

INTERVIEW REPORT

Gender Discrimination in modern background- What does the youth think?

Gender discrimination, a highly disputed issue in present times, has undergone several transformations across dimensions of space and time. Results from a first-hand interview have highlighted that majority opinion supports the presence of gender discrimination in this modern era, taking different forms among different socio-economic classes and geographic regions. However, there exist varied views on how this discrimination occurs, largely influenced by a person's experiences and exposure.

In-depth interviews followed by a group discussion was conducted among six engineering students belonging to the age group of 18 – 37 years; four women and two men; belonging to both rural and urban backgrounds from the states of Sikkim, Maharashtra, Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Bihar.

The questions focused on the interviewee's interpretations and related observations.

The two 20 year old boys, belonging to Sikkim and Bihar respectively, believed that denying girls the right to education was a common form of gender discrimination and agreed that the freedom for women to gain education and pursue the career of their choice without any societal obligations or expectations, restricting them to household work, would not only benefit the girl and her family but also the whole country, contributing to its future development.

They cited that girls in their home towns are dissuaded from practicing any profession apart from managing household work and those who do not abide by these societal restrictions are often secluded, demoralized by both their family and society.

Interestingly, the two boys also had a strong disagreement. The one from Bihar attributed this discrimination to girls taking undue advantage of the freedom provided to them, that on further probe revealed to be the practice of wearing short clothes which was considered immoral and uncivilized in his words. His exact perception was that the practice of girls wearing revealing clothes could attract men, leading to societal imbalance and also quoted this practice as a reason of sexual molestation and rape. This opinion was disputed by the other boy who felt that both boys and girls must have the freedom to wear the clothes they like and any restraints on clothing should be equally applicable to both of them. He felt that instead of restraining girls from practicing their freedom, boys should be taught to respect girls and abstain from any immoral behavior.

The boy from Sikkim further expressed that reservation of girls in engineering institutions gave unfair advantage to them, committing discrimination against boys. He believed that this led to computer science branches in IITs being dominated by

girls. On sharing actual statistics, which is 20-25% in government institutions with reservations, he admitted that his misconception was fueled by misleading posts on social media websites like Youtube.

The girls, on the other hand, who have grown up in metropolitan cities and belonged to STEM fields, also admitted having observed or experienced gender discrimination in some form. A 37-year-old underwent discrimination when her father discouraged her from pursuing civil engineering, her passion since that field was considered unsuitable for girls. A 20-year-old girl admitted that her parents often became target of pity from others on learning the fact that they only have two daughters. Both the 20-year-old girls admitted that there is a drastic difference between the representation of boys and girls in their colleges where one had only three girls in a class of 180 students in the field of IT and other reported having 7-8 girls in a class of 80 students in the field of aerospace engineering.

They felt that the lack of exposure and facilities related to STEM fields in the upbringing of girls, as compared to boys, facilitated this disparity. One also stated that parents generally fear sending girls into male-dominant fields to prevent their daughters from leading a struggleful life.

Additionally, a belief commonly encountered while generally interacting with other people is that girls lack in scientific aptitude and practical skills by birth. This belief was revealed not to be based on any scientific explanations or proofs and has been mostly triggered by unreliable sources on social media platforms.

In my opinion, there are subtle differences in the attitude of parents during the upbringing of boys and girls which can be reflected by how dolls and kitchen sets are the most popular toys for young girls whereas cars and robots are more popular for young boys. These practices can create a strong impression on those young minds, forcing them to be restricted to certain professions.

In the end, all of them believed that absolute gender equality is attainable and vital for our society, making it imperative for us to improve our educational system, change our thinking and practices and overcome our fears to pave way for a just and fair society.

Student Reflections

The performed experiment showcases that gender discrimination is still widely prevalent and existent in various forms across different communities and regions. Several reservations and misconceptions regarding career-growth and freedom in all aspects for women still prevail. Even today, women are underrepresented in multiple fields like engineering, sports, law, legislation, etc. People are skeptical about giving women the liberty to wear clothes and pursue career or profession of their own choice owing to the stereotypical image of women and traditional division of responsibilities existent over centuries in our society. Hence, the need arises to

achieve total equality for both men and women and eradicating any social norms which constrain or bind either party to any specific societal role and practices. It is essential to eliminate the disguised discrimination present in cities by not only legally stating but actively taking steps to encourage women to freely pursue their dreams and exercise their rights. Our ultimate goal should be to achieve an equal ratio in educational institutions, workplaces and equal roles in responsibilities like parenthood. Paving way for all women in our country to freely pursue their dreams and aspirations without being a subject to any kind of mistreatment, abuse and discrimination can drastically increase our country's growth and development.