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QUESTION: Is Gender relations changing in the 21st century? What are the areas of change and the factors driving it?

ANSWER.

Gender relations refer to relations between men and women that are socially determined by culture, religion, or socially acceptable ways of thinking or being. It is defined with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological differences; it is not determined biologically as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men but is constructed socially.

Over the decades, gender roles for men and woman have changed dramatically. No longer are men expected to do the hunting and women expected to do the gathering, as stereotypes were once socially and culturally defined. Studies show that in the 1980's both sexes agreed on how they had different separate roles but since the 1990's those views have steadily changed. A dramatic transformation has taken place, changing men and women's lives, creating a more balanced view of roles and responsibilities that generations will continue to sculpt. The 20th century saw women take the workplace by storm. Now, the revolution has reached higher education, as women outpace men in college graduation and continues to narrow the gap in professional degrees; 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. 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. Women are currently outpacing men when it comes to college graduation and labor force participation, and they are rivaling men when it comes to holding jobs in law, medicine, and other traditionally male-dominated professions.

In the 1980's half of the nation agreed that the role for men was to go out to work and to be the main breadwinner of the family. The role for women was to stay at home and look after the children and the house. This portrayed the strong definition between men and women that had become a tradition through history, but that was about to dramatically change. In 2013 a study showed that only 1 in 8 people still believed that gender roles should be separated and valued the old-fashioned tradition. A tradition that has perhaps not changed so much in terms of overall opinion but more from personal beliefs, is that most women want to be able to stay at home and look after their young children until they reach school age. However, financial pressure is the most common reason for women going back to work sooner and putting their children in to childcare, and many couples do not have the option.

Once all women were expected to stay at home and look after the children and the house. She would have given a housekeeping allowance by her husband to pay for food and clothes, and perhaps a little extra for herself. Over time and since women have started working, they have climbed the ladder of success, studying and training in well-paid roles with high responsibilities, such as doctors and lawyers. Some women are career driven and have opted not to have children so that they can focus on their work, while others want to do both; have a family and keep striving forwards in their career. What was once a pair of divided genders has now become a platform of equal opportunities and expectations.

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 and females being the caretaker. 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 whereby man still carries weight of being the head of the household though women headed families also perform equal roles.

The change in gender roles today is significantly different to how gender roles past were perceived. Our roles are considered as much more of an equal balance, sharing responsibilities and expectations. However the areas of changes in gender

relations include;

- **EMPLOYMENT:** Most couples will now have a full-time job and will share financial responsibilities for their home. In the past, a full-time job and financial responsibility were expected in the role for men. Now that couples can both work, there will be less pressure on finances.
- **THE HOME:** Both men and women now equally share responsibilities in caring for their home. Gender roles past would have expected the woman to carry out the daily household chores, the cooking and the cleaning, whereas now the jobs at home are very much shared.
- **CHILDCARE:** The pressures of supporting a family and perhaps paying for childcare has changed the role for women, from the one most associated with the past, a full-time stay at home mother. Now most women work full-time or at least part-time, so that they can contribute towards the family's finances.
- **ROLE REVERSAL:** In some families we are seeing a complete role reversal from the past where the woman is going out to work full-time and the man stays at home to look after the children and carry out the household chores.

- **THE STAY AT HOME DAD:** Times are changing and we are seeing many more men taking the paternal role and committing to being the stay at home parent while their partner goes out to work. Compared to the 1980's this is a complete change that has perhaps transformed parenting in certain places of the world. The majority of people feel that if the man has the option to become the full-time parent, it is a refreshing and important change for many parents and for society. Men are now getting the chance to spend more time with their children and workplaces understand that this is important. Paternity leave has now been granted and fathers are not missing out on the early months of their new born baby.

REFERENCE

- World Development Report, 2012 by MIT's Esther Duflo
- Samson Esudu (Author), 2016, Gender in the 21st Century,