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***Question***

***Is gender relation changing in the 21st century? What are the areas of change and the factors driving this change?***

**Gender** is a state of being a male or female. In most cases, it’s typically defined with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological differences. Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) defines it as ‘relations between men and women, both perceptual and material’ It is not determined biologically as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution’ (FAO, 1997).

# Gender Relations

Gender relations refer to relations between men and women that are socially determined by culture, religion, or socially acceptable ways of thinking or being. These relationships between men and women, as they exist in most societies, are characterized by the marginalization of women in decision making and other forms of power sharing in the home and places of authority. The economic exploitation of women and extensive violence to the person and psyche of women the problem of unequal gender relations is both personal and systemic. This is giving rise to gender-based violence, death, poverty of families, neglect of children and a variety of societal dysfunctions In the interest of justice, empowerment and the development of families and communities, these relations need to be analyzed and new solutions found for their transformation. The problem will need to be analyzed both from its personal and systemic roots.

**How Gender relations is changing in the 21st Century and factors driving that change**

In the current generation of 21st Century, gender is often misunderstood as promotion of women who have taken more active role in different sectors and careers despite some traditions still hold women inferior in their society like numerous cases reported in Indian cultures women still come from traditional strict households, they have accepted their roles and feel comfortable in their decisions or lack thereof. Feminist movement gained momentum in the 1960’s and 70’s in the United States together with other Human Right groups that advocated for equal rights among all genders in recent centuries after observing women gender being domesticated by cultural norms, religious believes, traditional marginalization yet for the few women who were out speaking role models showed great hope. Gender roles in communities changed lately whereby women now play equal role as men in owning lead large companies, very active in their families and communities, own personal businesses, manage big organizations, head political groups, earn higher academic degrees from all sectors equal to men, to mention but few as compared to early centuries. Both genders actively attend sporting events; go to bars and all other outdoor activities that were dominated by men alone. The 21st century demonstrates equal participation of both genders in different activities as compared to early centuries that kept women behind by being responsible for domestic chores. Gender being a central organising principle of society in social construction which governs the process of production, reproduction where consumption and distribution are elements in that setting, gender has remained a critical and major focus of society despite equal rights. Young genders both males and females are groomed up with knowledge of man being head of family. Religions across all denominations still hold believe of man being a superior being from woman gender. This naturally has left a gap between the two genders where by man still carries weight of being the head of the household though women headed families also perform equal roles but the family still remains incomplete without a man due to title, security, and other duties that women can’t perform.

### a. Marriage Proposals

Marriage proposal in early centuries, men typically propose to women which was traditionally their role but in the 21st Century, women are stepping up by proposing to men as they get down on their knees. They have boldly come out elaborating men initiative proposals that can’t wait any longer for men to propose. Sometimes cultures term them as taboo breakers who boldly ask their future husbands to be hand in marriage. Men traditionally take head the process of proposing for marriage but this has changed in the 21st century where women now take bold action in dating and propose for marriage. This has left some traditional cultures thinking of women proposing as prostitutes desperate for marriage for example in my Iteso Culture, men take lead in proposing for marriage but when woman proposes, man shys off in fear of mockery and insults from fellow men or woman might be having HIV/AIDS as to why she boldly took men role of proposing for marriage and men prefer traditional marriage proposals or weddings. This happens in rural villages. However, todays women can propose for marriage. According to Chicago Tribune Article on marriage, more women are proposing than ever before. Some are giving men engagement rings.

### b. Dress code.

Culturally dress code for men and women are defined by norms and expectations that relate to an understanding to tell difference between man and woman. The dress has the most direct contact with the human body and is therefore considered an integral part of the self. Garments influence and shape the appearance with significant impact on the construction of social identity (Tseelon 1989). Dress codes differ from culture to culture, religion to religion, tribe to tribe, some people use different dress code for different settings for different gender (marriage parties, church/mosque, offices, etc) for example the easiest identified dress code is men put on trousers and shirts while women put on skirts and blouses. However in the 21st century, the trousers are worn by both genders. Women dress on trousers, shirts and neck-ties like men while men as well take part in women dresses, skirts and blouse though not widely in public. This has been associated with gay proactive men. Meanwhile Brighton College in Britain is the first school to scrap uniform policy so all children can wear skirts or trousers (Mirror online by Steve Robson. January 20th 2016). In Islam women are required to wear modest forms of attire which covers from head to toe. Therefore all this depends on the traditional cultural environment either in rural or urban though in most urban settings adapt any kind of dress code. In other words the world of clothing is changing as new cultural influences meet technological innovations.

### c. Work

Traditionally, both genders have different roles and responsibilities whereby men were considered responsible for taking care of the family financially; guiding the family while listening to their spouse though they make final decisions while women are to take care of children and household duties. During the 20th – 21st centuries, there strengthened Gender inequalities in all areas that are rooted in social structures but also in attitudes, said Professor Gillian Robinson, of the University of Ulster. Many arguments have shown imbalance at work. Others defend men to be more burdened while others argue that women are more burdened with daily chores such as laundry, cleaning, cooking food, shopping, looking after sick relatives and carrying our repairs while men only show significant contribution by other services of mending faulty items around the house. Both genders to some extent perform equal domestic duties though tradition still holds some societies.

## Other Areas of change in gender relations in the 21st century

Gender has for the past experienced many challenges that have led to massive advocacy for equality with specific promotion of women to equate with men. This has always varied from country to country. Most activists in developing countries focus on more basic issues like combating violence against women and equal access to other services like education, health care, job opportunities etc which men have dominated. Below are some challenges faced by gender;

**1, Domestic violence**; the violent confrontation between genders in families, at work, in public etc which involves physical harm, sexual assault. More than 40% of domestic violence victims are male according to World Development Report, 2012 by MIT’s Esther Duflo. Victims of domestic violence are men dominating while number of women is always left battered and bruised. Men assaulted by their partners are in most cases ignored by police according to reports on equal treatment. However according to religious believe where man is treated as head of the family while woman is termed as weaker vessel quoted from holy bible 1 Peter 3:7 which states ‘Likewise you husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour to the wife as to the weaker vessel and as being heirs together of the grace of life that your prayers be not hindered.’ This is where gender challenge is embraced despite equality advocacy.

**2 Decision making power**; Despite the fact that women hold positions of influence in both social, political, economic and religious levels, their decision making power still remains significantly lower than men gender. Decisions range from self-management to public management. At family levels (Married couples), money related decisions, women ability to visit friends and family, even managing own self still remains more powered by men gender. In Cultural settings, women are less powered to head tribes, clans or any cultural structure though Queen is recognised but the King has more decision making powers than Queen. For example in some other cultures like Bantu tribe in Uganda who have the King and the Queen. If the King dies, the Prince has to be crown as King. King Oyo of Toro in Uganda ascended to the throne in 1994 at the age of 3 years after his father’s death though his mother was alive. Therefore this limits women gender from having equal decision making powers than men gender in society.

**3 Inequality, th**is has always been challenging in the sense that naturally genders are not equal in all forms. Physical, mentally, socially, economically, biologically despite demands and adjustments made towards equating both genders. In many references, man gender and woman gender differ which has persistently left the gap in between despite bridging efforts of equality which has led gender being misunderstood as women empowerment though it’s the most affected gender. This discrimination and barriers prevent women gender from equating with men gender at all levels and through attempts on equity in both genders, it has in most cases exposed both genders to violence because socially accepted gender norms and values about what constitute acceptable behavior and interpersonal relationships are instilled since childhood and to be more specific, girl child is raised to be more submissive while boys are raised to be more controlling, dominant and aggressive as per traditional gender roles of what they should be in their maturity age of becoming father and mother..

**4 Gender imbalance,** this is the proportion of males to females across the world pauses challenges to gender. There are slightly more men than women in the world according to 015 estimates by United Nations. There are 101.8 men for every 100 women with the number of men rising gradually. This depends from country to country. In some countries, female population outnumber male population. In 2013, 49.59% of the global population were women. 81 countries had a majority of women, 37 countries had a majority of men, and 75 were within 0.5% of gender parity (United Nations Population Division's by David Bauer, 2014). The imbalance in gender is as a result of many factors that include wars, diseases, etc. It’s so challenging in gender in that the populated gender imposes pressure on the other in terms of violence, discrimination, abuse of rights etc hence having limited opportunities for equal right practices despite the fact that female gender have always fallen victims of abuse.

**5 Equality has increased divorce.** This analysis has proven fact that many families have broken up due to equality move between females and males. The move for equality was as a result of high prevalence of domestic violence and abuse on less active gender and in most cases affects female gender. However, due to introduction of equality in gender, this has increased the rate of divorce in marriages. For example, arguments about house work are not necessarily about labour but they are all about care, respect, believe together with ignorance of the meaning of equality. Tradition provides roles and responsibilities where man emerges as head of family and this makes male gender more autocratic leadership in family leaving female gender to be in charge domestic chores while male is to look up for the sustainability of family institution. Through this causes conflicts where man is expected to perform duties which tradition empowered female gender to be in charge hence divorce.

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