INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF



Journal Homepage: - www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

RNAL OF CH (IJAR)
355
AR01/2355

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/2355 **DOI URL:** http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/2355

RESEARCH ARTICLE

BECAUSE WE ARE WOMEN?

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 30 September 2016 Final Accepted: 30 October 2016 Published: November 2016

Key words:-

WE (Women Empowerment), WHO (World Health Organisation), JSY (Janani Suraksha Yojana), PPH (Post-Partum Haemorrhage), WHS (World Health Statistics), (Maternal Maternity Rate) MMR, WEF (World Economic Forum), GGI (Gender Gap Index) SIGI (Social Institutions Gender Index), RMK(Rashtrya Mahila Kosh), STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women)

Abstract

This Paper attempts to analyse the status of Women Empowerment in India and highlights the issues and challenges on women Health, Gender inequality and violation against women. Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concern of 21th century. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observe that in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. The study concludes by an observation that access to Education, Employment and Change in social Structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment but somewhere the basic root for all sufferings of women start within the home.

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Introduction:-

Women constitute about half of the population and therefore there can't be happiness and full development, so long as women remain depressed and exploited. No society can be free, fair and just until its women enjoy freedom and justice and opportunities for utilising their full potential. One of the major causes for the exploitation of the females is their economic dependence upon men.

It is fact that whatever is beautiful, whatever is lovely and whatever is grand and great and colourful is feminism in its substance and spirit. And of God were to come down on earth, it is always by and through a women. Therefore, the women are the embodiment of all that is tender, sweet, graceful, beautiful and compassionate.

Unfortunately Women in India, as elsewhere in the world, are facing a crisis. What exactly are they doing with themselves? They seem to be walking on a sharp edged knife. If they are little below the expectation of their spouse, they are dubbed as backward and useless. If they are smart and outwit their colleagues or partners in life they are looked down with suspicious and jealousy and are immediately classified as "aggressive", "unwomanly", "unnatural" and so on. Although the United States recognize equality of women, yet there is lot of discrimination because we are women. Women are not only economically dependent but also politically and legally powerless. As daughters, wives and mothers we are caught in a life cycle that begins with unequal treatment, with early marriage and often ends with death in child birth. They make up about a third of the official labour force. They are grossly under-represented in the government institutions.

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The World Plan of Action issued from the World Conference of the International Women's Year (1975) is the most significant document about the human role of women ever to be conceived. If women remain peripheral in the eyes of the policy maker, the human race cannot make progress. The United Nations decade of women has not only helped the development of national women's movements by providing international public relations and consciousness, but the worldwide communication established among these movements has given them decisive incentives for a more intrinsic and better rooted programmes.



Figure 1:- Slow Movement of Women Empowerment

In spite of the unrivalled culture and high ideals of society that ancient India placed before us, we have to bear witness to the tragic fact that we have fallen ever so far from that happy estate, and perhaps in no sphere of life has that fall been as great as in that of women. From being man's co-equal and co-sharer and helpmeet we has become his subordinate- mere chattel to be used at will for satisfying his wants with no rights or will of our own. Customs and usage have dealt harshly with us.

Women's health:-

The Constitution of India not only provides for equal rights and privileges for women and men but also for making special provision for women. A series of social legislations have been enacted from time to time for raising the status of women in the country. The five-years plans have consistently place special emphasis on providing minimum health facilities integrated with family welfare and nutrition for women and children, acceleration of women's education, their increase in labour force and welfare service of women in need. Various welfare and development schemes have been introduced to improve the living condition of women and to increase their access to and control over material and social resources.

Despite the various programmes the demographic fear of female population like excessive mortality in female children resulting in persistent decline in sex ratio, low rate of literacy and low economic status stress the need for greater attention to the economic emancipation of women

In India, women, more so in the rural society do not enjoy an independent social status. Her social status is linked with that of her father or husband as she was regarded that she is a women and is unable to work like her father or betterhalf. They are here primarily to reproduce as much as and as quickly as they can. They are married off early. Puberty and motherhood carry a very special significance in Indian families. But ironically, this unique reproductive potential of a female has been considered as a case for receiving better medical care or better social treatment. Although she is idealised in her role of mother and house wife she has in fact been derogated to the role of a self-sacrificing citizen to think of her family before herself and to suffer in silence on all matters.

A report of the second WHO consultation on" Women as provided of health care" states that "while countries were busy in establishing modern schools and post for high paid health professionals, there were little talk about the need

for women. The Lancet released the Global Burden of Disease 2015 study. On the global front, there is good news: Between 1990 and 2015, deaths of children under five have gone down by half .But for India, the news was sombre: India has the highest number of such deaths at 1.3 million in 2015. In first ever estimates of the number of stillbirth, the study counted 2.1 million such instances in 2015. The number of stillbirths in India was estimated at 0.61 million. Of 195 countries studied, 122 countries have met the Sustainable Development Goal target to reduce the number of women dying from pregnancy-related causes to less than 70 of every 100,000 live births by 2030.

The study also indicated why India is still struggling to take such deaths, and the reason is not new: Lack of awareness, Age old pattern of delivery in houses and Poor last –mile delivery of health programmes such as Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) programme. While the JSY has been successful at increasing reproductive health- care services, it has not been as effective as reaching poor rural women, the socio –demographic group that is at highest risk of adverse pregnancy out comes, the study said [1].Report said that many hospitals even at a district level fail to meet the basic requirement of the programme such as free transport ,food, medicines and check –ups for pregnant women.

Nearly 5 women die every hour in India from complications developed during childbirth, with heavy blood loss caused by haemorrhage being a major factor, WHO has said. Nearly 45,000 mothers die due to causesrelated to childbirth every year in India which accounts for 17 percent of such deaths global health body.

The WHO said the major cause of deaths is Post-Partum Haemorrhage (PPH), which is often defined as a loss of more than 500-1000ml of blood within the first 24 hours following childbirth. Based on the World Health Statistics (WHS) 2016, the MMR (Maternal Maternity Rate) of India is 174/100,000live births. Even taking into consideration the WHO 2016 highest estimated of MMR of 174/100,000 live births.......and a birth cohort of around 26 million per year, this works out to nearly 45,000 mothers dying due to causes related childbirth every year in India. The time has come when the maternal and child services to be more effective and will have to recognize and aid women's existing functions making their multiple more effective and less burdensome by aiming at a substantial change in their social status. Evidence indicates that when girls with the basic education reach adulthood, they are more likely than those without an education to manage the size of their families according to their capacities, and are more likely to provide better care for their children and send them to school.

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Figure 2:- Five women die every hour during childbirth in India, says WHO

As we are women the major and essential action for our health and status takes place within our families. We needs supports from family and the community on reshaping our life. If only this is achieved, we will rise from our lowly depth to our rightful place as equal to man.

Gender inequality a social problem:-

Some of the most common occupation in the country, truck driving, construction, sectorial work and nursing are almost completely segregated by gender, even some professions that require a high level of education such as engineering, law and medicine are heavily towards to men, Why is that? One reason is that occupation dominate and somewhat similar to the work they historically done at home, child care nursing and teaching for example. Man on the other hand is more likely to go into the profession that are not associated with domestic work such as construction and engineering. Some of this segregation is the result of the personal choice likes and dislikes as well as socialization from childhood, some is due to sexism by employers and competition between employees of different genders. However it is still case that male dominated jobs pay more than female dominated jobs, even

when they required the same level of skill a matter of personal preferences it is an important part of story of gender inequalities in society.[2]

The gender inequalities inhibit the social and economic progress of the country. Inspite of the progress achieved reducing gender disparities in India during last few decades there are still widespread discriminations against the girls and women. Their number is relatively much larger regarding the undernourishment in the country. Their representation in different spheres of life is much lower. There are gender inequalities in the country whether it is social, political, economic or cultural participation undermining the importance of females in national development. Those countries realized the importance of empowering their women developed fast and many others in the world are joining the rank of the developed countries educating their women and involving them in the decision making process of social and economic development. Ester Boserup-Danish women author challenged the prevailing view that growth is gender neutral through her book 'Women's Role in Economic Development' in 1970. Now, it is commonly held that gender disparities retard growth and thereby the welfare of the society.

Herz, etal; points out that the contribution of women to the social and economic development of the country on the whole appear to be larger than men. A country can provide better future to its children, ease population pressure, improve productivity and reduce poverty. Yet, many countries are still neglecting their women by spending less on them as compared to men. Human deprivations in the developing countries like India are largely due to the neglect of females as part of human resource development. It has been proved that nearly two third of the economic growth of the country occurs due to the human capital which develops mostly by the empowerment of women.

Various groups have ranked gender inequalities around the world. For example, the World Economic Forum publishes a Global Gender Gap Index score for each nation every year. The index focuses not on empowerment of women, but on the relative gap between men and women in four fundamental categories - economic participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. It includes measures such as estimated sex selective abortion, number of years the nation had a female head of state, female to male literacy rate, estimated income ratio of female to male in the nation, and several other relative gender statistic measures. It does not include factors such as crime rates against women versus men, domestic violence, honour killings or such factors. Where data is unavailable or difficult to collect, World Economic Forum uses old data or makes a best estimate to calculate the nation's Global Gap Index (GGI).

According to the Global Gender Gap Report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2011, India was ranked 113 on the Gender Gap Index (GGI) among 135 countries polled. [3]Since then, India has improved its rankings on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (GGI) to 105/136 in 2013.[4]. When broken down into components of the GGI, India performs well on political empowerment, but is scored to be as bad as China on sex selective abortion. India also scores poorly on overall female to male literacy and health rankings. India with a 2013 ranking of 101 had an overall score of 0.6551, while Iceland, the nation that topped the list, had an overall score of 0.8731 (no gender gap would yield a score of 1.0). Alternate measures include OECD's Social Institutions Gender Index (SIGI), which ranked India at 56th out of 86 in 2012, which was an improvement from its 2009 rank of 96th out of 102. The SIGI is a measure of discriminatory social institutions that are drivers of inequalities, rather than the unequal outcomes themselves. Similarly, UNDP has published Gender Inequality Index and ranked India at 132 out of 148 countries[5]

Thanks to closing the gender gap in wages and educational attainment, India rose 21 places in gender equality ranking, but still at an abysmal 87 out of 144 countries evaluated by the World Economic Forum and Pakistan ranked second forum from the bottom again.

Of other countries in South Asia, Bangladesh outranked India 72, Sri Lanka ranked 100, Nepal 110, the Maldives 115 and Bhutan 121. The only country ranked below Pakistan, at last position is Yemen, at 144. Globally, the leading four nations continue to be Scandinavian, with Iceland on top, followed by Finland, Norway and Sweden. The US was ranked 45. Of Brics countries, South Africa ranked 15, Russia was at 75, Brazil ranked 79 and China came in 99. The Global Gender Gap Report 2016 report measure gender parity in "Economic Participation and Opportunity", "Educational Attainment", "Health and Survival" and "Political Participation".

In Economic participation, India rose slightly in the ranking to 136 from last year's 139. In education, it ranked 113, up from 125 last year in health it was an abysmal 142, up just one position from last year and in political

participation, it was a high 9, the sae as the last year. In 2015, projection based on the GGR data suggested that the economic gap would be closed within the 118 years, or by 2133. The latest report noted that the prospects for workplace gender equality have slipped beyond our lifetime, to 2186.

Bridging the gap of gender inequality:-

A mass campaign should be carried out by involving people at the local level for removing gender inequalities. Peace, prosperity and stability of a family depend on the education of females who formulate the household budget in a manner that it builds up the healthy family environment. The involvement of women in the decision making process at different layers of the government and private bodies is highly conducive to the overall welfare of the people-end objective of all the developmental activities.

Discriminations are all around against the females whether it is educational attainments, provision of health, and share in economic opportunities, political participation (except the local bodies) and female population. Adult female literacy rate as per cent of males in India in 2011 stood only 65.46% per cent, which does not show much improvement over the level of one decade before 1993 amounting 56 per cent. However, female net primary enrolment as per cent of males shows better performance reaching to 94 per cent in 2003 over 81 per cent in 1993. But the dropout rate among the girls is much higher and a large number of them do not complete the primary level education. The enrolment of females at the entire primary, secondary and tertiary levels also remained below as compared to the males in 2003. The share of women in economic opportunities especially in the non-agricultural wage employment is poor. Out of the earned income, they consisted only 38 per cent of the share of males in 2003 increasing 5 per cent over 1993. Adult Female's economic activity rate as per cent of males amounted to 50 per cent in 2003, which remained same as in the year of 1995. As mentioned above, they occupied only 17 per cent share in the non-agricultural wage employment in 2001 little higher than 13 per cent in 1990. Female's work time as per cent of males is greater standing 117 per cent in 2000. Their participation in the market activities in India in the same year was only 35 per cent out of the total time allocation to market and non-market activities while in the case of men it was 92 per cent keeping large number of women out of market activities.

It is global phenomenon that many women are not involved in the political decision making process. There are, no doubt, exceptions to it. Some countries like Sweden and Norway have sufficient number of women representation in their parliament and women had been Prime Ministers in some countries including India. Even women are currently also Prime Ministers in some countries in the world; yet emancipation of women from the various types of discriminations are very slow.

It is appreciating that India has allowed 33 per cent of women representation in the local bodies and efforts are also being made for their representation in parliament where their share of total seats amounted to only 9.3 per cent in 2005. Their representation at the ministerial level was even much lower constituting only 3.4 per cent in the same year. One of the most alarming aspects of the gender inequalities in India is the declining female population. It amounted only 48 per cent of total population in the country according to 2001 population census. It has occurred mainly due to certain patriarchal practices and social customs such as preference for male child, bride burning and female foeticide etc.

Tasks Ahead Despite the numerous schemes initiated by the Government of India and initiatives on the part of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) gender inequalities are still dragging us much behind of many developing countries and carrying negative impact on human resources in the country. The schemes undertaken by the government from time to time empowering women are such as Swayamsidha, Swa-Shakti Project, Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP), Swalamban, Creches/Day Care. Centres for Children of Working and Ailing Mothers, Hostels for Working Women, Swadhar and Rashtrya Mahila Kosh (RMK) - also known as National Credit Fund for Women. All these schemes are, undoubtedly, promoting the social and economic upliftment of women in India but their implementation is very slow and benefits of these programmes do not reach the needy and the target groups.

There is lethargic attitude on the part of administration because action hardly follows against the implementing agencies. The government should monitor effectively the implementation of the on-going schemes. For the empowerment of women and adopt new remedial measures for the elimination of all sorts of discriminations at social and economic levels against the girls and women. There should be widespread local campaigns involving local people identifying the areas of concern for removing the gender disparities. The most important of them appear

to be the wide gender gaps in literacy and non-agricultural wage employment, high infant and mortality rate, adverse child sex ratio, child trafficking and escalating violence against women.

Sooner the steps are taken in effective manner; better it will be for more than one billion people of our country because' the lap of mother is the cradle of civilized society and sustainable development. The role of women is crucial in the management of household, proper education and healthcare of the children and cohesive development of society. The Government of India has initiated numerous schemes from time to time for empowerment of women; their impact on the emancipation of females in our country is very slow. There are gender inequalities in India in all spheres of life whether it is education, health, economic opportunities, political participation and even in population. The neglect of girls and women has given rise to human distresses.

A large number of our people are below poverty line, undernourished and illiterate. Many do not have access to improve drinking water and sanitation. Child and women deprivations are widespread. Therefore, government both at the central and regional levels should implement effectively the on-going projects for eliminating all sorts of social and economic discriminations against females for improving their capabilities and enabling them to contribute to the national development. Mass campaign should be carried out at the local levels by involving local people for removing' gender inequalities. Sooner it is done better it will be for the welfare of our people and India will be able to join the rank of developed countries in the WORLD.[6]

Violence against women:-

Women is socially a very sensitive issue and more so in our country where we have a special place for 'Family Honour'. Any act which affects the family honour is not tolerated and very strongly put down. Therefore the acts of violence are seldom talked-out of the family and its close confines. Perpetrators are very family members, who are supposed to protect their women folk from such violence. It would sound strange but true that many women think that it is 'right' for their men to resort to some degree of violence which has tacit approval of 'family elders' and community leaders. This is a catch-22 situation where the protector turns predator and the ultimate sufferers are women folk who endure the violence with great courage as she cannot speak-out or walk-out of the family in such situations only in grave situations such issues come to be known outside. This makes the subject under study a very difficult one to comprehend.

The total reported crime against women under Indian Penal Code (! PC) is only 1, 43,615 in 2004. It implies that only a very insignificant percentage (0.03 per cent) of women (with a total population of 498.7 million - 2001 Census) gets victimized. It is common knowledge that the level of crime could be much higher than what the reported figures make out to be. As any study has to be based on the reported crime data, this study also suffers from this lacuna. In spite of the shortcomings explained it is felt worthwhile to undertake such a study to, reflect the qualitative aspects of the crime, although the physical dimensions could be greater.



Figure 3:- Acquittal % by crime, overall acquittal rate 77%.

The study analyses trends in violence during the period 1999-2004. This can be taken as an intervening period between two millennia and could serve as a base line analysis for future studies. This is also a period of resurgent interest in the subject among media, civil society, government and the activism of judiciary (PIL litigations as can be seen from' different agitations and movements going on in the country (reservation of seats in local bodies, civil society's protests against court pronouncements in the Jessica Lal murder case, Supreme Court observations for stricter enforcement of laws against sexual harassment at workplace, demand for reservation in the - Parliament). Violence against women is widespread and viewed as one of the cruellest social mechanisms to suppress women. Unequal power relations have led to discrimination against women. Violence on women manifests even before birth and early life, married life as domestic violence, rape, murder, dowry death etc.

When the basic reason for violence against women is their inferior status - educationally, economically, politically and socially - in a male dominated society. Other factors responsible for increasing criminalization of society, media images, inadequate means to address the cause and, consequences of violence; poor enforcement of legal provisions, unabashed erosion of family values have all added to it.

Over the past decade, there has been growing awareness of this phenomenon and its long-term impact on Women empowerment. The media reports extensively on dowry deaths, rape, molestation, incest, assault etc. and give out information that was virtually unavailable till a few years ago. Women are victims of crimes like 'Murder', "Robbery, '.Cheating' etc. only the crimes which are directed against Women are~ characterized as 'Crime against Women', Domestic violence has been clearly defined in the 'Domestic Violence Act 2005'.

The Constitution of India grants equality to women and empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socioeconomic, educational and political disadvantages. The States has enacted much women-specific legislation to protect them against discrimination, violence and atrocities and prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, etc. These are: (a) The Women related crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), (b) The Woman related crimes under the Special & Local Laws (SLL).[7]Problems Despite existence of special legislations, providing protection to women, the proportion of crime against women as compared to the total IPC crimes has increased from 3.5 per cent in 1998 to 9.3 per cent in 2004.

Torture (cruelty by husband and relatives) occupies the first place and accounts for 37.66 per cent of crimes followed by molestation which is 22.40 percent. Both these crimes account for 5610 60 percent during 1999 to 2004. Rape, kidnapping and abduction cases account for 20 to 23 percent, while sexual harassment, dowry death and other; account for the rest. Of the nine categories of violence, crimes such as torture, rape, kidnapping & abduction, dowry death and others have increased in 2004 over 2003Article 46 of the Constitution of India expressly provides that the State shall promote, with special care, the educational and economic upliftment of the weaker sections of the society, in particular SCs and STs and protect them from injustice and exploitation.

Total cases registered under this category for all women have declined by 2.4 per cent during this period. Socio-Economic Dimensions Generally, people do not register the crimes committed against women due to social stigma. An attempt has been made to see whether any relationship exists in registering the cases with women literacy rate. The crime rate is a better measure of crime level prevailing in a state than incidence of crime.

Having more urban population with sound socio-economic conditions, women have better awareness about their rights and better understanding of the problems perhaps awareness rather than greater prevalence of crime itself. With the increased women literacy rate and per capita income, more cases have been registered in the states except Assam and Madhya Pradesh. With higher literacy rate, higher per capita income and greater police presence, legislations would not bring women their rightful place in the society. Perhaps, it would be better to encourage the formation of self-help groups which has created social awareness amongst women who were, hitherto, living within the four walls led to better registration of incidence of crime. An exercise has been carried out by assigning weightages to different ranking of states for six major crimes.

The high level of reported crime in Andhra Pradesh could be reflection of greater, Delhi stood first amongst all the states as per Crime Rate. Delhi has no place in the first five ranks when comparison is made with actual number of cases registered. Even though adequate policing and administrative efforts have been taken by the Government, there is a need for changing the mind-set of the society towards women. Women themselves should understand their personal rights, political, social and economics entitlements so that they can demand access to the redressal forums.

From the above analysis it appears that there is a persistent increase in all forms of crimes against women. A positive relationship exists between crime rate, literacy rate and per capita income. Government as well as our society needs to make concerted efforts to contain increasing incidence of crimes committed against women. There is a need for action plan to create awareness amongst women regarding their rights for better redressal. Otherwise any number of Media campaign showing positive image of girl child and women's contribution to the society and family needs to be intensified to spread the message. Further, there is a need for changing the mind-set of men dominated society so as to give equal rights as enshrined in the constitution.

Conclusion:-

The approach of addressing issues related to empowerment of women from a holistic and macro-point of view acknowledging the cross cutting linkages between economic, social and political identity of women presents a new hope. There is increasing recognition that there factors are deeply intertwined and if efforts in any one dimension remains absent or weak, the outcome and momentum generated by the other components cannot be sustained, and that it is only when all these three factors are addressed simultaneously and made compatible with each other can women be truly empowered. The fact that we are speaking of "Women's Empowerment" shows that all is still not well with women, despite having broken through the glass ceiling in many fields. Women constitute about 35% of the workforce in software industry and enjoy the same status, wages and perks as men. They have also made great progress in various fields equalling and even surpassing men as doctors, teachers, engineers, managers, law enforcers and soldiers. However, it has to be kept in mind that many of these women who have made great strides, did it braving very adverse situations, shrugging of social criticism and at times have even risked getting ostracized.

Therefore, for the holistic empowerment, all ministries and departments would need to energize synergistic measure through more effective use of tools such as Gender Budgeting and platforms such as the National Mission for Empowerment of Women. The gender convergence mantra also holds a key to inclusive governance and our cherished dream of growth with justice and equality. Women's concerns have to be kept at the centre of public policy, developmental planning and governance, with recognition of their role as critical growth agents and as ambassador of social changes.

Acknowledgement:-

I take this opportunity to acknowledge here the contributions and help rendered by many scholars in the completion of this research work. At the outset, I am highly grateful and indebted to Dr.Deepak Shriwastava Divisional Librarian (I/C) Govt. Divisional Public Library Kota (Rajasthan) who through his able guidance, comments and suggestions has helped me in the completion of this research study. He has been a source of constant encouragement and help right from the selection of the research topic till its completion.

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr.H.C Jain Principal Akalank Girls P.G.College, Kota (Rajasthan) and Dr.ArvindSaxenaRetd. Vice Principal Government College Kota helping and especially for their criticism and valuable suggestions for this research paper. I don't find words to express my gratitude to my brother Mr Ankur Sucklecha, daughter Arsi Dhariwal and my parents. Without their love, moral support and constant encouragement this work would not have been possible.

I am thankful to all my friends who are there to stretch their hand for helping in all the time. It was their constant encouragement that made me to venture into its work.

I acknowledge the help of the staff of the library. They helped me in collecting data and necessary information for research work.

Ekta Dhariwal

Recommendation:-

1. What I recommend is that instead of blaming the government, the society and the culture, it is better that we aware the mothers the elder women of the society to guide the flower buds; the young girls to be strong and confident to face the society and male domination strongly and go to the root cause of violence. We all have a role in ending violence against girls and women and it is important that we all take responsibility in ending the violence.

- 2. Boys and young men need to be respectful when entering into a sexual relationship and should not feel entitled to girls and women's bodies.
- 3. 3. Strengthen the cooperation of women's non-governmental organizations and their active participation in drafting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender equality policies and programmes.
- 4. 4. We shouldn't think that violence against women is only pervasive in the developing or conflict-ridden pockets of the world. Sexual violence happens in our own homes, and in our institutions. Investigating and understanding gender power structures is an important element that can lead to combatting violence against women. That, and the absolute need for all of us to stop avoiding the reality and start helping each other.
- 5. Increasing the representation of women in decision-making positions in political life, including their motivation and opportunities to run for office and participate in decision-making.
- 6. 6. Improving the level of knowledge in the field of women's human rights and gender equality by ensuring continuous and comprehensive education in the framework of lifelong learning.

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