through the proverbs used to describe a woman. It is however important to note that in both cases, the inherent sexism is too overriding in the Assamese linguistic expressions. This is a dangerous social phenomenon as the “man-made” sexist language has often been used as a powerful tool to consolidate gender differences following which women or the weaker sex have been consistently relegated to a marginal status in the affairs of our society. For writing this paper, only locally available works published in the Assamese language from the state of Assam were consulted to collect the proverbs cited in this paper, and the theoretical perspective needed for discussing the findings were derived from the works of critics like L Irigaray, M Z Rosaldo, and M Schipper. Most of such local cultural resources are unknown to the outside world as these are not yet been translated into English, and only region-specific studies or area-based studies, like in case of the current study, can make them available for further research.

## **3. Sexism in language**

In nearly all societies, sex status is an unavoidable evil as it fixes women’s role and limits their autonomy in society, although linguistic sexism is actually based on



real-life social inequality between men and women. For a woman to be virtuous, she must be beautiful, obedient, sacrificial, and sexually pure, and when these “feminine” virtues are missing, her very “womanhood” is questionable. Rosaldo stated that the biological role of women in reproduction and the socially and culturally defined role of women as mothers, bearers, and nurturers of children provide the basis for their subordination in society [1]. The French feminist critic Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which is Not One* states: Women’s social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that woman does not have access to language, except through recourse to “masculine” systems of representation which dissociates her from her relation to herself and to other women. The “feminine” is never to be identified except by and for the masculine, the reciprocal proposition not being “true” [2]. According to Irigaray, women are forced to assume the roles prescribed for her by the male-dominated patriarchal ethos. She, like many of her counterparts, including Helen Cixous, believed that language typically excludes women from an active “subject position,” which has always been hampering in the liberation of women in the true sense.

Linguistic sexism, or how women are described through words, can be best explored in terms of the proverbs people use in our society. A proverb is a well-known saying that states a general truth or issue an advice. As Hirsch et al. mentioned, proverbs are short, pithy sayings that reflect the accumulated wisdom, prejudices, and superstitions of the human race [3]. Now, it may be argued that most of the proverbs which are in circulation in our society are misogynous in nature as they express innately chauvinistic ideas of sexual stereotypes. Common proverbs such as “A woman’s tongue wags like a lamb’s tail,” “Diamonds are a girl’s best friend,” “A woman’s place is in the home,” “A bad wife is poor harvest for sixty years,” and “Beware of a bad woman and put no trust in a good one” are still uttered widely in different cultures of the world even in the twenty first century.

However, it is never so correct to state that all proverbial sayings are gendered. As Schipper states, proverbs, the world’s smallest literary genre, are a most telling part of that serial narrative about humankind as in case with oral literatures, myths and origin stories, fairy tales, animal fables, love poems, or cradle songs. Such oral “wisdom,” transmitted from generation to generation, represents a fascinating cultural history [4]. Then, he also mentions that “proverbs wholeheartedly acknowledge procreation as an indispensable female quality, and motherhood as a crucial domain of life. Being able to give birth is apparently considered so unique that numerous proverbs express not only respect but also fear *vis-a-vis* this awesome creativity.” (p. 16) Schipper further mentions

*The legacy of oral traditions is a moral one: it teaches people what to do or what to think in a given situation. They formulate some part of common sense, values, and ways of doing. Endowed with authority, proverbs, like other prestigious oral and written texts, present how things ought to be from certain perspectives. Such authoritative views have contributed to molding people’s roles and identities and continue to have an impact in many ways. Although we hardly ever know whether the original creator of a particular proverb was male or female, we can consider the interests at stake. What these interests are and how they are expressed in particular cultures—rhetorically and thematically—are questions to be born in mind when looking into proverbs about women... (p. 17)*

It is important also to note that the subject of a particular proverb and its variants in one particular culture and language often exist in other regions as well. One

may wonder how this co-incidence is possible. A researcher like Schipper, however, believes that certain standard patterns exist in the attribution of status and the division of labor, which in a way are the cause of such similarities. As he states,

*In virtually all societies men fare better than women. Men exercise more power, have more status, and enjoy more freedom. Men usually head the family, exercise considerably more force in legal, political, and religious matters, take alternative sexual partners, may often take more than one wife, have greater freedom in the choice of a spouse, usually reside near their own kin, and have easier access to alcoholic beverages and drugs. Women, on the other hand, are often segregated or avoided during menstruation, must often share their husbands with one or more co-wives, are blamed for childlessness, and are often forced to defer to men in public places. Child rearing is the only domain where women regularly exert more influence than men. (p. 11)*

However, the idea of a woman being segregated by men is vehemently challenged by many feminist critics who tend to opine that the man-made language is used largely to entrap women under patriarchy where the role of a woman is dictated by a peculiar kind of male chauvinism.

Let me here refer to some common proverbial expressions used against women by the people in different parts of the world where the use of sexist language is clearly visible, because in most cases, a woman is negatively implicated and her self-respect and authority have been seriously denied.

- a. The tears of an adulteress are ever ready. (Egyptian) [5] (p. 6)
- b. It more becomes a woman to be silent than to talk. (Roman) [5] (p. 30)
- c. Choose neither a woman nor linen by candlelight. (English) [5] (p. 55)
- d. April weather, woman's love, rose leaves, dice, and luck at cards, change every moment. (German) [5] (p. 61)
- e. Where the Devil cannot go himself, he sends an old woman. (German) [5] (p. 102)
- f. A store-house of evil is a woman if she is depraved. (Roman) [5] (p. 131)
- g. It is safer to irritate a dog than an old woman. (Roman) [5] (p. 235)
- h. The jealousy of a woman sets a whole house aflame. (Roman) [5] (p. 236)
- i. A goose, a woman, and a goat are bad things lean. (Portuguese) [5] (p. 253)
- j. Who's the man that was never fooled by a woman? (German) [5] (p. 279)
- k. No woman stays happily married without paying a price for it. (Spanish) [5] (p. 282)
- l. A whistling woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for God nor men. (Roman) [5] (p. 309)

- m. No one rejoices more in revenge than a woman. (Roman) [5] (p. 361)
- n. Three things without rule: a woman, a pig, and a mule. (Irish) [5] (p. 370)
- o. A ship and a woman are ever repairing. (English) [5] (p. 387)
- p. When a woman weeps, she is setting traps with her tears. (Roman) [5] (p. 424)
- q. A truth-telling woman has few friends. (Danish) [5] (p. 444)
- r. Woman is a torment, but let no home be without torment. (Persian) [5] (p. 480)
- s. Women are like shoes; they can always be replaced. (Rajasthani). [4] (p. 26)
- t. Women are like busses: if one leaves, another one will come. (Spanish, Venezuela) [4] (p. 26)
- u. "Never trust a woman, even after she has given you seven sons" (Japanese)? [4] (p. 27)

From these examples, it becomes apparent that a large number of proverbs transmit exactly the same idea. Some proverb specialists argue that a proverb acquires its concrete contextual meaning at the very moment it is used. As new shades of meaning are added each time a proverb is quoted, the very process of meaning creation must be carefully studied. Nonetheless, proverbs about women usually represent a dominant view [4] (p. 29). The same can be seen in case of the Assamese proverbs too as sought to be discussed in this paper.

Kalita, while discussing the use of sexist language in the Indian School Textbooks, brought in an interesting discussion about the issue of sexism and language. With a view to defining sexist language, he quoted from an answer provided by Vetterling-Braggin: "A word or sentence is sexist if ... its use creates, constitutes, promotes, or exploits an unfair or irrelevant distinction between the sexes...[and] if its use contributes to, promotes, causes or results in the oppression of either sex" [6] (p. 794). Kalita brings in an interesting discussion about the issue of sexism and language, as can be found in the following:

*Sexist terminology distinguishes between people purely on the basis of biology. It defines the "masculine" or "feminine" labels attached to roles, statuses, ideas, behaviors, activities, and condemns those who in any way overstep the bounds of their sex role stereotypes. Sexism in language allows an ideology to legitimize the prescriptions and appraisals of every human endeavor solely on the basis of gender. Language uses us as much as we use language; so, sexist language vents, spreads, and reinforces sex role stereotypes...Sexist language conveys prejudice through the everyday vocabulary used in social intercourse. Many gender-related words metaphorically insult or belittle women by identifying them as children, animals, or objects: girl (used in reference to a woman), "baby," "dish," "chick," "hot tomato," "bitch," ("son of a bitch" for men), "dog," "sugar," etc. Exclusion involves the creation of sex-based names, terms, and expressions to characterize essentially sex-neutral positions, occupations, etc. Through exclusionary devices, sexist language restrains one gender from pursuing activities similar to those allowed the other gender in the same society. Words such as "chairman," "foreman," and*

*“fisherman,” exclude women by calling to mind male actors, thus, implicitly eliminating qualified women from consideration in these positions and occupations. (pp. 3-4)*

There is no doubt about the fact that in the twenty first century, when women across the world are expressing their discomfit with the excessive use of sexist language in nearly all types of social dealings, almost no detailed or systematic studies have been done on the issue of sexism in the Assamese language in a state like Assam.

#### **4. Sexism in context-specific proverbs in the Barpeta district of Assam**

Barpeta, one of the prominent districts of lower Assam, is known for its great and ancient religious traditions. Previously known by different names such as—Tatikuchi, Porabhita, Mathura, Vrindavan, Choukhutisthan, Iccha Kuchi, Kampur, and so on, Barpeta is renowned as the “Land of the Satras” in the whole of Assam that bear the testimony of the great Assamese reformer, saint, scholar, and cultural exponent Srimanta Sankardeva and his great disciple Shri Shri Madhabdeva who set their foot in lower Assam long back in the sixteenth century to lay the strong foundation of the Assamese culture and language in the region through their socio-religious Vaishnavite Reform Movement. Although this Movement left a historic legacy and although revolutionary changes were initiated in the society by their successor saints and holy personalities, the place called Barpeta is still suffering from various ills as the society has remained too insular and conservative. Even today, women are not allowed to enter the main “Sattrā” premise or the “Kirtanghar,” leaving a big scar on the face of the society and inviting debates regarding the relevance of age-old religious norms and customs set by the male-dominated patriarchal setup which are used to deprive the women folk.

Throughout the last few centuries, the Assamese cultural setup in the Barpeta district has been found to be innately patriarchal. Even today, it is very common that the birth of a male child is a matter of great joy to the family, while just the opposite happens when a female child is born because people believe that “Poror babei Janme Bala”—meaning “A girl is born only to serve others.” It is however not for nothing that the belief is so persistent among the people of Barpeta, that most of such belief and views are self-degenerating. Because, in order to marry a daughter to a “man,” the poor parents would need a huge amount of money; whereas, it is assumed that a son would continue his father’s dynasty and look after his parents even in their old age. This belief is so fundamental to the day-to-day existence of the common people that even the would-be mother desires for a boy child before delivery of the child. In this regard, several other proverbs carry similar undertones.

- a. “Aapa Soli Moijar Mati/Api Soli Dhokonar Kati”—meaning “The son is the earth of the floor; the daughter the sheath of the betel-nut tree.”
- b. “Beta Dhaan/Beti Pataan”—meaning “The son is the paddy; the daughter the seedless pod.”
- c. “Bamnor Baarir Lai/Kaethor Sagale Khai”—meaning “Vegetables in the kitchen garden of a Brahmin are consumed by goats owned by lower castes.” Here, a girl from a low caste getting married to a high-caste boy is implied.

- d. “Beta holi dhar suje/Beti Holi Nai”—meaning “The son pays for what parents owe; the daughter doesn’t.”
- e. “Putra Sukhor Chitto/Kanya Dukhor Chitto”—meaning “The son is the heart of happiness; the daughter of sorrow.”
- f. “Jee ti Lokor/Po ti Bukor”—meaning “The daughter is for others; the son for the heart.”
- g. “Bohu Putri, Kulor Naraki”—meaning “Having numerous daughters is like the Hell falling over the dynasty.”

Thus, from since birth, a girl child is destined for a secondary role in the Assamese society, and she is often pushed into a bleak future as the parents believe that “Jome Nileu Nia/Jowai Nileu Nia”—meaning “Marrying the daughter to a man is no different from submitting her to Yama, the God of death”—marriage being her final destiny. However, such proverbial utterances render negative connotations on the society as a whole, as such sayings have been affecting the murder of female fetus, murder of the daughters and daughters-in-laws, and the increase in the population growth in the hope of a male heir.

For the purpose of the paper, the following are some of the selected contexts in which case-specific proverbial expressions are used to imply a girl or a woman. In these examples, the way of uttering the expressions is very unique to the local people of Barpeta. Although, in most cases, the male member is to blame, yet it is the woman who always suffers or is made to suffer in the face of the patriarchal social dictum. A woman’s actual experiences reside in obscurity, while the language used to describe her ends up with further discrimination. Some of the proverbs cited here are taken from Kalita [6] and Das [7]. However, some of them are also in circulation in other parts of the Indian state of Assam. It is pertinent to note here that in the absence of English translations, such proverbs are not known to the world outside Assam. Whereas the fact is that the experiences derived from such a vast gamut of proverbs would add more impetus to undertake newer researches on the politics of language in general where gender discrimination is clearly visible.

## **5. Context 1: perceptions about wives**

In different parts of the Barpeta district, there is a great pervasiveness of various common proverbs and proverbial utterances which deny the rightful place to “wives” in general. Some proverbs, on wives, present a negative idea of the women further justifying their differences from men or husband as in case of the following colloquial expressions where the term “tiri” means “wife”:

- a. “Tiri Boiri, Sima Boiri”—meaning “Like neighbours, the wife is also the rival.”
- b. “Tirir Kotha Sune Jito/Odhogati Jai Sito”—meaning “He who listens to his wife, is bound to fall.” Such expressions are common in other parts of the state too.
- c. “Ji Kore Tirotaar Aash/Taar Saday Sarbanash”—meaning “One who has expectations from wife, is doomed forever.”

- d. “Maak-e Sai Mukholoi/Tiri Sai Hatoloi”—meaning “The mother looks at the face (of the son), the wife looks at the hands (of the son for gifts). Here, the mother of the husband is socially given a privileged position over the “wife.”
- e. “Hak Nai Dhak Nai/Gabhoru Tirir Naak Nai”—meaning “A young wife who does not listen or isn’t under the veil is shameless.”
- f. “Masor Naniba Soru Kuta/Tirir Naniba Bajar Luta”—meaning “Never to buy the smallest fish; never to marry a woman frequenting the Bazaars.” Here, a woman frequenting the market places or bazaars are seen as character less.

## **6. Context 2: physical traits of wives**

There are also some proverbs that provide us with a rich reflection on the female body and the social consequences of people’s sexual differences. In such proverbs, certain physical traits of a woman are often viewed as inauspicious as can be found in the following expressions that shamelessly state that such women are not fit for marriage.

- a. “Uthor Upore Gofor Sari/Sei Tiri Dekhonte Bari”—meaning “Woman who has moustache over her leaps is impotent from the very look.”
- b. “Jar gharat Motoamua Tiri/Sei ghar Jai Hotosiri”—meaning “The family with a wife as unruly as man, shall be bereft of prosperity.”
- c. “Sorumua Api Kutosthor Ghai/Maj Dangar Api Poiekor Mur Khai”—meaning “A short girl is the root of conspiracy; a big-headed girl is the husband’s worry.”
- d. “Bannir Buti/Tirir Suti”—meaning “Like the short broom, a short wife is of no use.”

## **7. Context 3: polygamy and the plight of women**

Polygamy is prevalent in many cultures, and the Assamese society in the Barpeta district was no different. There was a time in Barpeta, when the very rich well-to-do men could wed several wives either to fulfill their desire for a male heir, or to relinquish their physical hunger, or to show their so-called physical potency. In the absence of any strong protest, such norms gradually gained validity in the society. Now, in such a case, a particular wife could not have tolerated the presence of the “Satini” or the co-wife. Often, the fear of losing the love of the husband made one wife very jealous or even sometimes possess certain dangerous intents. As she did not have the courage to stand against the husband, and as she will not be able to sustain herself if thrown out of the family by the husband, she would rather try to assert her own existence against the co-wife or other wives.

- a. “Oin Satinire Lare Sare/Boini Satinie Puri Mare”—meaning “Unlike the other co-wives, if one’s own sister is the co-wife, it burns deeply.”
- b. “Jala Dibar Thai Nai/Jala Die Satinir Bhai”—meaning “There is no end to sorrows, when the brother of the co-wife starts torturing.” (Here, the woman who is uttering the proverb is implicated.)

- c. “Satnir Jal, Gaa Nakare Bhal”—meaning “The trap laid by the co-wife does not cure the pain in the real wife.” (Here, the woman uttering the proverb is implicated.)

Similarly, when the wife of a person dies at the tender age, the husband in order to fulfill his desire, he can remarry. However, the irony is that an aged man would often try to marry a teenage girl and even the poor parents of such girls would never hesitate to marry their daughter to an aged man. Thus, the power of wealth is the only recourse for the aged man deciding to remarry, and the girl would become a puppet in the hands of both her poor parents and the rich would-be husband.

- d. “Takar Naam Moina/Taka Thankli Ana Jai Anandabarir Koina”—meaning “Money is everything, and money can buy a beautiful wife.”

## 8. Context 4: affairs of women

Often seen as illicit, the love affair between a man and a woman was too common in Assamese folk life. To satisfy their emotional needs, many tender girls wanted to break free or did not even bother to lose chastity as a way of rebelling against the societal norms or the shackles of the family. As different types of confinements affect their emotional being, the girls and women were forced to live lives with certain limitations. However, against this situation, a very common saying that is being used in Barpeta is:

- a. “Pora Maas Nosto Hoi Dhomdhomiya Juit/Api Nosto Hoi Lokor Gharat Sui”—meaning “Like the fish gets spoilt when burnt, the girl gets spoilt when she sleeps with others.”

Assam is a land of rivers and since ancient times, the banks of the rivers had been serving as the meeting place for the girls and daughters. Besides, in older times, people used to fulfill the need of water by fetching water either from the rivers or from the nearby ponds. However, the local girls took this as an opportunity to taste the sense of “freedom” against the confinements at home. They liked to take bath and swim in the rivers, make merry, and carry out clandestine affairs with their loved ones especially with their male partners. However, such type of freedom also persuaded the girls to commit “mistakes” as can be found in the following utterances which are quite common in the village areas of Barpeta.

- b. “Obhabotei Swabhab Nosto/Noir Ghatot Naari Nosto”—meaning “Habits get spoilt due to wants; Chastity of a woman gets spoilt in the river-bank.” (Here, river-banks are seen as clandestine meeting place of boys and girls.)
- c. “Purush Nosto Hatot/Mai Nosto Ghatots”—meaning “Man gets spoilt in the bazaars, Woman in the river-banks.”

Like the unmarried girls and daughters, many married women too maintained secret relationship with other men to satisfy their mental and sexual needs. In most cases, however, the woman’s character was in question rather than the impotence of the husbands or the other man who strived for her company.

- d. “Mone Sine Pap/Mawe Sine Bap”—meaning “Only the heart knows when a sin is committed, only the mother knows the father of her child.” (Here, mother hood is not obviously celebrated.)

The derogatory remarks against the women with extramarital relationship are very obvious in the following lines:

- e. “Oho Thogo Bai Rupe Tor Sama Nai/Iman Boyoxote Tinta Swami Pai Asa/Tor Somo Bhagyabati Nai”—meaning “Oh sister, there is none as beautiful as you, since you got three men as your husband at this age, there is none as lucky as you.”

## **9. Context 5: tripartite relationship among the mother, daughter, and daughter-in-law**

In the Assamese society of Barpeta, the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is too intricate. As the new bride arrives in the house, the mother-in-law faces different sorts of anxieties and helplessness. She feels that the bride shall now have all the control over her son, and she will be deprived of her son's love. Therefore, she cannot take the attachment her son has for the newlywed girl for granted. She becomes even more jealous when all members in the family start giving preference to the new member in the family. However, the society is structured in such a way that despite enduring all mental pressures, the daughter-in-law has to follow the dictates of the mother-in-law, as she has to ensure the conjugal happiness of her son. Even the greater society also feels that the mother-in-law should carefully watch every move of her daughter-in-law. Thus, the mother becomes ill-reputed as the head strong woman of shrewd observation. The following are some utterances prevalent in Barpeta which:

- a. “Patharor Kala, Behoror Tel/Sahek Noho Borekor, Bate Bate Mel”—meaning “A bride without a mother-in-law is the talk of the village.”
- b. “Mase Chotka Anja/Sahui Chotka Bori”—meaning “The fish makes the curry tasty; the mother-in-law makes the bride perfect.”

But, such a control over the bride creates additional problems as the mother takes this opportunity to fulfill her angst against the bride causing an even more complex relationship between them.

- c. “Edon Bora Sahur Lora Sora/Bowari Adhamora”—meaning “A bucket full rice and the hurried movements of the mother-in-law renders the daughter-in-law half dead.”
- d. “Tini Saj Nakhai Borek Kope/Tio Sauheke Daulhe Dhore”—meaning “The daughter-in-law becomes too weak without meals for three times, yet the mother-in-law catches the foul for meal.”

Such treatment from the mother-in-law is sure to aggravate further hatred for the mother-in-law. Although the bride seems to respect her in-laws, she can never come to good terms with the mother-in-law. The following utterances imply the same feeling:



- e. “Sahu, Satini, Nanad Khosa/Sahu Thakile Gharar Pora Gusa”—meaning “It’s better to stay away from home than to be tortured by the mother-in-law, co wife and sister-in-law.”
- f. “Buri Moril Bhalei Hol/Sikhen Kathao Morei Hol.”—meaning “It is good that the old woman is no more, her clothes are now mine.”

However, it is important to note that such proverbs and sayings are also popular in other cultures. In English, there is a saying that “Happy is he who marries the son of a dead mother.” In German, it is said that the “Husband’s Mother is the Wife’s Devil.” In Spanish, there is a saying that “Give up all hopes of peace as long as your mother-in-law lives.” But there are also some sayings on the tripartite relationship among the mother, daughter, and daughter-in-law as is explicit from the following example in Barpeta District.

- g. “Akha Tita Bakh Tita/Tita Nimur Pat Tato Kori Tita/Sahu Nanandir Mat”—meaning “There are several herbs including Neem which taste bitter, but the words of the mother-in-law and the sister-in-law taste more bitter.”

## 10. Context 6: general attitude toward women

The patriarchal ethos in the Assamese society is so dominant that in the fear of the women taking the advantage in the household, people often abstain from openly acknowledging the contribution of the women or even praising them as in case of the following:

- a. “Bharjak Praangsiba Briddhkal Hole/Bhojanak Prahangsiba Khadya Jin Gole”—meaning “A wife should be admired only at the old age; a meal should be praised if it gets digested.”
- b. “Jaar Stree Swatantraa, Si Jiyonte Mora”—meaning “One whose wife is independent, leads a life in death.”
- c. “Kotari Dharaba Silot/Tiri Solaba Kilot”—meaning “A knife is to be sharpened on the stone; the wife to be controlled by beating.”

Even while the husband dies a premature death, the wife always faces verbal abuses of different sorts from the people in the locality including her own family members.

- d. “Doh putra Jadi thake Tar Ghare/Swamihina Hole Narik Obhagini Bole”—meaning “A woman without husband is called unfortunate despite having a dozen sons.”

On the contrary, if the wife dies, the husband has the peculiar right to remarry. Therefore, in the Assamese society of Barpeta district, there are many cases where, even the middle-aged men are also never reluctant to marry or remarry. However, nobody comes forward to marry even a teen-aged widow as this is never acceptable in society.

- e. “Subat Dur Gaman, Take Najaba Sari

Sowalir Namot Burhike Aniba/Teo Naniba Bari”—meaning “You may marry an elderly woman assuming her to be young, but never marry a widow.” (Here, ‘Bari; in Assamese means widow.)

Nothing can be as disgraceful a comment as this that discourages widow marriage in the Assamese society even today. Not even the widow, the possibility for remarriage is almost impossible even for those women who are divorced or abandoned by their husbands. If at all a woman is forced to leave the husband’s house, she loses everything including her social status. People often keep their evil eyes on such women. And if that woman is beautiful, then her beauty contributed to further troubles on her way as in case of the following utterance.

f. “Mota Naikia Nari/Dhum Dhum Koi Dhore Gari”—meaning “The woman without the husband catches the bus with pomposity.”

There are also some norms following which a widow cannot, most specifically in case of the Brahmin community, take meat or have meal in a social gathering together with the elderly people of the locality.

g. “Kopalot Ase Bidhoba Jog/Khabo Khoje Mangsor Bhoj”—meaning “Widowhood is her destiny, yet she thinks of feasting with meat.”

However, the educated people in society often fail to understand the fact the women also have the equal right to enjoy the same privileges as their male counterparts. However, the women without their husbands often face the greatest brunt from the society members as is implied through this following proverb.

h. “Akashot Chandra Nai, Nojoloi Tora/Ji Naarir Purush Nai, Jiwantate Mora”—meaning “Like the sky without the moon or stars, the woman without the husband is as good as dead even while living.”

## **11. Proverbial contexts and prejudices against women**

The examples cited above are only some contextual examples where sexist language is abundantly used in the Assamese society. The use of specific languages and words in the common sayings and proverbs render an adverse effect on the mentality of the people further making the actual emancipation of the women really impossible. The same age-old narratives about women keep circulating from one generation to the other as can be seen through the different oral folk sayings and proverbial expressions of the people of Barpeta, in which women are denied their rightful status, self, and dignity. Even in the proverbs emanating from the mouths of the mythical “Daak” which are still in wide circulation in different corners of the district, mostly among the poor farming villages, women were sought to be kept under male control in terms of certain stereotypical images of women. As rightly stated by Goswami, “There is no other option left to find out the fault of the women than to utter one or two proverbs from Daak” [8] (p. 88). Therefore, some reformists often state that “Tirir Uparat Sokolo Marad” meaning—“Every male in society behaves like a husband with a married woman.”

Thus, the linguistic treatment of the women in the Assamese society by the illiterate and educated together is part of the “Cultural Literacy” of the Assamese-speaking

people in the greater Barpeta area. As a term coined by Hirsch, “Cultural literacy” refers to the ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture. The culturally literate person, according to Hirsch, is able to talk to and understand others of that culture with fluency, while the culturally illiterate person fails to understand culturally conditioned allusions, references to past events, idiomatic expressions, jokes, names, places, etc. Hirsch et al. [3] states:

*Cultural literacy, unlike expert knowledge, is meant to be shared by everyone. It is that shifting body of information that our culture has found useful, and therefore worth preserving. Only a small fraction of what we read and hear gains a secure place on the memory shelves of the culturally literate, but the importance of this information is beyond question. This shared information is the foundation of our public discourse. It allows us to comprehend our daily newspapers and news reports, to understand our peers and leaders, and even to share our jokes. (p. x)*

Schipper [4] stated that musical, direct, frank, and the proverbs reflect not only cultural uniqueness but also commonalities shared around the globe and throughout history. Consciously or subconsciously, we have all been influenced by such messages, in spite of local and regional differences, and historical developments and changes (p. 19). He also argues,

*Proverbs about women substantially help to explain how and why, worldwide, sexual differences have resulted in a growing gap, a gap that has estranged men and women from sharing both public roles in life and responsibilities at home. Teaching and preaching the preservation of such a gendered gap, on the basis of relatively insignificant body differences, proverbs have reinforced prevailing hierarchies and established rigid images of what it means not to be a man but a woman, thus legitimating accessory roles for life for both sexes. The inescapable other side of this prescriptive coin is that women and men who do not fit the prescribed behavior are stigmatized—no less by other women than by men. Privileges are never given up easily. (pp. 20-21)*

Thus, in case of Assam too, the proverbial expressions are affected by the “Cultural Literacy” of the people in question. However, the proverbs, maxims, and similar expressions can also reveal different ways of seeing or perceiving life. As part of people’s cultural legacies, most proverbs confirm the societal norms and values forcing the users to further insist on the collective acceptance of the male-inspired domestic and social interests and the inherited ideas about the Assamese womanhood. This also hints at how sexism is still dominant among the Assamese-speaking people of the Barpeta district. The proverbial utterances cited above display misogynistic sentiment which are transmitted from generation to generation. Some even argue that a reflection of the negative attitude toward women is associated with impurity and blind faith of the people as in both physical and mental harassments of the Assamese women, such proverbs have been very handy.

Some studies have already been conducted on Assamese folk life, folk literature, and proverbial utterances such as Prafulla Dutta Goswami’s *Osomiya Jana Sahitya* [8], Nabin Chandra Sarma’s *Osomiya Loko Sanskritir Abhash* [9], and Manisha Talukdar’s *Osomiya Prabhad Probrachan: Ek Bishleshanatmak Adhayan* [10] among others which are significant contributions to the field. However, none of them have so far specifically discussed the role of sexism in language as well as in folk like and culture. Books like *Prabad Prabasan (Buranji, Baichitra Aru Bishleshan)* by Chakreswar Das [11]

or *Loko Sahityar Rahghara: Fakara Jojana* by Phul Kumari Kalita [12] are also very rare contributions toward excavating Assamese proverbial expressions in lower Assam area but without a particular focus on the use of the sexist language and its problematics. Therefore, as we discuss equality and equity for everyone living in the society, there is also a need of studying the use of words and language with insights received from the newer researches being carried out in the fields such as Paremiography, Miemeology, Sociolinguistics, and Cultural literacy across different societies and cultures.

It is a matter of debate whether the cultural values of specific language communities are actually reflected in their proverbs. The point here is that even in the twenty first century, the proverbs still remain very popular among the common masses despite unprecedented developments in science and technology. Several scholars including Mieder [13] have reacted to the male dominance and the misogyny in proverbs. As a surprise, they tried to find the “man” in place of “woman” as early as 1880 in a short humorous verse: “Early to bed and early to rise Makes *woman* healthy, wealthy, and wise” (p. 179). Another gender-free possibility would be to replace “man” with “person,” as in case of “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a person healthy, wealthy, and wise” (p. 179). We now should see the Assamese “women” as individuals who always have “fewer opportunities” than men in accessing the existing occupations and positions. It therefore rests upon an assumption that “gender equality” means integrating these women into the social and political status quo. Thanks to the idea of women’s liberation through education and economic uplift that there are now noticeable reactions against such sexual politics.

## **12. Conclusion**

Today, girls and women of our society are provided with a full range of choices and preferences for meeting their daily needs and fulfilling their interests and experiences. However, contrary to this, linguistic sexism has become a social phenomenon encouraging more gender discriminations by means of language. The Assamese proverbial expressions used in the Barpeta district are part of the “Cultural Literacy” of the people of the region, but even the educated women are so reluctant to accept the fact that a particular kind of “Cultural Literacy” is also dangerous to the society they live in as women themselves turn out to be the oppressors of other women. The sexist terminologies prevalent among the Assamese-speaking people of the Barpeta district are so inherently lasting and can be so purposively customized to satisfy male hypocrisy or female “jealousy” that it will need ages to get rid of them unless we do not stop promoting gender inequality in society through both colloquial and standard languages. The discussions provided in the paper would surely enable the readers to examine the attitude of the Assamese people toward women and how linguistic and social stereotypes are born due to continuous linguistic transactions in a sexist society. Finally, answers to questions like—what the Assamese proverbs say about the women or why the Assamese people believe that men and women are to be treated differently should source new researches on the politics of language in general. In the context of the twenty first century, such researches will encourage more and more region specific, transregional, and transnational researches around the living conditions of women in society and how language has been continuously being used as a tool to dominate women.

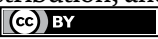
## **Author details**

Prasenjit Das  
Discipline of English, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University,  
Guwahati, Assam, India

\*Address all correspondence to: [prasenjitgu@gmail.com](mailto:prasenjitgu@gmail.com)

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] Rosaldo MZ. Women culture and society: A theoretical overview. In: Rosaldo MZ, Lamphere L, editors. *Women Culture and Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1974:17-42
- [2] Irigaray L. *The Sex which is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter with Caroline Burke. New York: Cornell University Press; 1985. p. 85
- [3] Hirsch ED, Joseph F, Trefil KJ. *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company; 2002. p. 47
- [4] Schipper M. *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet: Women in Proverbs from Around the World*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press; 2004. p. 14
- [5] Stone JR. *The Routledge Book of World Proverbs*. London and New York: Routledge; 2006
- [6] Kalita NN. Women and sexism: language of Indian school textbooks. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 1986;21(18):794-797
- [7] Das U. *Barpeta Jilar Prabasan aru Naari Manstatwa*. Baihata Chariali: Mouchak Prakashan; 2017
- [8] Goswami PD. *Osomiya Jana Sahitya*. Guwahati: Bani Prakash; 1986
- [9] Sarma NC. *Osomiya Loko Sanskritir Abhash*. Guwahati: Bani Prakash; 2007
- [10] Talukdar M. *Osomiya Prabhad Probrachan: Ek Bishleshanatmak Adhayan*. Guwahati: N. L. Publication; 2017
- [11] Chakreswar D. *Prabad Prabasan (Buranji, Baichitra Aru Bishleshan)*. Bani Mandir: Guwahati; 2008
- [12] Kalita PK. *Loko Sahityar Rahghara: Fakara Jojana*. Balijan, Digboi: Nip Kumar Deka; 2003
- [13] Mieder W. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press; 2004

# Reconstruction of Women Portrayal in Indonesian Movies

*Naurissa Biasini and Aura Saskia Zahwa Zeusta*

## Abstract

Women in movies so far have often been shown unfairly, especially in action movies. Women are usually only as a complement or as a weak party and need to be saved. Gradually this is starting to change, but there are still many movies that depict women as not important characters in a story. This has changed significantly in 2022 when there are several action movies featuring female characters as the main characters or characters with different characters from previous movies. In this research, two Indonesian movies released in 2022 were taken, namely “*Mencuri Raden Saleh*” and “*The Big 4*.” This study aims to see how the four female characters, namely Sarah, Fella, Dina, and Alpha are presented in the two movies by using semiotic analysis. The results showed that the four female characters were successfully reconstructed as characters who did not experience marginalization, did not obey the orders of the male characters, and did not follow the stereotypes of women that usually appear in movies. Even so, there are still stereotypes of romantic relationships that still emerge.

**Keywords:** reconstructions, women portrayal, movies, gender inequality, social construction

## 1. Introduction

Movie is one part of the mass communication media, which has an important and strong role in conveying a message to the public. This is because movie as a product of mass communication media is a medium that is in great demand and easily understood by people of various age groups, from children to parents. This is what shows that movies have the potential to influence their audiences according to Sobur in Susanto [1]. The integration between audio and visual quality can very easily attract the attention of audiences, especially with the addition of very diverse ideas and story ideas.

The function of movies in general is to convey a message and information that is packaged in the form of entertainment. That is why movies have a significant influence on the formation of the audience’s mindset, this is because the content of movies can not only reflect but also create reality according to Jowett in Susanto [1]. Many things can be learned through movies, they have the power to form a stigma through the construction of reality and people’s stereotypes about something. One of the stigmas and stereotypes in the movie industry that is heavily discussed is the construction of women’s representation, which is considered to be as old as the movie industry itself.

The representation of women in both the national and international movie industry has always been a hot topic of discussion. However, the construction of the depiction of female characters still carries negative stereotypes [2]. This is none other than being influenced by cultural traces and patriarchal ideology that is ingrained in Indonesian society. Where in the patriarchal system, women rarely get a place and become the number two marginalized creatures [3]. This old-fashioned thinking is then constructed in the movie industry and creates historical traces of the negative portrayal of women in a movie. The presence of women in movie history, in fact, has not been able to eliminate the negative representation of women in stereotypes that are constructed in the movie industry [2].

A study entitled “Women’s Representation in Soap Operas” shows that soap operas in Indonesia still represent women with an image of being weak, dominated, dependent, crybaby, sex symbol, and passive [4]. There is still a lot of negativity about women’s representation in the world of cinema, making academic studies related to women’s representation in movies always interesting to discuss, especially to see how the reconstruction of women’s representation in the world of cinema continues to develop. Another study titled “*Construction of the Reality of Women in the Film: Wanita Tetap Wanita (Women Stays Women)*” using Roland Barthes’s semiotic analysis indicates that the construction of women’s reality in the film “*Wanita Tetap Wanita*” presented women as victims of discrimination due to gender construction that distinguishes the characteristics of women’s femininity. In addition, women also received acts of domestic violence, sexual harassment, coercion, and physical attacks.

The results of the third study titled “*Construction of Reality of Women in the Film 7 Hearts 7 Love 7 Women (Film Semiotics Analysis)*” indicate that the reality of women constructed in the film *7 Hati 7 Cinta 7 Wanita* is women as sex objects, women as victims of promiscuity, subordination, and marginalization, discrimination against women, women as objects of violence, and femininity for women. From some of these previous studies, we can conclude that the depiction of women in Indonesian films has been objectified. Women are still portrayed as objects and helpless creatures, and are marginalized and subordinated.

Movies that represent women with a different image, and are far from the old-fashioned stigma construction, will also become a new wind, both in the movie industry and for academics who like the discussion. The movie industry in Indonesia itself is growing and experiencing improvement. This is of course based on the high enthusiasm of the Indonesian people as spectators for various movies produced by the nation’s children. Movie is one of the media of mass communication that is of interest to the public from the past until now. The reason is that the packaging contains the contents of the story, plot, themes, and characterizations in such a way as to produce an interesting story and carry a special message.

Throughout 2022, various movies appear in the Indonesian movie industry, which brought novelty to the depiction of women. The novelty of this different portrayal of women has emerged in various movie genres, especially action. Two examples of Indonesian action movies in 2022 that present female characters differently are the movie “*Mencuri Raden Saleh*” and the movie “*The Big 4*.”

The movie “*Mencuri Raden Saleh*” itself is a drama, action, and heist movie that tells about a group of teenagers who plan and carry out the theft of historic paintings for the Indonesian people. The main characters in this movie consist of 6 teenagers who are members of the planning group for the theft of Raden Saleh’s painting, the five teenage figures are Piko as The Forger, Ucup as The Hacker, Gofar as The Handyman, Tuktuk as The Driver, Fella as The Negotiator, and Sarah’s character as



The Brute. The six of them carried out their roles and collaborated in the theft mission, which did not go easy due to their respective conflicts [5].

This movie brings novelty regarding the depiction of female characters in it. Where this is supported by the statement of the actor Sarah in the movie “*Mencuri Raden Saleh*” namely Aghniny Haque in his interview with Kompas.com. Aghniny Haque feels that the character Sarah she plays in the movie “*Mencuri Raden Saleh*” is much different from the depiction of female characters in other movies. The female characters in the movie “*Mencuri Raden Saleh*” have great strength, are not oppressed, do not look weak, and are even superior to the male characters [6]. In this movie, the two female characters, Sarah and Fella, are shown as smart, strong, and brave women. These two figures do not sink among the other 4 main male characters. With the skills they have in this movie, it is a breath of fresh air in the construction of the reality of depicting female characters in the movie industry. Where so far women have often been shown as weak figures who need help from men to get out of life’s problems [7].

In the movie, Sarah is a female Pencak Silat athlete who decides to join the mission to steal Raden Saleh’s paintings after learning that her lover, Piko, is involved in this mission. Sarah is shown as a young woman who is very strong, brave, and good at martial arts. Therefore, in the movie, Sarah is likened to the muscle of this theft group. Sarah is also shown to be responsible in all matters concerning fights in order to protect her group [8].

The second female character in the movie *Mencuri Raden Saleh* is the character Fella. Fella is a bookie who has excellent manipulation skills. Fella is shown as a young woman who is smart and detailed in planning strategies. Therefore, in the movie, Fella is likened to the eyes, ears, and mouth of this group of thieves. This was because Fella was the one who served as the face to meet many people and gave directions to the other members. Fella is also often shown to show intelligence in correcting and completing the deficiencies of the initial planning [8].

Meanwhile, the movie “*The Big 4*” is a Netflix original action and comedy movie directed by Timo Tjahjanto, premiered on December 15, 2022. This movie centers on the character Dina who is a police detective who finds her father mysteriously dead. She is then determined to unravel the mystery of her father’s death with the clues. The clues she found led her to an island called Pulau Bersi. However, Dina was surprised to find another fact that her father was the leader of a group of assassins who had several foster children, namely Typhoon, Alpha, Pelor, and Jenggo. Dina then had to face debates with her father’s four foster children, until they finally decided to work together to fight the enemy to reveal their father’s death [9].

This movie also features female characters in it by constructing the reality of women in a new way that no longer appears weak or only as a complement as in most other movies. In this movie, the two female characters, Dina and Alpha, are shown as tough, brave, and aggressive women. These two figures are also highlighted in the movie and become important figures as well. The first female character in *The Big 4* is Dina. Dina is the biological daughter of Petrus and is a female police officer who serves as a detective. Dina decides to investigate her father’s mysterious death case, which is not progressing. Dina is shown as a young woman who is tough, has a strong will, and is good at fighting [10].

The second female character in *The Big 4* is the character Alpha. Alpha is the only female member of The Big 4, aka Peter’s adopted daughter. Alpha is shown as a woman who is brave and aggressive both in acting and speaking, good at fighting, and also a weapon expert. In this movie, Alpha’s character stands out with her outspokenness in expressing her opinion [11].

Both the movies “*Mercuri Raden Saleh*” and “*The Big 4*” do not specifically address women’s issues in the theme of the story, but in these two movies, the main female character is often highlighted as a character who is stronger, smarter, and critical as a helper for the other male characters to solve problems. Whereas in most other movies, there are still a lot of constructs of cultural stigma about women. The stigma is the notion that women are identified with weakness and oppression [12]. This makes these two movies one of the movies that respond to concerns regarding the reconstruction of the depiction of female characters in current movies.

However, because the movies “*Mercuri Raden Saleh*” and “*The Big 4*” are not movies that focus specifically on women’s issues and only insert their message through the depiction of the personality traits of the female characters in certain scenes, the audience is required to pay more attention to the movie in more detail to be able to analyze it and capture the message you want to convey. Messages in movies usually appear in symbols that are implicitly or explicitly depicted, so the reconstruction of the representation of female characters in movies requires a more detailed analysis.

Hence, it is very interesting to observe the verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs on the characters Sarah and Fella in the movie “*Mercuri Raden Saleh*”, as well as the characters Dina and Alpha in the movie “*The Big 4*” to find the reconstruction of women shown in the movie through scenes featuring all four characters. We can observe verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs by using Roland Barthes’ semiotic analysis to find out how the reconstruction of women is shown in the movies “*Mercuri Raden Saleh*” and “*The Big 4*” through the main female characters.

## **2. Movie and the social construction of reality**

### **2.1 The social construction of reality**

The social construction of reality was popularized and introduced by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann through their book entitled *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociological Knowledge of Knowledge*. The book describes social processes through interaction and action, in which individuals intensely create a reality that is collectively experienced and owned subjectively. Therefore, understanding something is caused by communication with other people. Social reality is actually nothing more than the result of social construction in certain communications [13]. Social construction stems from constructivism philosophy with cognitive constructive ideas. According to Suparno in Muthmainnah [12], there are three types of constructivism, namely ordinary constructivism, radical constructivism, and hypothetical realism constructivism. The similarity of the three is that constructivism is seen as a person’s cognitive work to make sense of the world of reality, which is caused by social ties between individuals and the people or environment around them.

Sobur in Muthmainnah [12] explains that community institutions are formed, maintained, and changed by human interaction and action. Society and social institutions may look objectively real, but in fact, they are formed subjectively through processes of interaction. Where at the highest level of generality, humans form a world with symbolic meanings that view life as a whole (Universal), which gives legitimacy and handles social forms, and also gives meaning or defines various areas of life.

Media content is in fact the result of the construction of reality by using language as its component. Not only is it a tool in presenting reality but language can also

determine the form that will be realized with respect to that reality. Therefore, the mass media has great power to be able to influence the meaning and description of the reality it constructs. If in the media there is a construction of reality that is different from that in society, then basically there is symbolic violence that occurs. Where symbolic violence can occur through the use of language that obscures, refines, to coarsens a fact [13].

## **2.2 Movies in constructing reality**

In fact, movie always captures the reality that grows and develops in society and then projects it onto the screen. As a reflection of society, movie is a perspective that is generally easier to agree on. Movie has a different meaning than just a reflection of reality, the movie has the meaning of representing the reality of society. Movie as a reflection of reality is only limited to transferring reality onto the screen without changing reality itself. Meanwhile, movie as a representation of reality also builds and displays reality based on codes, conventions, ideology, and culture [14].

Today, movie has become a means of communication by telling stories. Storytelling is a culture of thousands of years from humans that is now perpetuated by movies. Everything about life is always told in the movie. Therefore, the movie is referred to as a representation of the real world that we live in. According to Sasono in Muthmainnah, when compared to other media, movie has more power in imitating reality as closely as possible to the real thing [12]. However, even though it mimics reality as closely as possible, in reality, the reality shown in the movie is not the actual reality. The reality presented in the movie is a pseudo-reality. As explained by Hooks in Muthmainnah [12], movie cannot present the actual reality. What the movie presents may look familiar but is actually different from the real world. This is because what is presented in the movie is an artificial re-imagination of reality. Where after watching a movie, individuals can develop an artificial reality as a comparison to the actual reality they face. Hence, this is where movie can be used as a window to see the world and a new understanding.

Movie developed from what was originally just a fragment of an object image that was recorded and played back for the audience to see, into a movie engineering that records reality to become an integration that describes reality itself. The recorded image then has its own meaning. In denotation, movies are enjoyed as they are without the need to understand them in depth. This is the advantage of movie, which is that it can provide a picture of reality and communicate it in detail, which is difficult if only done by spoken or written language.

Connotatively, movies require in-depth interpretation to see the picture of meaning. The movie displays a hidden or implicit code of meaning. The connotation aspect becomes an essential aspect because the power of meaning lies precisely in what is invisible and not in what is seen. This hidden meaning is understood by Barthes as an area of mythology and ideology. Ideology is a language phenomenon whose emergence may not be realized but can bring people to agree or disagree. Movie then becomes an effective medium for instilling various behaviors, lifestyles, and attitude orientations in its audience, whether intentional or not [12].

## **2.3 Reconstruction**

The word “reconstruction” is a combination of two words, namely, “re,” which means renewal, and also “construction,” which means a form system. The overall

meaning of the word “reconstruction” is explained in the Black Law Dictionary as: “Reconstruction is the act or process of rebuilding, recreating, or reorganizing something.” This means that reconstruction is the act or process of rebuilding, reorganizing, or rearranging something. According to Qardhawi in Sutrisno [15], there are three main points in the reconstruction, namely maintaining the core of the original form by preserving its character and characteristics; fixing something that has fallen down and strengthening a weak joint; and pouring newness without changing its character and characteristics [15].

From what has been described above, it can be concluded that reconstruction is an activity of rebuilding separate sets of ideas into a single whole. If reconstruction is related to reality, it means that reconstruction is interpreted as renewal with efforts to repair and apply current reality. In this research, writers tried to see how the two movies that are the object of research try to rebuild how women are represented in movies.

## **2.4 Semiotic as methodology**

According to Prasetya in Nurrochman, Abidin, and Santoso [16], semiotics describes that the cultural code in movie is a combination of the concept of a sign and the culture of society. Where in the movie, the strongest identification is through the language used, which includes the codes of meaning representation that need to be conveyed by the sender of the message. In Roland Barthes’s semiotics, he adheres to and implements de Saussure’s semiotic theory (signifier and signified), which seeks to explain that humans in social life are dominated by connotations [12].

According to Sobur in Nasirin and Pithaloka [17], Roland Barthes developed this thought and applied it to the concept of culture with a system of meaning in the form of two levels of signifieds, namely denotation and connotation. It is explained that Barthes defines a sign as a system consisting of (E) an expression or signifier in conjunction (R) with content (signified) (C): ERC.

The primary sign system can be an element of a sign system that is much more complete and has a different meaning than before. With that, the primary sign is denotative, while the secondary sign is one of the connotative semiotics. So that this connotative concept is the key to Roland Barthes’s semiotics. Barthes explains that semiotics is basically concerned with how humanity makes sense of things [1]. Sobur in Susanto [1] explained that Barthes’ analysis model is known as two-stage significance (two orders of signification). Where the first stage of significance is the relationship between the signifier (expression) and the signified (content/denotation meaning), which describes the relationship between the signifier (object) and the signified (meaning) on the sign in external reality. This refers to the real meaning of the signifier (object). While the second stage of significance is the connection that arises when the sign meets (connotative meaning). The term connotation itself, according to Barthes [1], describes a relationship that processes when meeting the emotions and cultural values of its users.

Nurrochman, Abidin, and Santoso [16] explained that in Barthes’ semiotics, two stages of meaning denotation and connotation then create myths. This is because Barthes also explores a cultural approach in the search for meaning. Myths are in fact inseparable from human life because what underlies the creation of myths is mass culture so that they can dominate. For Barthes, connotation actually denotes myth, then myth has the connotation of a certain ideology.

In this study, a semiotic method is used by focusing on analyzing the signs and texts in the film to understand the code behind the signs and texts, so that the

desired meaning can be found. In the area of semiotics research, the researcher uses the Roland Barthes model of semiotic analysis through two orders of signification, denotation, and connotation.

Where in the first stage of significance, namely denotation, will examine the clearest meaning in accordance with the reality of the selected scenes. Then in the second stage of significance, namely connotation, it will examine the meaning of signs related to emotions and values in these scenes. Then after the connotative meaning is found, it is continued by looking at the myths that arise from the meanings and messages found. The researcher will observe the scenes in the films “Mencuri Raden Saleh” and “The Big 4” and relate them to the concept of forms of gender inequality to see the reconstruction of women’s reality in the main female characters.

## **2.5 Representation of the reality of women in gender inequality**

The increasing progress on women’s rights at this time apparently did not stop the issue of social injustice that still occurs to women. This is caused by the construction of gender that has flowed over a long history and has taken root in society. As explained in the Women’s Studies Encyclopedia, gender is a cultural concept that seeks to create a difference/comparison between men and women in terms of characteristics, behavior, roles, and mentality that develop in society [18]. This difference became known as gender differences.

Gender differences in fact will not be a problem as long as it does not cause gender inequalities. In fact, gender inequalities have given birth to various injustices. Women are still ranked highest as victims of gender inequalities, although it is possible for men to become victims of gender inequality [12]. According to Herdiansyah [19], in his book entitled *Gender in a Psychological Perspective*, gender inequality manifests itself in patterns of daily life in many forms:

1. Marginalization is a process of exclusion and subordination caused by gender differences and resulting in poverty. There are various ways to marginalize a person or a group, one of which is by assuming gender. In this case, women are usually set aside regarding the economy. Where there is an assumption that women are less suitable to work in the public sector, less authorized to become leaders, and less worthy of a higher salary/income than men.

Because of this unequal situation, especially in terms of the economy, women become powerless under male domination. An example of marginalization of women is the notion that women are only supporting breadwinners, so that in the public sector such as factories, women are most vulnerable to layoffs due to gender reasons such as reproductive factors and are only supporting breadwinners.

2. Subordination can be interpreted as a situation that is not primary and not too important. Subordination is also the view that a role/thing done by one sex is lower than the other sex. Subordination with women puts them in a low position because of the assumption that women are more irrational and emotional. So that women are not considered too important and are not prioritized in making ideas, opinions, or other important decisions. In domestic life, there is also an assumption that women are responsible for domestic and reproductive affairs, while men are responsible for public affairs and production. Therefore, women are often unable to be present to lead. An example of subordination of women is

the priority of education for boys compared to girls who are deemed not to need higher education because they will end up in the kitchen. This is because there is still an assumption that women are only bound by three things, namely the kitchen, the well, and the mattress.

3. Stereotypes are labeling of certain characters or traits based on a wrong assumption of a person or a group. In general, this labeling is often used as a justification for an action from one group to another. So that labeling can show power inequality with the aim of controlling/dominating other parties. Negative labeling can lead to injustice that ends in discrimination, and this can harm women. Stereotypes based on gender often affect women, making it difficult and detrimental to women. An example of stereotypes against women is women who are considered inappropriate to be leaders because women are emotional beings who will not be able to make fair decisions because they are mixed with emotional elements.
4. Violence is an act of physical and nonphysical (mental/psychological) violence. If it is related to gender, it is physical and nonphysical violence perpetrated against certain genders and generally occurs in women. Violence in gender roles occurs because of differences in character between men and women. Where men are considered masculine with characteristics of being brave, strong, dashing, and others. While women are considered feminine with weak, gentle, submissive characteristics, and others. Even though there is nothing wrong with this difference, in fact, this difference gives rise to acts of violence against women. The assumption that women are gentle is misinterpreted as a reason for acts of violence against women. Fakhri in Herdiansyah [19] describes eight forms of gender bias consisting of rape, domestic violence, violence and torture of the genital organs, prostitution/prostitution, pornography, violence in contraception, covert violence, and sexual harassment. Examples of violence against women are the beating of a husband against his wife in the household, sexual harassment, coercion, sexual exploitation, and others.
5. Unbalanced double burden is an imbalance of workload or in general referred to as a double-burden for one gender when compared to the other gender. This happens a lot in the daily lives of women in various cultures and countries, especially those with a patriarchal history. The reproductive role of women is often considered a permanent role. So that the domestic role of women does not decrease even though there has been an increase in the number of women who carry out public roles by working in public areas in this modern era. These two role responsibilities result in a double burden being borne by women. An example of a woman's double burden is a wife who works, but when she returns home she still has the obligation to take care of the house, children, and husband. On the other hand, it is considered normal for men to immediately rest or relax after returning home from work without other responsibilities.

### **3. Reconstruction of women in “Mercuri Raden Saleh” and “The Big 4”**

#### **3.1 Marginalization**

In movies, women are usually shown to be marginalized by portraying themselves as side characters. Women are usually only companions or supporters in the life of male

characters. This is due to the assumption that women are not suitable to work in the public sector, are less suitable to be leaders, and are less eligible to earn the same income as men [19]. However, based on the results of documentation and analysis conducted from the two movies in this study, the concept of marginalization in gender inequality towards women does not appear. The female characters in these two movies are shown to be empowered and even have more reliable abilities than the male characters.

In the movie “Mencuri Raden Saleh,” the characters Sarah and Fella are shown to have an equal position with other male characters. They are not just side characters but are characters who both play an important role in the theft of a painting that was planned along with three other male characters. Sarah has an important role in this heist group, namely as a muscle for her group. Because she has extraordinary martial arts abilities, she acts as The Brute whose job is to protect her group and advance in any event that requires martial arts skills to bring down opponents. Next is the character Fella who gets the nickname The Negotiator in the group. He is a clever character and very detail oriented. Fella often gives directions and corrects the strategies her team has devised.

In terms of cinematography, Sarah and Fella’s characters when talking or discussing with other characters are always shown standing side by side, not behind the male characters. This shows that the two characters have an equally important role, not just as a support, as we can see for example in the image below **Figure 1**.

In the movie “The Big 4,” Dina’s character is a woman who works as a police detective, which is usually handled by a male character. Even though so far women’s work in movies is usually not far from jobs that support men’s positions or household chores. However, in this movie, Dina’s character holds a job position that is rarely played by female characters. This is also shown by the character Alpha who acts as a member of “The Big 4” assassins. Alpha is also shown as a woman who has the ability to defend herself and use firearms that are just as great as other male assassin characters. The duties she carries out are the same as other male characters without any discrimination.

### 3.2 Subordination

Subordination with women puts them in a low position because of the assumption that women are more irrational and emotional. So that women are not considered



**Figure 1.**  
*The scene where fella is recruited as a member of the team because of her strategic skills.*

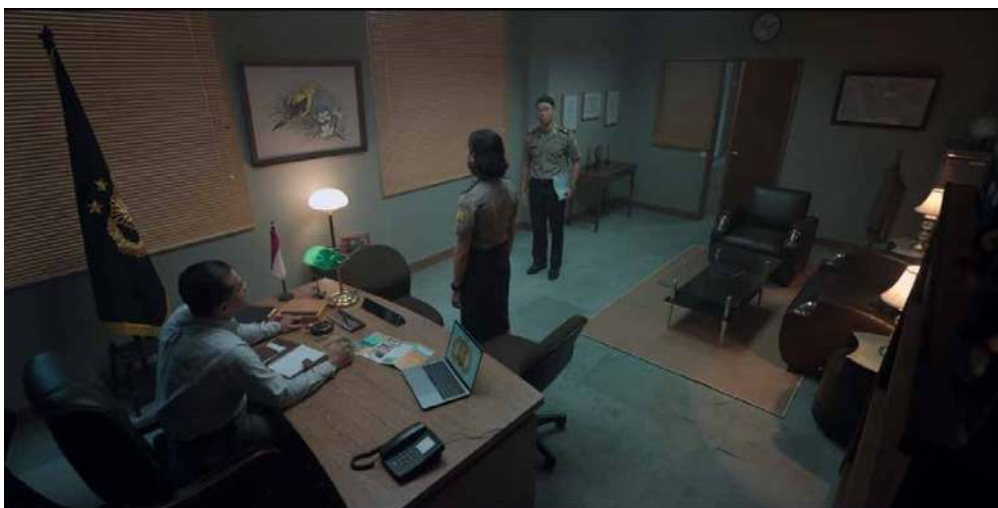
too important and are not prioritized in making ideas, opinions, or other important decisions. However, in the movie “Mencuri Raden Saleh,” the characters Sarah and Fella do not show subordination to the male characters. In several scenes, when Sarah and Fella receive orders from the male characters, they show defiant reactions or even do not follow what they are told. Sarah, for example, in one of the scenes when she is ordered to be quiet by her friend, Ucup, actually challenges Ucup to a fight because he disturbed her conversation with Piko, her boyfriend **Figure 2**.

This is also shown by the characters Dina and Alpha in the movie “The Big 4” who do not show subordination to male power either at work or in personal life. Dina, for example, who works as a police detective, refused when her boss ordered her not to continue the investigation into her father’s death. This is shown in the scene image below **Figure 3**.

This scene shows that the female character (Dina) is presented differently from the female characters in previous Indonesian action films. Women are usually



**Figure 2.**  
*The scene where Sarah challenged Ucup to a fight.*



**Figure 3.**  
*The scene where Dina refuses her superior’s order to stop the investigation into her father’s murder.*



shown as characters who always follow orders or directions given by male characters. This shows that there are different constructions of how women are presented in action movies. Even from a cinematographic point of view, in scenes that show changes in terms of subordination, female characters such as Dina and Alpha are positioned in the center and in front of each scene. The placement of a character in the middle or front of a scene shows the center of the story of a scene, not just as a companion in a scene [3].

### 3.3 Stereotype

According to Herdiansyah [19], stereotypes is labeling of certain characters or traits based on a wrong assumption of a person or a group. Stereotypes based on gender often affect women, making it difficult and detrimental to women. An example of stereotypes against women is women who are considered inappropriate to be leaders because women are emotional beings who will not be able to make fair decisions because they are mixed with emotional elements.

There are three stereotypes that usually appear in movies according to Fedorova. First, women rarely take the role of a leading character. Second, the story usually links them romantically with the main characters. Finally, the third portrayal of women on screen is as someone who needs to be rescued [20]. Some of these stereotypes are reconstructed but one is still shown in these two movies.

In movie “The Big 4,” Dina is the main character in this movie who runs the story from beginning to end. Although Alpha is not the main character, he still plays an important role in the storyline. Dina and Alpha work hand in hand in a firearm fight with a group of military who are about to kill them. Even the cinematographic character Dina is shown in front of the main male character when they are chasing the enemy. We can see this as an example in the cut scene below **Figure 4**.

The second stereotype is that the female character has a romantic relationship with the main male character, which is almost indescribable. However, unfortunately at the end of the movie, there is a scene where it turns out that Dina and Topan, one of the male characters, show interest in each other through a kiss scene. Even though



**Figure 4.**  
*The scene where Dina leads the enemy search in front of the male character.*

in the end the kiss scene is Topan's trap so that Dina does not follow or catch them after they succeed. Knocks her opponent out, but Dina still falls into the trap and kisses Topan.

The third stereotype, women are characters who need to be saved, is clearly refuted in this movie. Dina can defend herself and is able to defeat her opponent, namely a bigger and stronger man. One of the enemy figures even told Typhoon that Dina did not need to be saved because she must be strong. In addition, since the beginning of her appearance in the movie, the Alpha character is a female character who does not need to be saved. She is an expert in martial arts and fire-arms. She was even shown to be very excited when they had to enter to attack their enemy's base.

In the movie "Mencuri Raden Saleh," the characters Sarah and Fella share the screen with three male characters. Although the center of the story is Piko, Sarah and Fella appear from the beginning of the story and contribute a lot to the theft process in this movie. The characters Sarah and Fella are also not characters who need to be saved by a male character. Sarah can defend herself and even protect other characters, including male characters with her martial arts skills. Meanwhile, Sarah protects herself by using her brain intelligence to set a strategy (Figures 5 and 6).

The character Sarah, for example, is shown as a strong and brave "Pencak Silat" (Indonesian Martial Art) athlete.

In the scene above, we can see the sign shown here is Sarah who is fighting and can defeat her opponent. In terms of denotation, the scene shows that Sarah defeated her opponent. However, based on the connotative meaning of defeating an opponent, it shows that Sarah has more strength than other male characters in the movies.

Unfortunately, in this movie, since the beginning of the movie, Sarah's character is told to have a romantic relationship with the character Piko. He also helps Piko carry out the theft plan because he really wants to help Piko, who has to steal paintings to help his father. This shows that the stereotype of women in movies, namely having romantic relationships with male characters, is still depicted in the two movies in this study.



**Figure 5.** Scene when alpha broke inside their enemy's base while smiling and throwing grenades.



**Figure 6.**  
*Scene when Sarah had to protect her friends by fighting with lots of guards.*

### 3.4 Violence

Violence in gender roles occurs because of differences in character between men and women. Where men are considered masculine with characteristics of being brave, strong, dashing, and others. While women are considered feminine with weak, gentle, submissive characteristics, and others. Fakhri in Herdiansyah [19] describes eight forms of gender bias consisting of rape, domestic violence, violence and torture of the genital organs, prostitution/prostitution, pornography, violence in contraception, covert violence, and sexual harassment. Examples of violence against women are the beating of a husband against his wife in the household, sexual harassment, coercion, sexual exploitation, and others.

In these two movies, the female characters do not experience violence as mentioned above. There are no scenes of rape, domestic violence, prostitution, and so on. In addition, because the four female characters that appear are not told about domestic relations, there is also no form of domestic violence that is shown. Precisely in these two movies, the female characters are able to balance their opponent's strength when they have to fight using physical violence.

### 3.5 Unbalanced double burden

The reproductive role of women is often considered a permanent role. So that the domestic role of women does not decrease even though there has been an increase in the number of women who carry out public roles by working in public areas in this modern era. These two role responsibilities result in a double burden being borne by women. However, because in these two movies, there is not a single female character who is told to run a household relationship, so the unequal burden of multiple roles does not appear and cannot be examined.

## 4. Conclusions

The conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this research is that the depiction of women shown in two Indonesian action movies in 2022 has changed.

If previously women were shown as a complement in the story, but in the movies “Mencuri Raden Saleh” and “The Big 4,” women are shown differently. The depiction of women is reconstructed so that they are not merely shown as weak figures. The characters Sarah, Fella, Dina, and Alpha have their respective strengths, both physical and intellectual, which are usually possessed by male characters. In some scenes, it can be seen that they are stronger, braver, and protect the male characters.

In addition, the four characters are not characters who need to be rescued by men, as is usually the case in action movies. They fought their way and carried out the mission well. This reconstruction of the female character really provides a different view of women, even though there is still a stereotype of a romantic relationship with a male character which in fact still emerges. However, the reconstruction provided by these two movies provides good news for the depiction of Indonesian women in the future.

## **Acknowledgements**

This research was conducted with the help and input from the lecturers of the Communication Science Department at Universitas Pembangunan Jaya, Indonesia.

## **Notes**

All images in this article are taken from the official OTT, which screens the two films without prejudice to the filmmakers and the official copyright owners of these images. Images are used solely for research purposes without seeking any profit.


## **Author details**

Naurissa Biasini\* and Aura Saskia Zahwa Zeusta  
Universitas Pembangunan Jaya, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia

\*Address all correspondence to: naurissa.biasini@upj.ac.id

## **IntechOpen**

---

© 2023 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

## References

- [1] Susanto O. Representasi Feminisme Dalam Movie “SPY”. *Jurnal EKomunikasi*. 2017;5-1:1-10. Available from: <https://publication.petra.ac.id/index.php/ilmu-komunikasi/article/view/6164/5661>
- [2] Irawan RE. Representasi Perempuan Dalam Industri Sinema. *Humaniora*. 2014;5-1:1-8. DOI: 10.21512/humaniora.v5i1.2975
- [3] Wandu G. Rekonstruksi Maskulinitas: Menguak Peran Laki-Laki Dalam Perjuangan Kesetaraan Gender. *Kafa'ah*. 2015;5-2:239-255. DOI: 10.15548/jk.v5i2.110
- [4] Peran Perempuan dalam Sinetron Selalu Dieksploitasi. 2007. Available from: <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/82536/peran-perempuan-dalam-sinetronselalu-dieksploitasi> [Accessed: January 27, 2023]
- [5] Kerja Sama Peran dalam Pencurian pada Movie “Mencuri Raden Saleh”. 2022. Available from: <https://www.kompasiana.com/lailafriliariyadi3515/6305e868c835126b95564485/kerjasama-peran-dalam-pencurian-di-movie-mencuri-raden-saleh> [Accessed: January 25, 2023]
- [6] Aghniny Haque Bangga Penggambaran Karakternya di Mencuri Raden Saleh. 2022. Available from: <https://www.kompas.com/hype/read/2022/07/19/172419666/aghyniy-haquebangga-penggambaran-karakternya-di-mencuri-raden-saleh> [Accessed: January 25, 2023]
- [7] Naurissa B, Sri W. Representasi Feminisme Dalam Karakter Pahlawan Perempuan Captain Marvel. *Jurnal Widyakala*. 2021;8:17-24. DOI: 10.36262/widyakala.v8i0
- [8] Profil Karakter Penting Dalam Movie Mencuri Raden Saleh. 2022. Available from: [https://entertainment.kompas.com/read/2022/08/25/221132766/profilkarakter-penting-dalam-movie-mencuri-radensaleh?page=all&jxconn=1\\*34s3sv\\*other\\_jxampid\\*b002dEZYs2\]zRjI0N19wb1hPUbTRV9Pd0VTNkR2Wk9UZjVlkay1UY3hjcWtDTk9wS3J3b2V4Z0hUWGpwSHItcg..#page2](https://entertainment.kompas.com/read/2022/08/25/221132766/profilkarakter-penting-dalam-movie-mencuri-radensaleh?page=all&jxconn=1*34s3sv*other_jxampid*b002dEZYs2]zRjI0N19wb1hPUbTRV9Pd0VTNkR2Wk9UZjVlkay1UY3hjcWtDTk9wS3J3b2V4Z0hUWGpwSHItcg..#page2) [Accessed: January 25, 2023]
- [9] 6 Fakta The Big 4. Movie Indonesia yang Puncaki Netflix Dunia. 2022. Available from: <https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2022/12/21/150000065/6-fakta-the-big-4-movie-indonesia-yang-puncaki-netflix-dunia?page=all> [Accessed: February 13, 2023]
- [10] Movie The Big 4. Reuni Keluarga Paling Eksplosif dari Timo Tjahjanto. 2022. Available from: <https://www.jawapos.com/entertainment/music-movie/19/12/2022/movie-thebig-4-reuni-keluarga-paling-eksplosif-dari-timo-tjahjanto/> [Accessed: February 13, 2023]
- [11] Cerita Lutesha Perankan Karakter Perempuan Alpha di Movie The Big 4. 2022. Available from: <https://www.parapuan.co/read/533615700/cerita-lutesha-perankan-karakterperempuan-alpha-di-movie-the-big-4?page=all> [Accessed: February 13, 2023]
- [12] Muthmainnah A. Konstruksi Realitas Kaum Perempuan Dalam Movie 7 Hati 7 Cinta 7 Wanita (Analisis Semiotika Movie) [thesis]. Makassar: Universitas Hasanuddin; 2012. Available from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/25487512.pdf>

- [13] Tamrin M. Konstruksi Realitas Perempuan Di Media Suara NTB. KOMUNIKE: Jurnal Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam. 2018;**10-1**:32-48. DOI: 10.20414/jurkom.v10i1.556
- [14] Robiansyah A. Konstruksi Realitas Kaum Perempuan Dalam Movie “Wanita Tetap Wanita” (Analisis Semiotika Movie “Wanita Tetap Wanita”). E-Journal Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas Mulawarman. 2015;**3-3**:504-518. Available from: <https://ejournal.ilkom.fisip-unmul.ac.id/site/?p=214>
- [15] Sutrisno M. Rekonstruksi Regulasi Penegakan Hukum Tindak Pidana Illegal Fishing Berbasis Nilai Keadilan. [thesis]. Semarang: Universitas Islam Sultan Agung; 2022. Available from: <http://repository.unissula.ac.id/id/eprint/26698>
- [16] Nurrochman DI, Abidin Z, Santoso MP. Representasi Nelangsa pada Movie Pendek Banyu Karya Richard Suwae dari Pandangan Semiotika Roland Barthes. Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi dan Bisnis. 2021;**3-3**:504-518. Available from: <http://147.139.206.86/index.php/JIK/article/viewFile/666/381>
- [17] Nasirin C, Pithaloka D. Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Konsep Kekerasan Dalam Movie The Raid 2 Berandal. Journal of Discourse and Media Research. 2022;**1-1**:28-42. Available from: <https://journal.rc-communication.com/index.php/JDMR/article/view/14/18>
- [18] Latief A, Maryam S, Yusuf M. Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Budaya Sibaliparri Masyarakat Mandar. Papatudzu: Media Pendidikan dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan. 2019;**15-2**:160-173. DOI: 10.35329/fkip.v15i2.474
- [19] Herdiansyah H. Gender dalam perspektif psikologi. Jakarta: Salemba Humanika; 2016. p. 220. ISBN: 9786021232422
- [20] Stereotypical Women’s Representation in the Movie Industry. 2023. Available from: <https://www.byarcadia.org/post/stereotypical-women-s-representation-in-the-movie-industry> [Accessed: April 27, 2023]





*Edited by Feyza Bhatti and Elham Taheri*

*Gender Inequality - Issues, Challenges and New Perspectives* brings together advancements and empirical studies on gender studies from different parts of the world. Focusing on issues, challenges, and new perspectives on gender (in)equalities in multiple spheres and multiple countries, the book is an interdisciplinary and international compilation of studies on gender that also offers insight into future directions for the field. The book will appeal to those interested in empirical and practical advancements in gender studies, particularly students, teachers, and researchers across disciplines, as well as professionals, employers, and practitioners who are working towards addressing gender inequalities across the world.

*Usha Iyer-Raniga,  
Sustainable Development Series Editor*

Published in London, UK

© 2024 IntechOpen  
© Andre2013 / iStock

**IntechOpen**

ISSN 2753-6580

ISBN 978-1-83769-022-0



9 781837 690220