

Ethical Issues Associated with Gender Bias

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Introduction

Gender bias remains a pervasive issue that continues to impact individuals, organizations, and societies globally. It is a form of discrimination rooted in societal norms and stereotypes, leading to unequal treatment based on one's gender. This paper explores the ethical issues associated with gender bias, examining its various types, including explicit and implicit biases, stereotyping, micro-aggressions, tokenism, and more. By understanding these biases, we can identify their ethical implications, which violate fundamental principles of equality, fairness, and respect for human dignity. Furthermore, the paper will address the impact of gender bias on individuals' mental health, career opportunities, and overall well-being, and discuss the importance of legal frameworks aimed at combating gender-based discrimination. By evaluating the existing laws and regulations, we aim to highlight the challenges and the need for continued efforts to eradicate gender bias and promote gender equality in society.

Gender

Gender refers to those characteristics and roles of women and men that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being woman, man, girl or boy as well as relationship with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities. Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation among others.

Gender Bias

Bias comes in many forms and causes us to form prejudices against others. It helps us categorize things to make sense of the world around. Gender bias is the tendency to prefer one gender over another. It is the inclination towards or prejudice against one gender. It is a form of unconscious bias or implicit bias

which occurs when one individual unconsciously attributes certain attitudes and stereotypes to another person or group of people. This result in discriminatory treatment or unequal opportunity.

Types of Gender bias

1. Explicit Bias: This bias involves conscious and intentional beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors that favor one gender over another. For example, overt discrimination in hiring practices based on gender.

2. Implicit Bias: Implicit bias refers to unconscious or automatic biases that influence perceptions, judgments, and behaviors towards individuals based on their gender. These biases can occur without conscious awareness and may shape decision-making processes subtly.

3. Stereotyping: Stereotyping involves attributing certain characteristics, traits, or roles to individuals based on their gender, often oversimplifying or generalizing their behavior or abilities. For instance, assuming that women are more nurturing or emotional, while men are more assertive or logical.

4. Micro-aggressions: Micro aggressions are subtle, everyday actions or comments that communicate derogatory or negative messages about individuals based on their gender. These can include subtle forms of discrimination, such as making jokes or comments that belittle or undermine someone's gender identity or expression.

5. Tokenism: Tokenism occurs when individuals from underrepresented genders are included in groups, organizations, or initiatives solely to give the appearance of diversity, without genuine efforts to address systemic inequalities or ensure equitable representation and inclusion.

6. Double Standards: Double standards involve applying different sets of expectations or standards to individuals based on their gender, often holding them to stricter or more lenient criteria depending on their gender. For example, judging women's competence or behavior differently than men's in the same situation.

7. Hostile Environment: A hostile environment is created when individuals are subjected to unwelcome or offensive behavior or harassment based on their gender, creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or social environment.

8. Institutional Bias: Institutional bias refers to systemic or structural biases embedded within organizations, institutions, or systems that disadvantage certain genders while privileging others. These biases can manifest in policies, practices, and norms that perpetuate inequality and discrimination.

9. Intersectional Bias: Intersectional bias occurs when gender bias intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, disability, or age, resulting in compounded experiences of oppression or disadvantage for individuals with intersecting identities.

10. Educational Bias: Educational bias refers to biases and stereotypes present in educational settings that impact student learning experiences, opportunities, and outcomes based on their gender.

Reasons for Gender Bias

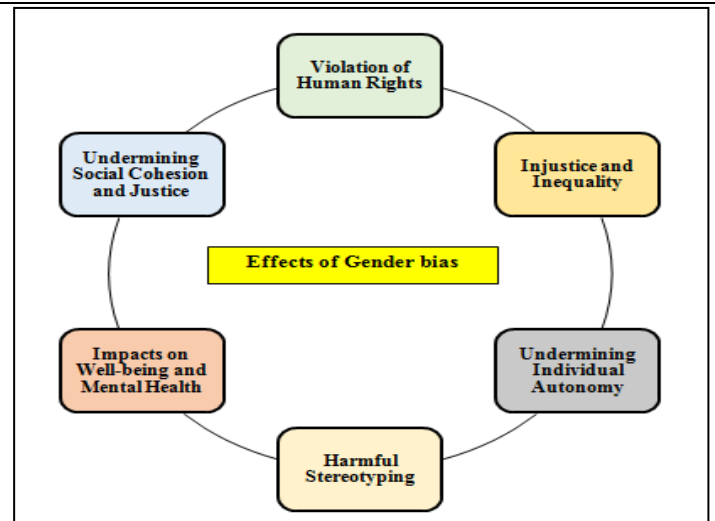


Why Gender bias - An ethical issue?

Gender bias is an ethical issue because it violates fundamental principles of fairness, equality and respect for human dignity.

1. Violation of Human Rights: Gender bias deprives individuals of their basic human rights to equal opportunities, treatment, and representation regardless of their gender identity.

2. Injustice and Inequality: Gender bias perpetuates unjust and unequal treatment based on gender,



leading to disparities in access to education, employment, healthcare, and other resources.

3. Undermining Individual Autonomy: Gender bias restricts individuals' autonomy by imposing societal norms and stereotypes based on gender, limiting their freedom to express themselves and make choices without discrimination or prejudice.

4. Harmful Stereotyping: Gender bias reinforces harmful stereotypes about what roles, behaviours, and characteristics are deemed appropriate or acceptable for individuals based on their gender, which can lead to stigma, marginalization, and exclusion.

5. Impacts on Well-being and Mental Health: Gender bias can have detrimental effects on individuals' well-being and mental health by fostering feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, particularly among those who experience discrimination or lack of acceptance due to their gender identity.

6. Undermining Social Cohesion and Justice: Gender bias undermines social cohesion and justice by perpetuating systems of power and privilege that favour certain genders over others, leading to division, resentment, and injustice within communities and society as a whole.

Impact of Gender Bias

The impact of gender bias is pervasive and affects individuals, organizations, and society as a whole in various ways:

1. Individual Impact

- ✓ Psychological Effects: Gender bias can lead to feelings of inferiority, self-doubt, and low self-

esteem in individuals who are subject to discrimination or stereotypes based on their gender.

- ✓ Career Limitations: Gender bias can hinder career advancement and limit opportunities for professional growth and development, leading to disparities in income, job satisfaction, and overall success.
- ✓ Health and Well-being: Individuals experiencing gender bias may suffer from increased stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, as well as physical health problems resulting from chronic stress and discrimination.

2. Organizations

- ✓ Workforce Diversity: Gender bias can impede efforts to build diverse and inclusive workplaces, leading to a lack of representation and perspectives from different genders, which can hinder innovation, creativity, and problem-solving.
- ✓ Employee Morale and Engagement: Gender bias can erode employee morale, trust, and loyalty, leading to lower levels of job satisfaction, engagement, and productivity among staff members who feel undervalued or marginalized.
- ✓ Legal and Reputational Risks: Organizations that fail to address gender bias may face legal liabilities, lawsuits, and reputational damage due to allegations of discrimination, harassment, or unequal treatment.

3. Society as a Whole

- ✓ Economic Impact: Gender bias contributes to economic inequality by limiting women's access to education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities, which undermines overall economic growth and development.
- ✓ Social Cohesion: Gender bias perpetuates social divisions and inequalities, undermining social cohesion and trust by reinforcing harmful stereotypes, prejudices, and power imbalances between genders.
- ✓ Health and Education Disparities: Gender bias can exacerbate disparities in health outcomes, access to healthcare, and educational

attainment, particularly for marginalized gender groups, leading to broader social inequalities and injustices.

Ethical Principles violated by gender bias

1. Equality: Gender bias undermines the principle of equality by treating individuals differently based on their gender rather than their merits, abilities, or inherent worth as human beings. This unequal treatment perpetuates unjust disparities and denies equal opportunities to individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

2. Fairness: Gender bias goes against the principle of fairness by subjecting individuals to discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudices based on their gender, rather than evaluating them impartially and objectively. Fair treatment requires considering individuals on their own merits and treating them equitably, regardless of gender.

3. Respect for Human Dignity: Gender bias disregards the inherent dignity and worth of every individual by reducing them to stereotypes, roles, or expectations based on their gender. Respecting human dignity entails recognizing and valuing each person's autonomy, agency, and right to self-determination, irrespective of gender.

4. Justice: Gender bias undermines the principle of justice by perpetuating systems of inequality, oppression, and privilege that favour certain genders over others. Justice requires addressing systemic barriers, biases, and injustices to ensure equitable treatment and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender.

5. Autonomy: Gender bias limits individuals' autonomy by imposing societal norms, expectations, and constraints based on their gender, which can restrict their freedom to express themselves, make choices, and pursue their goals without fear of discrimination or prejudice. Respecting autonomy means allowing individuals to define and live according to their own values, aspirations, and identities, free from gender-based limitations or constraints.

Laws and Regulation for combating gender bias

Laws and regulations are aimed at combating gender bias and promoting gender equality. Some of the key legislative measures include:

1. Constitution of India (1950): The Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex. Articles 14, 15, and 16 provide the legal framework for ensuring gender equality in various spheres of life.

2. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005): This law provides protection and relief to women who are victims of domestic violence and aims to prevent the occurrence of domestic violence by addressing gender-based power imbalances within the family.

3. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013): This legislation mandates the establishment of internal complaints committees in workplaces to address complaints of sexual harassment and ensure a safe and harassment-free work environment for women.

4. Maternity Benefit Act (1961) and Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017): These laws provide maternity leave and other benefits to female employees to ensure their health and well-being during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as to promote gender equality in the workforce.

5. Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006): This act prohibits the solemnization of child marriages and provides for the protection and welfare of children, especially girls, who are at risk of being married off at a young age, thereby addressing gender-based discrimination and inequality.

6. Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (1994): This law prohibits the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques for sex determination and sex-selective abortions, aiming to prevent gender-based discrimination and promote the value of every human life irrespective of gender. Effectiveness of these laws and regulations in combating gender bias in India varies. While these legal measures provide a framework for addressing gender-based discrimination and inequality, their implementation and enforcement often face challenges due to various factors such as cultural norms, social attitudes,

bureaucratic inefficiencies, and lack of awareness among the population. Moreover, gender bias persists in various forms and contexts despite the existence of laws, indicating the need for continued efforts to raise awareness, strengthen institutional mechanisms, and address systemic barriers to gender equality in India. Enforcement of existing laws, coupled with education, advocacy, and societal change, is crucial for effectively combating gender bias and promoting gender equality in India.

Conclusion

Gender bias is not only a societal problem but an ethical issue that undermines the values of equality, fairness, and justice. It harms individuals by limiting opportunities, reinforcing harmful stereotypes, and violating basic human rights. The continued presence of gender bias in various forms—whether explicit, implicit, or institutional—reveals deep-rooted inequalities that require systemic change. While legal measures have been introduced to combat gender bias, the effectiveness of these laws depends on their enforcement and the broader societal shift in attitudes towards gender equality. Achieving genuine gender equality requires a combination of legal reforms, social awareness, and cultural transformation. Only through a unified effort can we hope to build a society where every individual, regardless of gender, has the freedom, opportunities, and respect they deserve.

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