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Our voice on gender discrimination: adolescent girls

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ABSTRACT

Background: Gender equality has been one of the goals (Goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women) in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (goal 5: gender equality) which emphasise that gender discrimination remains a major barrier to human development. As gender socialization begins early in India, it is necessary that awareness must start in childhood and adolescent age on gender equity. This study aimed to assess gender discrimination experienced by the adolescent girls at home and surroundings which help to understand the persistence of gender discrimination and to access association of socio-demographic and family characteristics with gender discrimination.

Methods: It is a cross-sectional study. Data was collected using a pre-structure pre-tested questionnaire. Information on socio-demographic profile was also collected. Purposive sampling was used and a total of 236 late adolescent girls (16-19 years) were included in the study, from PU and Degree colleges of Mysuru District, each from Urban, Rural and Tribal areas. Data collected was analysed using SPSS V.22. Descriptive statistics like mean, Standard deviation, proportions were used and inferential statistics like Chi-square analysis was used to know the association of socio-demographic variables with Gender discrimination.

Results: Among the study participants 47% of adolescents experienced a moderate level of gender discrimination (score >29), 1% experienced severe gender discrimination (score >34). Age, residence, subject that they pursue and education of father were found be significantly associated with gender discrimination.

Conclusions: A total of 48% late adolescents experienced either a moderate or severe gender discrimination.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, Adolescent girls

INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination is a social evil of favouring the males over females. Though predominantly seen among traditional families, gender discrimination is a universal phenomenon being practiced both at home and in the society around.

In India, gender discrimination favouring men is evident from ancient times as is seen in sex ratio, life expectancy, literacy rate, morbidity and mortality rate, school

enrolment, school dropout, job opportunities and in the economic and political participation of the women. Females here continue to be at a disadvantage and face barriers that restrict their access to resources and inhibit their ability to make informed choices in various walks of life. Gender discrimination is a lifelong process that starts from the womb and ends at the tomb. It threatens the growth and survival of female foetus, female infant, girl child, adolescent girl and the adult female.¹

Gender Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights,

responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.²

Gender equality has been one of the goals (Goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women) in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (goal 5: gender equality) which emphasise that gender discrimination remains a major barrier to human development. Women and girls are discriminated in health, education, political representation, labour market, etc.—with negative consequences for development of their capabilities and their freedom of choice.³

Adolescence is a crucial period when boys and girls go through puberty-related changes, explore their sexuality, and further develop their gender identities, attitudes and behaviours. Adolescent girls (10–19 years) face different forms of violence depending on their age and also depending on whether they are married or have partners (casual, or long-term) or not. Both adolescent girls and boys are subjected to physical and emotional abuse by those who have power and authority over them (e.g. parents, care-givers, guardians and teachers) and by peers.⁴

Adolescents aged 10–19 years constitute about one-fourth of India's population. As gender socialization of both boys and girls begins early in India, to promote gender equity it is necessary that awareness must start in childhood and adolescent age for both girls and boys and it is important to initiate change processes at a young age to shape their attitudes and transform their behaviours.⁵ With improving school enrolment and retention rates in India, schools can serve as crucial spaces to inculcate and promote progressive attitudes among young people to challenge discrimination and violation related to gender and sexuality.⁶

Hence, this study was intended to assess the gender discrimination experienced by the adolescent girls at home and surroundings which help to understand the persistence of gender discrimination and socio-demographic variables associated with them that make girls more vulnerable to gender discrimination.

METHODS

It is a cross-sectional study conducted in the colleges of Mysuru district. A randomly selected Pre University and Degree College each in rural, urban and tribal areas of Mysuru district were included in the study. Purposive sampling was adopted. A total of 250 students belonging to late adolescence between the ages of 16–19 years were included. Study period was from November 2016 to April 2017 (6 months). Data was collected using a pre-structured and pre-tested questionnaire which included questions related to gender discrimination experienced at home and the surrounding immediate society. Performa

also included details of socio-demographic variables. Scores falling in first and second quartile was considered to be associated with no discrimination, scores in the third quartile were considered to be associated with moderate gender discrimination and the scores in the fourth quartile was considered to be associated with severe gender discrimination as perceived by the adolescents. Data collected were entered in Microsoft Excel and analysed using SPSS V.22. Descriptive statistics were used in the form of proportions, mean, standard deviation etc. and inferential statistics were used in the form of Chi-square analysis to know the association of socio-demographic variables with the gender equality. Fisher's exact test was applied where 20% of expected values were less than 5. The association was considered to be statistically significant with $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Out of the 250 adolescents involved in our study, 14 had incomplete questionnaires and hence were not considered for analysis. It was observed that majority around 70% of study participants were in age group of 16–17 years. 61% were pursuing arts and nearly 96% were Hindus by religion. There was a nearly equal representation of participants from rural, urban and tribal areas. Nuclear families constitute a majority of the family type while joint families were only around 6%. A major source of income was the father (80%) as perceived by the study participants. Around 92% of participants have siblings and the majority of them were either of first or second birth order. 63% of the study subjects had female siblings alone. While the proportion of fathers and mothers with no formal education was nearly equal, those completing Pre University and degree were more among fathers (18.3%) compared to mothers (11.1%) (Table 1).

Among the study participants, 47% of adolescents experienced a moderate level of gender discrimination (score >29), 1% of whom experienced severe gender discrimination as seen from the scores (score >34) (Figure 1).

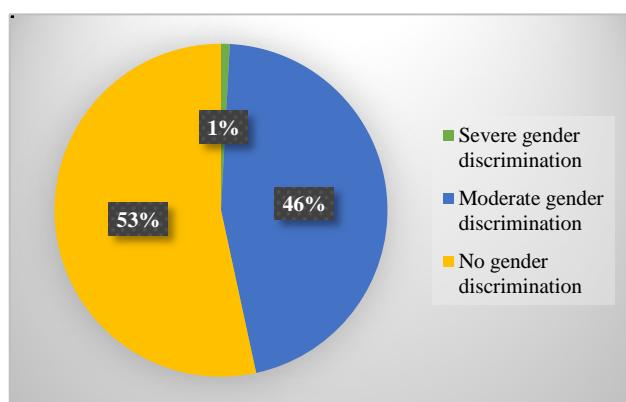


Figure 1: Gender discrimination based on experience among adolescent girls (N=236).

Age, residence, subject that they perceived and education of father were found to be significantly associated with gender discrimination (Table 2). It was seen that as the age has increased the gender discrimination has reduced. Discrimination was found to be higher in rural (70.5%) area compared to tribal (55%) and urban, but a minor

proportion (about 1% each) of tribal and urban study participants experienced severe gender discrimination. In those perceiving science and those who had fathers with better higher education had lesser experience of discrimination.

Table 1: Socio-demographic and family characteristics of the study participants (N=236).

Variable	Category	Frequency (%) N=236 (100%)	95% confidence internal
Age in years	16	83 (35.2)	29.2-41.5
	17	82 (34.7)	28.4-41.5
	18	35 (14.8)	10.6-19.5
	19	36 (15.3)	11.0-19.5
Subject	Arts	145 (61.4)	55.1-67.8
	Commerce	47 (19.9)	15.3-25.4
	Science	44 (18.6)	13.6-23.7
Residence	Rural	80 (33.9)	28.4-39.8
	Urban	67 (28.4)	22.5-34.3
	Tribal	89 (37.7)	31.4-44.5
Religion	Hindu	228 (96.6)	93.6-98.3
	Muslim	7 (3.0)	1.3-5.5
	Christian	1 (0.4)	0.0-1.3
Type of family	Nuclear	190 (80.5)	75-85.6
	Joint	14 (5.9)	3.0-9.3
	Three generation	32 (14.6)	9.7-17.8
Major source of income	Father	189 (80.1)	75.0-85.2
	Mother	23 (9.7)	5.5-14.0
	Both	22 (9.3)	5.5-13.5
	Others	2 (0.8)	0.0-2.1
Siblings	Present	215 (91.1)	87.3-94.5
	Absent	21 (8.9)	5.5-12.7
Birth order (n=215) ¹	1	93 (43.3)	36.6-49.5
	2	91 (42.3)	35.5-49.0
	3	28 (13)	8.8-17.6
	4	1 (0.5)	0.0-1.4
	5	2 (0.9)	0.0-2.4
Gender of siblings (n=215)*	Only female	135 (62.8)	56.4-68.7
	Only male	80 (37.2)	31.3-43.6
Education of father	No schooling	64 (27.1)	21.6-32.6
	Primary school	70 (29.7)	24.2-35.6
	High school	59 (25)	19.9-30.5
	PUC	24 (10.2)	6.4-14.0
	Degree and above	19 (8.1)	5.1-11.9
Education of mother	No schooling	72 (30.5)	25.0-36.9
	Primary school	71 (30.1)	24.2-36.4
	High school	67 (28.4)	22.5-34.3
	PUC	15 (6.4)	3.4-9.3
	Degree and above	11 (4.7)	2.1-7.6

¹n=215 for birth order and gender of siblings as those with no siblings were not considered for analysis.

Table 2: Association between socio-demographic, family environment and gender discrimination based on participants experience (N=236).

Variable	Categories	No gender discrimination (score ≤26)	Moderate gender discrimination (score: 27-39)	Severe gender discrimination (score ≥40)	P value ¹
Age in years	16	37 (44.6)	45 (54.2)	1 (1.2)	0.001
	17	45 (54.9)	37 (45.1)	0 (0)	
	18	15 (42.9)	20 (57.1)	0 (0)	
	19	29 (80.6)	6 (16.7)	1 (0.8)	
Residence	Urban	74 (71.8)	28 (27.2)	1 (1)	<0.001
	Rural	13 (29.5)	31 (70.5)	0 (0)	
	Tribal	39 (43.8)	49 (55.1)	1 (1.1)	
Subject	Arts	65 (44.8)	79 (54.4)	1 (0.7)	<0.001
	Commerce	37 (78.7)	9 (19.1)	1 (2.1)	
	Science	24 (54.4)	20 (45.5)	0 (0)	
Fathers education	No schooling	32 (44.4)	40 (55.6)	0 (0)	.013
	Primary school	37 (52.1)	33 (46.5)	1 (1.4)	
	High school	40 (59.7)	26 (38.8)	1 (1.5)	
	PUC	10 (66.7)	5 (33.3)	0 (0)	
	Degree and above	7 (63.7)	40 (36.4)	0 (0)	

¹Fisher's exact test, Figures in parenthesis () indicates percentage of row total

DISCUSSION

Despite many efforts being done to overcome gender discrimination, 48% of study participants had an experience of gender discrimination either in the family or by surrounding society. Although there was very less proportion of participants (0.8%) who experienced severe gender discrimination, the persistence of moderate gender discrimination at adolescent age shows the importance in the need to promote gender equality more effectively. Literature suggests that girls everywhere experience lower levels of parental investments when they are younger, be this via family structure, health investments, parental time or educational investments.⁷

The persistence of gender inequality suggests that there must be on-going social processes that continually recreate gender inequality. Social scientists and other observers have amassed lots of evidence showing that stereotypes and assumptions about men and women shape everyday personal interactions and shape gender inequalities in jobs, wages, authority, and family responsibilities.⁸

The World report on violence against children study confirms that violence against children happens in all parts of the world.⁹

Recent studies have shown, though the manifestation of gender discrimination differs in developed and developing countries, there are small, but significant, gender differences in early childhood inputs in more developed countries as well. Critical factors such as marital stability, family size and sibling gender, labour force participation of parents, and parental involvement

have been found to differ in both developed and developing countries.⁷

In the present study, father's education was found to be statistically significant with gender discrimination which shows that education plays an important role in reducing the gender inequality. The higher the education level, the lower the gender inequality. A study by Tansel showed results similar to ours that gender discrimination in parental allocation of resources have been a result of the low-parental literacy levels.¹⁰

It was also found in many field studies that household/family to be 'foundational' as a pivotal site where socialisation takes place and gendered processes and limitations are embedded for a lifetime.¹¹

Age of the study subjects was significantly associated with the experience of gender discrimination among girls. It was found that 57% among the age group of 18 years experienced moderate gender discrimination. Probable reasons could be that at their age decision related to life like pursuing subject of their choice for higher education, going to distant places (or away from home) for the purpose of education, consideration of marriage that takes place in this age group could be the reason for them perceiving higher gender discrimination compared to other age groups. Results from a study indicated that older children were more likely than younger children to make attributions to discrimination when contextual information suggested that it was likely. Girls (but not boys) were more likely to view girls than boys as victims of discrimination, and children with egalitarian gender attitudes were more likely to perceive discrimination than were their peers.¹²

Residence (urban, rural and tribal) was also found to be significantly associated with gender discrimination and it was found that 70% of the rural population had an experience of moderate gender discrimination compared to urban (27%) and tribal (55%). Gender norms and lower parental education levels in rural areas could have led to more gender discrimination. Increased access and awareness of rural adolescents to the urban practices and the egalitarian gender norms in urban areas would have increased their need for gender equality and perceiving gender discrimination that doesn't meet their needs. In tribal areas due to increased efforts of government on school enrolment leading to an increased proportion of adolescents allowed to obtain education could be a reason for adolescent girls to perceive less gender discrimination who was once not at all provided any education.

In the present study, it was also found that participants pursuing different subject (arts, science, and commerce) was statistically associated with gender discrimination. It was found that participants pursuing science were experienced with lesser gender discrimination than arts and science. This could be due to the reason as education and intelligence play an important role in determining gender discrimination.

Strengths and limitation

Strength of our study is that we have tried to address the issue of Gender discrimination from the perspective of adolescent girls belonging to Urban, Rural and Tribal areas. Very few studies have been conducted in India addressing this issue. The Limitation would be that while addressing such issues qualitative study would have been a better option. But due to time constraints, we had to follow quantitative method to assess gender discrimination. Hence in-depth analysis was not possible.

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Ethical approval: Not required

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