

# GROWING UP AS BOYS AND GIRLS

## 4

### CHAPTER

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#### ➤ INTRODUCTION

We all know that biologically all human beings fall into two categories – male and female. The term gender refers to social and cultural attributes, roles and responsibilities associated with a male and female.

Gender is culturally determined and is a social concept that changes over a period of time from one culture to another culture.

#### ➤ MEANING OF GENDER

- (i) Gender is a term that you may often have heard. It is a term, however that is not easily understood. It tends to remain distant from our lives and restricted to discussions during training programmes.

- (ii) In fact, it is something that all of us experience in our lives on a daily basis. It determines, for example, who we are and what we will become, where we can go and where not, the life choices available to us and those we eventually make.
- (iii) Our understanding of gender is often based on the family and society that we live in. This leads us to think that the roles we see men and women around us play are fixed and natural.
- (iv) In fact, these roles differ across communities around the world. By gender, then, we mean the many social values and stereotypes our cultures attach to the biological distinction between male and female.
- (v) It is a term that helps us to understand many of the inequalities and power relations between men and women in society.

### ➤ GENDER INEQUALITY

The gender inequality can be traced back to the prehistoric time when men were allowed to go for hunting, women were asked to cook and look after children at home.

Gender is also stereotyping which assumes that girls are fit for certain type of jobs like cooking, taking care of babies only while men are capable to go outside and earn money.

### ➤ GROWING UP AS BOYS AND GIRLS

- (i) Being a boy or a girl is an important part of one's identity.
- (ii) The society we grow up in, teaches us what kind of behaviour is acceptable for girls and boys, what boys and girls can or cannot do.
- (iii) We often grow up thinking that these things are exactly the same everywhere. But all societies do not look at boys and girls in the same way.
- (iv) Different roles are assigned to boys and girls to prepare them for their future roles as men and women. Most societies value men and women as different.
- (v) The roles women play and the work they do are usually valued less than the roles men play and the work they do.
- (vi) Inequalities between men and women emerge in the area of work.

### ➤ VALUING HOUSEWORK

- (i) Across the world, the main responsibility for housework and care, looking after the family, especially children, the elderly and sick members, lies with women.
- (ii) Yet, as we have seen, the work that women do within the home is not recognized as work. It is also assumed that this is something that comes naturally to women.
- (iii) It therefore, does not have to be paid for. And society devalues this work.

### ➤ LIVES OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

- (i) Many homes, particularly in towns and cities, employ domestic workers.
- (ii) They do a lot of work sweeping and cleaning, washing clothes and dishes, cooking, looking after young children or the elderly.
- (iii) Most domestic workers are women. Sometimes even young boys or girls are employed to do this work. Wages are low, as domestic work does not have much value.

## ➤ NATURE OF HOUSEWORK

- (i) In fact, what we commonly term as housework actually involves many different tasks. A number of these tasks require heavy physical work. In both rural and urban areas women and girls have to fetch water.
- (ii) In rural areas women and girls carry heavy head loads of firewood. Tasks like washing clothes, clearing sweeping and picking up loads require bending, lifting and carrying. Many chores, like cooking, involve standing for long hours in front of hot stoves.
- (iii) The work women do is strenuous and physically demanding – words that we normally associate with men.
- (iv) Another aspect of housework and care – giving that we do not recognized is that it is very time consuming. In fact, if we add up the housework and the work women do outside the home, we find that women spend much more time working than men and have much less time for leisure.

## ➤ WOMEN AND EQUALITY

- (i) As we have seen the low value attached to women's household and care - giving work is not an individual or family matter. It is part of a larger system of inequality between men and women. It, therefore, has to be dealt with through actions not just at the level of the individual or the family but also by the government.
- (ii) As we now know, equality is an important principle of our Constitution.
- (iii) The Constitution says that being male or female should not become a reason for discrimination. In reality, inequality between the sexes exists.
- (iv) The government is, therefore, committed to understanding the reasons for this and taking positive steps to remedy the situation.
- (v) For example, it recognizes that burden of child care and housework falls on women and girls. This naturally has an impact of whether girls can attend school. It determines whether women can work outside the house and what kind of jobs and careers they can have.
- (vi) The government has set up anganwadis or child care centers in several villages in the country. The government has passed laws that make it mandatory for organizations that have more than 30 women employees to provide crèche facilities.
- (vii) The provision of creches helps many women to take up employment outside the home. It also makes it possible for more girls to attend school.

## ➤ GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO REMOVE INEQUALITY-CHANGING SCENARIO

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Dayanand Saraswati fought for the upliftment of women. Dayanand Saraswati opened many schools and colleges to educate girls.

The constitution also provides equal opportunities for women in all spheres of life. The government is also taking steps to arrest violence or harassment against women at verbal, sexual, economical and emotional levels. Unless government takes stern steps, the inequality will continue in the society. Though to a great extent the inequality has decreased, yet miles are to go to see a brighter future for girls.