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 **GENDER DISCRIMINATION**

**ESSAY ABSTRACT**

Gender discrimination is a social vice reduced but not completely eradicated in the world. Consequently, this essay discusses the influence of gender-based stereotypes, social norms and practices on sexism and analyses how legislation reinforces gender discrimination. Using Saudi Arabia to test this hypothesis was cogent because of the level of women’s right abuse in the country. The essay was created on the basis of the research work of international organizations, institution and statistics. The research shows that outdated perceptions are now interwoven in our day to day life activities and continue to deepen its roots in the society at the expense of women. In order to eradicate this moral pariah, there needs to be increase in policies of the government in terms of protection of women’s right in order to ensure and free and equal society. Gender-based stereotypes, social norms and legislations are stringent factors that influence gender discrimination.

**Word Count: 149**

“Misogyny” seven letters, four syllables, one simple word yet the magnitude of anger, hatred and hurt it begets is gut-wrenching; originating from gender-based stereotypes, legislations, policies, social norms and practices. It is commonly known as the unjust treatment towards women, yet continuous encouragement of the moral pariah does not lessen. Gender discrimination is withstanding irrespective of the changes in the society; it continues to deepen its roots into the heart of the society at the expense of females. Women are subjected to the perceptions and standards of the society and limited by legislations. Makers (2018) ascertain that more than 62 million girls worldwide are denied education therefore it is no surprise only 57% of world’s working age women are in the labour force, compared to the 77% of men. It is terrifying that women around the age of 15-44 are more at risk of rape and domestic violence than cancer, car accidents and war; it is even more alarming that it has been proven by Makers (2018) that one in three women worldwide have experienced either intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. The rights and values of women continue to be trampled upon based on imaginary foundations but if you cut a man and a woman do they not bleed the same? Do they not require the same necessities to survive? Then why do women continue to face obstacles that prevent them from gaining equality that they rightfully deserve. Women and men should be allowed to compete equally for opportunities based on their skills not on the social norms, stereotypes or restricted by legislations.

Gender discrimination is borderless, even the leader of the free world Donald trump said “it is certainly not ground-breaking news, that early victories by women..... were to a large extent dependent on their sex appeal” individuals would rather accredit achievements of women to anything other than their intelligence. However, my focus for this essay is on Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a country thriving in its riches from crude oil but stunted by its misogynistic principles. Global gender gap (2017) reports Saudi Arabia as one of the lowest ranking countries with the position of 141 out of 144 for gender equality; majority of their laws and norms is as result to their allegiance to the Sharia law but in trying to maintain a sense of piety, these laws and norms restrict the freedom and equality beseeched by the women. However, one cannot undermine the influence of stereotypes, social norms and practices, legislations and policies in Saudi Arabia. Women of Saudi Arabia are subjugated: they have no position in the decision making; they are treated as babes with male guardianship regardless of their age.

The use of technology as a monitoring device to track the women by the male guardians is appalling and symbolizes a sense of ownership and imprisonment as the women must take permission to leave the country, get passports and driver’s license. Badriya al-Bash (2012) proclaims this atrocious use of technology as a systematic form of oppression as indicates a state of slavery under which women are held. As of 2012 only about 14% of Saudi women mwere in the labour force although World Bank (2016) ascertains a slight increase to 21% but with 20.5% still unemployed compared to the 2.8% of men; this does not seem like a huge victory. With arranged marriages being a norm, it is no surprise that 45% of marriages end in divorce Mittelstaedt and Shafy (2015).

Although the Saudi Arabian government encourages the young women to receive education, there are only a few jobs available to them and with restrictions in movement; it is no wonder 1 out of 3 educated women are unemployed. Women are restricted to the traditionally female-oriented jobs with more than 97% of their degrees being in social sciences or education (Revisesociology, 2017). Even though women want to run companies and develop computer programs, these are still just dreams and aspirations. The stereotypical identity forced upon the women of Saudi Arabia restricts any form of impartiality and is maintained and practiced even from the lowest to the highest individuals in the food chain; Mr al-Hajari, (2017) head of the Saudi government's religious edict, was against the petition to allow women drive claiming they have ‘half the brainpower of men’.

Gender stereotypes are one of the main reasons for gender discrimination; the fixed perception of how each gender is meant to behave is nothing short of a straightjacket that prevents equality and growth. According to liberal feminist Ann Oakley, individuals are socialized into their gender through four steps: canalization, manipulation, verbal appellation and different activities. Once gender socialized, the society requires individuals to act in line with the constructed gender-based behavioural pattern and anybody who acts different to these societally constructed guidelines is said to have deviated from the social standards. This required behavioural pattern limits individuals from reaching their maximum potential.

Women are stereotyped to be docile, submissive and obedient; any female that shows signs of dominance or abrasiveness is questioned. However, these stereotypes are invalid and they restrict opinions, freedom and equity. Gender- based stereotypes are based on gender roles: femininity and masculinity which are socially constructed. The Saudi Arabian culture emphasizes the protection of women which led to the creation of these roles then they became expectations however they became limitations clearly depicted in the workplace; it is rare to see a woman in the armed force or as engineers all because the Saudi society believes they are not ‘strong’ or ‘smart’ enough for these jobs. The media continues to encourage the outdated foundations by portraying women as ‘sexual objects, housewives, makeup fanatics, damsels in distress’ these stereotypes continue to restrict women from being more than “objectified” individuals and reinforces the prejudiced treatment of women because of the inaccurate depictions and false conclusions promoted

 In addition, apart from gender stereotypes being a factor of gender discrimination, one cannot undermine the influence of social norms. Social norms are extensions of stereotypes in fact they go hand in hand; social norms become stereotypes because they are the informal understandings that guide and govern the behavioural pattern of the members of the society. These understandings have been passed on from generations to generations but as time has changed (modernization) it seems they are constant and withstanding. These norms guide the way people think, their values, beliefs and standards but they are subjugating the females, the norms of the society depict women as ‘housewives’ ‘caregivers’, plain examples of femininity; Ann Oakley claims that these roles are societally constructed, and the weak, less meaningful roles are reserved for the women. The cultural traditions and local customs play an important role in the restriction of equality in Saudi Arabia; with emphasis on tradition and family, the roles of women in the society seems insignificant.

Tradition is a guide and not a jailer, Maugham (1938) but it seems that a lot of these traditions are now trapping societies into inequality. In Saudi Arabia, women are largely restricted to traditionally female-oriented fields in the public sector. Femininity and masculinity are still enforced in asymmetrical families whereby the duties of each partner in the family are an ascription to their gender. The traditional view of family ‘cereal packet family’ is one with a housewife, working man and children; this is the normalized construction of how the family is meant to look like, with this perception a working Saudi woman is distraught over how to balance work and family life and with changes to social norms being faced with hostility, scepticism and debate; this balance is important. According to Al–Humaid (2009), Saudi Deputy Minister for Labor “The unemployment problem is basically among women ... (and) it is mainly due to social customs....”

In addition to the above another stringent factor that encourages gender discrimination is laws and policies. Laws stand as foundations and guiding systems of every society, this is what every individual is required to follow and uses as their sanctuary. In Saudi Arabia, there are informal laws enforced by Mutaween (religious police); they make sure observation of segregated public areas are maintained in the society; however these laws cause more harm than good, majority of Saudi Arabian companies are reluctant to hire women because they believe they are expensive; cost of building separate entrance, separate stations and so on, these laws actually encourage gender discrimination because the unjust behaviour of the firms seen in their reluctance to hire females is not as a result of their lacking in skills but as a result of the overpowering laws. Women have few rights and their freedom is almost entirely controlled by their husbands. Other formal laws for example, women require male representatives to manage their businesses and represent them in government agencies and with only 12 out of 245 articles in Saudi labour regulations relating to women concerns like child care, breast feeding (AlMunajeed, 2010), it is relatively difficult for women of Saudi Arabia to work. Saudi women continue to petition against the law of male guardianship using the #Iammyownguradian campaign.

Marxist feminist like S. Firestone believe that there are two labour markets: primary and secondary, the primary are the important and higher paying jobs reserved for men and the latter are lower paying, petty jobs reserved for women; In addition, women face glass ceiling in the sense that they are prevented from reaching the topmost positions of their profession irrespective of their qualifications; women do two-thirds of the world’s work, receive 10% of the world’s income and own 1% of the means of production(UNICEF, 2011). However, not undermining the influence of these factors as contributors to gender discrimination, there are other causes that continue to motivate sexism such as mindset, poverty and low-level education. Mindset is also a powerful influencer of gender discrimination which is why we should encourage change of our mindset, seek the involvement of everybody both male and female; discourage apathy to the fight against gender discrimination and continue to aggressively obliterate gender discrimination.

Poverty is a crucial factor that continues to influence gender discrimination; a scenario a poor family has 5 girls and 1 boy, the father is most likely to send the boy to school because he there are more opportunities for the boy than a girl. Two out of every three poor adult are women Robbins (1994). Girls are hardest hit by poverty (Sipho, 2010) mostly because they are the easiest target to oppress and with less power than men, it is very easy to continue this institutionalized discrimination.

Although there has been progress in equalizing the rate of education for men and women, this has not been reflected in the areas of employment, politics and social relations. For those females still bereft of standard education, it is easier for the society to imbue these misogynistic principles in them, when a person is not educated it is easy for a person to accept the way of life of others because they know nothing better. Although progress in destroying gender discrimination is slow, we should still bathe in our victory like the Equal Pay Act of 1963, involvement and success of UNICEF in giving loans and start-up businesses for women.

 Majority of states claim they have abolished gender discrimination by capitalizing on the adoption of Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); however, the full progress of this convention is yet to be seen with majority of women still faced with female genital mutilation, arranged marriages and trafficking. Tackling of gender discrimination should not only be looked at state level: claiming this is a problem for the government but at individual and global level because this is a worldwide problem that deserves coverage and effort of everybody.

In conclusion, gender-based stereotypes, social norms and practices, legislations and policies all aid the moral “cancer”; gender discrimination. However there are solutions like enlightenment and empowerment campaigns especially in the developing countries, to educate woman on their rights and worth. To let them know equality is meant to be the norm and nobody is superior to them just because of their gender.

Encourage abolition of child and arranged marriages, female genital mutilation because they infringe on the rights of these females as human beings and they are degrading acts that discourage equality of the sexes.

In Saudi Arabia, they should reduce the influence of Sharia law in their law-making process because there are other Islamic countries like United Arab Emirates that are more lenient for the women and should relax the strictness of the cultures and traditions to give room for change and development in terms of women empowerment.

Encourage feminism and feminist activities seen in the case of Malala Yousafzai, Winnie Mandela, Rosa parks. Also, develop programs and organizations that assist in the abolition of sexual discrimination and educating people on how the society is at a disadvantage because of solving gender discrimination is not just morally just but vital for progress and development. With women currently making up 57% of the workforce, it shows the yet untapped source of energy for the growth of the economy. Liberal feminists believe that anything a man can do a woman can also do so why should we not have equal rights and opportunities as the men?

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