

Achieving Gender Equality (SDG 5): A Better Future for Women and Rising Generations

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A fundamental aspect of achieving gender equality has always been providing equal rights to men and women. Despite seeing some progress towards achieving this goal, women and girls still face discrimination and rights violations every day and are still being disadvantaged compared to men worldwide, explaining why it is still one of the Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved. The inequalities faced by women demonstrated a link between gender and health outcomes, occurring where they are more exposed to poverty, lack of access to education, malnutrition, violence, and poor mental health. All these aspects not only affect women negatively but also have a measurable impact on their children's health, especially within the stages of early development, thereby opening the way for rising generations, both girls and boys, to endure the consequences of gender inequalities the world has imposed on women. Therefore, I will present the severe impact gender inequalities have on both women and their children's health in the settings of poverty, violence against women, and inequality in access to education, to demonstrate the importance of gender equality.

In no country in the world have women been able to achieve economic equality with men mainly due to the unequal division of labor among genders. It can be seen in women being assigned the domestic sphere where they spend a lot of time on unpaid domestic and care work, often on top of their paid work. This means that women face inequality when it comes to employment opportunities and access to social resources, which is represented in unemployment rates that have always been higher for women, with the gap compared to men continuously increasing with a 0.8% gap in 1990, growing to 4% in 1999 (United Nations, 2004). Since the level of poverty is greater among women, it is expected that they are the most affected by its

health implications. According to Ngoma and Mayimbo (2017), maternal mortality is the second leading cause of death among women of reproductive age, living in poverty. Malnutrition is also shown to be very prominent among these poor communities, putting both women and children at risk (Ngoma & Mayimbo, 2017). Thereby, women who handle domestic work need sufficient daily calorie intake to be able to compensate for their heavy physical workload, especially when they are pregnant or lactating to avoid anemia which is still very frequent. Anemia puts them at risk of heart failure or even may lead to maternal death due to high blood loss during delivery (Ngoma and Mayimbo, 2017). These women are also more likely to encounter low-birth-weight, meaning that babies are more likely to die in their first year of life, therefore increasing infant mortality rates. In the case of babies who survive, they are more prone to suffering from infectious illnesses such as pneumonia and diarrhea during their lives and face growth retardation (Ngoma and Mayimbo, 2017). Therefore, the eradication of poverty through the creation of equal opportunities for men and women where women can gain access to social and material resources can contribute to lifting women out of poverty and improving their health outcomes, and securing a better and healthier future for their children.

Violence against women has been a public health problem for a long time, mainly caused by “unequal power relations between women and men, rigid gender roles, norms and hierarchies, and ascribing women lower status in society” (IPPF, n/d). According to the WHO (2021), the most common types of violence they face are intimate partner violence and sexual violence where nearly 1 in 3 women are subjected to physical and/or sexual violence worldwide. Also, more than 25% of women between the ages 15 and 49 who have been in relationships were subjected to both types of violence by their partner at least once in their lifetime, explaining how 38% of murders of women globally are committed by intimate partners (WHO, 2021). The

impact intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women have on health is very severe where it has been associated with a higher probability of contracting sexually transmitted illnesses among sexually abused women, the development of poor mental health under forms of depression, sleep difficulties, and even post-traumatic stress (WHO, 2021). Also, it has been shown to increase the likelihood of miscarriages or premature deliveries and can even lead to an increased risk of delivering babies with poorer neonatal outcomes (Shah & Shah, 2010). This shows that violence against women does not only affect them, but it also can harm their children's health, before and after their birth where they can face internalizing problems even before they are born (Martinez-Torteya et al., 2016). Children that grow up being exposed to violence within their households are more prone to developing behavioral problems and emotional disturbances which may as well affect their mental health and lead to transgenerational transmission of intimate partner violence if violence persists (WHO, 2021). Another impact that intimate partner violence can have on children has increased rates of infant and child mortality and morbidity due to reasons such as maltreatment, malnutrition, and lower rates of immunization which are known to cause major health threats (WHO, 2021). Therefore, achieving gender equality by eliminating violence against women will not only help and empower women, but it will also help ensure better environments for pregnant women and their children which will be able to lead healthy and safe lives.

Gender inequalities are still very frequent regarding access to education where girls have less access to formal education than boys. Karam (n.d.) has found that “almost two-thirds of the world's 775 million illiterate adults are women,” and among the 61 million primary school children who were out of school in 2010, 53% were girls, and there are only 98 women per 100 men in tertiary education (Karam, n.d.). The education of girls has a significant impact on their

babies' and their health, varying based on the level of health literacy acquired (Desai & Alva, 1998). It was shown that mothers with low levels of education are more likely to have babies with poor health at birth, at risk of not surviving infancy, whereas educating girls led to improved maternal education and a reduction in fertility rates as well as infant mortality, and mother-to-child transmission of HIV (Gage et al., 2013; Karam, n.d.). Most importantly, the impact of formal education was seen through the increased use of family planning methods by women, including delaying childbearing and marriage, additionally to the increased likelihood of seeking medical care, therefore, facing fewer health problems and having healthier babies with higher survival rates (Karam, n.d.). Additionally, the educational attainment of girls helps define the educational attainment of future generations since educated mothers are more likely to ensure their children get their essential formal education, increasing the children's behavioral and cognitive outcomes (Harding, 2015). This shows the impact that achieving gender equality in education will have on the health of women and their children, leading to more educated individuals and an overall healthier population.

To conclude, gender equality is one of the sustainable development goals set by the United Nations that still awaits to be reached by 2030, implying that women and girls are still facing violence and discrimination in their everyday lives, and are still working on claiming their full rights. Therefore, there is still a lot to be fixed to achieve gender equality such as prioritizing the education of girls as much as the boys to learn on becoming autonomous, helping women face all forms of violence, especially faced by intimate partners through empowerment, and supporting women living in poverty by granting them opportunities to improve and sustain themselves, as well as their children. Many forget that the foundation of the future generations depends on women, therefore, achieving gender equality will only benefit these generations and

help secure a healthy and sustainable future for all. This change can be executed through the enactment and enforcement of policies, regulations, and laws contributing to achieving gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence, and through the creation of economic of employment opportunities as a way to address unpaid care work and ensure participation of women in public and private decision making (UN-NGLS, n.d.).

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