
The Issue Of Gender Inequality

Gender Inequality has always been a struggle for Middle Eastern countries, but now there have been deeper studies to analyze the problems facing both genders and the countries when there is a gender gap. By examining and looking at data we can see how gender inequality impacts education, the healthcare system, and the economy, we can find ways to help fix the problem. We will see the problems women are facing in the Middle East and how these problems are impacting the country as a whole.

'How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?' Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani education advocate. She was shot in the head by a member of the Taliban in October 2012. Yousafzai became an advocate for girls' education and resulted in death threats from the Taliban. The Taliban were an Islamic military organization that inflicted serious rules on all Middle Eastern countries. They prohibited almost all education for girls and women. Malala has used her story to help her peers and others get the education they deserve. Many people like Malala and her father are providing education to rural areas with some help from the government. Malala's father "believed that lack of education was the root of all Pakistan's problems." (I am Malala, age 26). Studies are showing that since 2001 millions of girls who would not have received any education under the Taliban, are now receiving an education. Although more women are being educated than before, many still struggle. Malala's mother was also a mold of the Middle Eastern education system. She started and ended school at the age of six. "There seemed no point in going to school just to end up cooking, cleaning, and bringing up children, so one day she sold her books for nine annas, spent the money on boiled sweets, and never went back." (I am Malala, page 27) International test scores show that Arab public schools do not meet basic learning outcomes in reading, writing, and mathematics. These students often drop out of school or graduate without being able to find productive work commensurate to their education. The education of women and girls is the single most important factor in improving a nation's health. Gender gaps in education have been shown to have a significant negative influence on female health outcomes, and despite substantial efforts made over the last few decades in the Region to address these disparities, significant numbers of women remain illiterate or are excluded from the educational process.

Another area that lacks equality in healthcare. "Women in the Middle East are at a greater risk for physical and sexual violence, and as a result have an increased risk for mental and physical ill-health". (Mehta Manju, 2015) Gender inequities are so powerful among the region's low-literacy rural populations. Women in these populations are often not able to recognize a problem when it exists. Significant inequities in access to health care and overall health status persist for the region's women, especially in the area of reproductive health. "Educated women have been shown to possess greater reproductive autonomy as was demonstrated by a study conducted in Egypt, in which a large discrepancy in the rate of contraceptive usage was identified between university-educated women (93%) and illiterate women (33%)" (International Journal of Global Health and Health Disparities, 2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment can improve health. While it is important to address women's specific health concerns, men are also faced with rigid gender norms associated with poor health outcomes. Traditional expectations of masculinity increase the vulnerability to serious health risks. As a result of sociocultural norms, women in the Region are more likely to ignore symptoms of

serious illness over longer periods of time without seeking medical advice. Women's health is often neglected or subordinated to the family's health and this may result in the worsening of medical conditions as a result of significant delays in seeking treatment. Women's lack of information and knowledge of health issues and the inability to recognize symptoms of disease also exacerbate the problem.

The World Health Organization has stated that "gender inequity is not only a threat to economic development but also to population health, including that of future generations". (World Health Organization, 2018) There are laws designed to protect women who restrict the hours they can work, and in many countries, women require the permission of their male guardian to work. Employers often perceive women to be less productive or more costly to hire. These perceptions and restrictions restrict women's choice and mobility. The effect is that few women make it into the workforce and the ones that do find it very difficult to find employment. Women face discrimination when applying for jobs and are discouraged from challenging the traditional structure in society in many of the MENA countries. If more women were integrated into the workforce, the number of workers would increase and economic output would be improved, particularly for the less wealthy nations in the region. Traditionally, a woman's role is to remain at home and care for the family. In countries, the social policy stems from Islamic law, which states that women are obligated to perform the care roles of society, looking after family members unable to provide for themselves.

Men believe that women cannot take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions and men are responsible for guiding the family. Women even agreed that they would make good wives and mothers but not good leaders or rulers. Women are expected to fill the low-income positions of the informal market and are often discriminated against when applying for positions of greater authority. Due to the high levels of segregation in society, many believe integration is the first step to improving women's equality.