



## Girls are Weighed Down by Restrictions, Boys With Demands – Two Equally Harmful Disciplines

"Empowering Women is a Prerequisite for Creating a Good Nation"

— Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Societal expectations and norms have historically played a significant role in shaping the lives of individuals, especially concerning gender. Throughout history, girls and boys have been assigned distinct roles and responsibilities, leading to the perpetuation of **gender stereotypes** and **inequalities**. While it is evident that both genders face challenges.

Girls have long been subjected to a plethora of **societal expectations**, many of which restrict their **freedom and opportunities**. From a young age, they are often taught to be **obedient**, nurturing, and accommodating. These expectations can stifle their ambitions and limit their choices. In many parts of the world, girls still face barriers to education. Discriminatory practices and traditional beliefs that prioritize **boys' education** over girls' limit girls' access to quality learning environments, ultimately restricting their **intellectual growth**.

**Cultural** and **religious** restrictions on girls are **pervasive** and have been a longstanding issue in many societies around the world. These restrictions are deeply rooted in **traditional beliefs, customs, and religious interpretations**, and they often limit the autonomy and opportunities available to girls.

In some cultures and religious communities, **arranged** or **forced marriages** are common. Girls are often married off at a **young age**, sometimes against their will, and are denied the right to choose their own partners. This practice can have serious consequences for their physical and emotional well-being.

**Female Genital Mutilation** is a harmful cultural practice prevalent in certain communities, particularly in **parts of Africa, Middle East, and Asia**. It involves the partial or complete removal of a girl's external genitalia and is usually performed without her consent. It has serious health implications and **violates girls' bodily integrity**.

**Strict dress codes** and **modesty rules** are often imposed on girls and women by many cultures and religions. These restrictions are often enforced to require the covering of their bodies, including their **hair and faces**, in order to adhere to perceived notions of **purity** and **virtue**.

**Limited access to quality education** for **girls** is often prioritized over **boys' education** by some **societal norms** and **beliefs**. Their **intellectual development** and **future opportunities** can be **severely hindered** by this restriction.

**Specific gender roles** and **responsibilities** within the household are often assigned to females. This may entail expectations for girls to engage in **domestic chores** and take care of **younger siblings**, potentially constraining their capacity to pursue **education** and other **interests**.

In certain societies, girls may face restrictions on their **mobility and freedom** to travel independently. This limitation can impede their access to **educational** and **economic opportunities** and hinder their **personal development**. A report published by the **United Nations** titled **Progress on the**

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): The Gender Snapshot 2022** indicates that it may take close to **300 years for full gender equality to be achieved.**

The issue of **limited** or **no inheritance** and **property rights** for girls is a significant concern in certain cultural and societal contexts. Within these specific cultures and religious traditions, girls often find themselves in a precarious situation, as they may not have the **legal** or **customary entitlement** to **inherit property** or **assets**. This situation can have profound implications for their **financial security** and **overall well-being**. When girls are denied the **right to inherit property**, they face a **greater risk of financial vulnerability**. This **vulnerability** can **manifest** in various ways, such as **limited access to economic resources**, **reduced bargaining power** within the family, and a **heightened dependence** on male family members for **financial support**.

The concept of **"family honor"** is tied to the **behavior** and **actions of girls** and **women** in certain cultures. **Violence**, including **honor killings**, can be triggered by any perceived transgressions of these norms and is often justified as a means to **restore family honor**. This practice is deeply ingrained in the **societal fabric**, **perpetuating a cycle of violence** against **women** and **girls**. Efforts to address this issue should focus on challenging and changing these harmful norms while ensuring the safety and well-being of those affected.

Restrictions on **girls' autonomy** and choices can be justified in some **religious communities** through **conservative interpretations** of **religious texts**. These interpretations may give precedence to adhering to **religious norms** over **individual freedoms**. Religion plays an important role in demarcation of **societal norms** and **societal expectations**.

Having discussed the constraints imposed on girls, it is pertinent to shift our focus to the challenges faced by boys. **Boys** are burdened by **societal expectations** and **norms** that impose a **multitude of pressures** and **demands** on them, spanning a **broad spectrum of responsibilities** and **behaviors** that society anticipates them to adhere to.

They are often encouraged to **perform exceptionally** well in their studies, with an emphasis on achieving **high grades**. This pressure begins early in their **educational journey** and continues throughout their schooling. The expectation is that they will **excel in subjects** such as **mathematics** and **science**, as well as other areas considered **vital for future success**.

From a **young age**, boys are exposed to **career role models** and **societal messages** that highlight certain professions as more desirable or prestigious. These careers may include fields such as **engineering**, **medicine**, **law**, or **finance**. Boys may feel compelled to pursue these paths to meet societal expectations.

In many **cultures**, there exists a **significant emphasis** on **financial stability** and **success** as an expectation for boys. They are **frequently instructed** to **pursue careers** that not only ensure a **comfortable income** for themselves but also **secure financial stability** for their future families. In some **societies**, **traditional gender** roles dictate that **men** are the **primary breadwinners** for their **families**. This further **reinforces the expectation** that boys should **pursue careers** that are **financially lucrative**.

Societal expectations and norms have undeniably played a pivotal role in shaping the lives of individuals, particularly concerning gender. Throughout history, these expectations have molded distinct **roles and responsibilities** for girls and boys, perpetuating entrenched **gender stereotypes** and **inequalities**.

Recognizing the distinct challenges faced by both girls and boys is fundamental, and gender equality brings about a multitude of benefits for everyone. To achieve this, we must actively challenge societal norms, foster inclusive environments, and passionately advocate for equal rights and opportunities. Breaking free from the constraints of historical expectations not only enables individuals to pursue their aspirations but also empowers them to contribute significantly to their communities. Removing restrictions from girls and redefining expectations for boys are indispensable steps toward creating a truly equitable society, underpinning human rights, social progress, and sustainable development.

**"Gender Equality is Not a Women's Issue, It's a Human Issue."**

**It Affects Us All."**

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