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DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN—STILL A SOCIAL MALAISE
A LOOK AT GENDER DISPARITY IN 21ST CENTURY INDIA

With the advance of the 21st century, Indian women are taking on more significant roles when it comes to shopping. They’re as likely as Indian men to log online to plan purchases, and half of all women respondents in a recent survey were the key decision-makers during car purchases. But in many aspects of life—social, cultural and even financial they still face gender discrimination.

In India, for every 100 men in the country, there are only 93 women, which is below the global norm of 106 women for every 100 men. This reflects, in large part, both passive and active infanticide through unequal allocations of health, nutrition and other resources. In fact, girls born in India are 8-10 percent more likely to die before their fifth birthday than boys.

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A MAJOR CHALLENGE TODAY IS TURNING PEOPLE’S UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER EQUALITY INTO COMMITMENT AND DESIRED ACTION AROUND THE GLOBE.”
The U.N. lists promoting gender equality and empowering women as its third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and recognises that this goal is both an important objective in itself and central to achieving the seven other goals*, including the fourth and fifth MDGs to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health. However, a major challenge today is turning people’s understanding of gender equality into commitment and desired action around the globe.

To galvanize efforts, the U.N. set the third MDG to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. Though India missed the 2005 deadline, the country has recently sped up its progress and the gender parity index for Gross Enrolment Ratios in primary and secondary education has risen.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation report, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at the primary level was 83.8 in 1990-91 and it increased to 95.7 in 2000-01 and to 116 in 2010-11. For the middle/upper primary level, the GER was 66.7 in 1990-91 which declined to 58.6 in 2000-01 and then gradually increased to 85.5 in 2010-11. However, the female to male ratio in education has been steadily improving over the years. In primary education, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) has gone up from 0.76 in 1990-91 to 1.01 in 2010-11 and in secondary education from 0.60 in 1990-91 to 0.88 in 2010-11.

* The eight MDGs—which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education all by the target date of 2015—form a blueprint agreed to by all the world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions. Read more at: www.un.org/millenniumgoals/
SURVEYING THE NATION’S HEALTH

The Government of India’s Annual Health Survey (AHS), which was conducted in part by Nielsen, sheds some light on the subject of gender disparity. The data reflects discrimination against women at all levels—from education to employment to health—against the backdrop of the UN’s MDGs. The AHS was conducted across nine states—Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh—to yield benchmarks of core vital and health indicators at the district level.

Why only nine states? Together, these states cover 48 percent of the country’s population and 59 percent of births, and also perform low on vital maternal and child health indicators. Moreover, these nine states account for 70 percent of infant deaths, 75 percent of deaths among children under five years old and 62 percent of maternal deaths in the country.
INEQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

India is changing, and women today enjoy far greater freedom than ever before. However, due to existing deep-rooted traditions and archaic societal notions, they still have unequal access to education, work and health facilities.

The Government of India’s 2009 MDG report notes “participation of women in employment and decision-making remains far less than that of men, and the disparity is not likely to be eliminated by 2015.” In all nine states covered in the survey, women were less than half as likely to hold jobs than men. While the work participation rate among males ranges from 67 to 77 percent across different states, among females it is just 7 to 39 percent.

WOMEN’S WORK PARTICIPATION

Source: Annual Health Survey 2011
BRIDGING THE LITERACY AND HEALTH GAPS

The AHS findings also expose the huge gap between males and females in the effective literacy rate, with men having a much higher literacy rate than women in all nine states. Such a large gap is unlikely to be filled by 2015, the MDG deadline for eliminating gender disparity across all levels of education.

The differences extend to the health care space as well. Although women have higher life expectancy compared to men, they suffer more when it comes to chronic illnesses like hypertension and Arthritis. Moreover, under five years of age, female children have a higher mortality rate than male children, a marked difference from other age groups where the death rate is higher for men.
Moreover, the ability of governments and partners like NGOs to achieve success in reducing gender inequality can be limited in the absence of a public-private partnership. There is potential for Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives which can positively impact social status that women enjoy, their earning potential and even providing access to various services women were traditionally excluded from.

Gender equality in India has come a long way. However, changes such as higher education for girls and empowerment of women, could improve the lives of millions of women across the country. Considering that India missed the U.N.'s 2005 deadline to do away with gender disparity in primary and secondary education, the government needs to proceed briskly to ensure that the 2015 deadline of eliminating gender inequalities across all levels of education is met successfully.
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ABOUT THE STUDY

The insights on discrimination against women are based on averages of state-level figures of the Annual Health Survey Findings Round-I (2010-11). The Annual Health Survey (AHS) is commissioned by the Office of Registrar General of India on behalf of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India. It is one of the largest household sample surveys conducted across nine states including Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Assam. Approximately 20.1 million people and 4.14 million households were covered as part of the study. Nielsen India conducted the AHS in 37 districts across three states of Rajasthan, Assam and Jharkhand covering about 2.8 million people from across half a million households.
ABOUT NIELSEN

Nielsen Holdings N.V. (NYSE: NLSN) is a global information and measurement company with leading market positions in marketing and consumer information, television and other media measurement, online intelligence, mobile measurement, trade shows and related properties. Nielsen has a presence in approximately 100 countries, with headquarters in New York, USA and Diemen, the Netherlands.

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