THE IMPACT OF GENDER POLARIZATION ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

Gender Polarization refers to the division of gender, created by the society. The concept of gender polarization was first developed by American psychologist Sandra Bem. Genders are polarized so widely that society tends to fix roles for each gender. These roles are further exaggerated and tend to become rules for the society creating a binary between men and women. Example: separate hairstyles for men and women, different toys for boys and girls, pink colour for girls, blue colour for boys etc. Any individual deviating from the set rules are marked as abnormal and not considered good for a society. The impact of gender polarization has a negative impact on individuals where their education, employment and psychology is concerned. When genders are polarized it affects the overall development of a student, not only the students studies , but also their confidence ,talent, skill and potential. In case of employment it creates wage disparity, segregation of occupation, where women struggle in accessing highly paid jobs and leadership roles. Gender polarization also hinders the economic growth and development of women by limiting their participation in labour market. The most negative impact of gender polarization is on the psychology of an individual. The self-esteem, confidence and the ability to pursue their goals is badly affected, ruining their mental health . It negatively impacts the psychological well-being, including social relationships, personal growth and positive relations with others. Gender polarization can be addressed by promoting gender equality in education, addressing wage gaps and occupational segregation- paying according to the work done and skill and not on the basis of gender and supporting psychological well - being of individuals.

In this paper we shall see the impact of Gender Polarization on education, employment and psychology of individuals and some ways to tackle it.

Keywords: Gender Polarization, exaggeration of gender roles, wage disparity, occupational segregation.

Introduction

Gender polarization refers to the way in which society systematically arranges and separates behaviours, roles and expectations, strictly on the basis of male and female categories. It creates a rigid division between what is considered appropriate for men and women often ignoring the diversity and complexity of individual identities. It is important to understand gender polarization as it highlights the impact on personal identity and freedom caused by social structures. Gender polarization emerged from gender studies. Sandra Bem an American psychologist and feminist writer has elaborated about gender polarization in her book *The*

Lenses of Gender. According to Bem, gender polarization is "The ubiquitous organisation of social life around the distinction between male and female". Society tends to see genders as poles apart rather than humans. This polarization can be seen ever since a child is born. For instance pink colour is opted for a girl child and blue colour for a boy. Further when the child starts growing his or her toys are also given a distinct identity, like- bat and ball or toy cars for boys and dolls and kitchen set for girls. Even the hairstyles are not spared, short hair for boys and long hair for girls. This kind of polarization or distinction is borne in the minds of children and they start assuming these distinctions as set rules or law and follow it against their wishes. If anyone deviates from these set rules is considered as immoral or psychologically ill. Bem puts forth the argument that male - female difference are superimposed on so many aspects of human experience (Greenbaum Vicky - seeing through the lenses of Gender : Beyond Male/Female Polarization Journal 88 Volume, 3 pages 96 99) These differences have an adverse effect on both the genders. Societies that are strongly influenced by Gender Polarization, has its impact on activities, professions, clothing, and even way of speaking and hence often labelled as "male" or "female". Anyone who does not fit into this clear- cut roles may face discrimination, misunderstanding, or pressure to conform. According to Sandra Bem, " the definition of feminity and masculinity is different because they are polar opposite genders, and behaviours acceptable for a man are not seen to be appropriate for a woman" (Ben Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, 52).

General Polarization has deep social implications, influencing not only personal relationships and societal norms, but it can also be seen in case of education, workplaces, sports , media and also the psyche of an individual. Here, expectations are shaped by traditional gender norms. Despite progress in Gender equality across various domains, Gender Polarization continues to affect the lives of individuals, especially women, gendered minorities and non-

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conforming individuals by limiting access, opportunities and psychological freedom. Gender Polarization has a negative impact on education, employment and psychology especially for women and other gender minorities.

We shall see the impact below in details :

IMPACT ON EDUCATION:

Gender Polarization in education refers to the division or separation done in education amongst the genders. It influences the subject curriculum, teaching style and also classrooms, discussions and interactions.

1. Gender Polarization influences educational choices from the beginning itself. Students are coaxed towards activities and subjects considered appropriate for their gender . For instance boys are encouraged to study math, science, sports where as girls are encouraged to take Arts, literature or caregiving roles. This discourages the students from pursuing fields of their choices, especially certain fields that lead to under representation of women in STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics). This limits the student's exposure to their true interest and talents.

2. In education Gender polarization also affects the performance of students academically. It also affects the career aspirations and choices of subjects.

3. Gender stereotypes has a negative impact on student's self- esteem, which leads to poor academic performance, particularly girls.

4. Gender biases in textbook's and teaching materials can limit students access to diverse learning opportunities. Example we can often see more male characters in textbooks than female characters. Also the misrepresentation of females in educational textbooks ,environment and daily conversations reflects societys attitude towards females.. On the other hand , this influences females self-evaluation and their understanding of their social identities , which makes the girls feel that they are inferior and subordinate. (A. Pm, P . Jayaraman   2019 Gender Stereotype in Education)

5. Gender expectations can affect the participation of students in the classroom, leadership roles and even teacher's attitudes resulting in unequal encouragement and opportunities.

6. In many rural places and small towns male education is given more importance over female education , as boys are considered as the bread winner or the successor of the family even if the girl child is more brilliant in studies as compared to the male child. Even if they are given education, then they are allowed to have only basic education and cannot go for higher studies. They are taught household chores and taking care of

the family so that they get a suitable boy for marriage. Boys are allowed to pursue higher education so that they can take care of the financial needs of their family.

All the above aspects not only affects academic performance but it also affects the long term career choices and self- esteem of students. Gender expectations limit the ability of students to explore their true potentials and interests.

IMPACT OF GENDER POLARIZATION ON EMPLOYMENT

Gender Polarization in employment refers to the unequal placement or uneven distribution of employees in different work sectors and occupations based on gender. This has a negative impact in some places of employment.

1. Gender Polarization has a great influence while hiring employees and career advancement. Female employees are often paid less than male employees for same work and same responsibilities, which reflect gender bias. Promotion and leadership roles are given to men as compared to women, this hinders the career development and economic growth of a female employee.

2. In labour market too, gender polarization has a negative impact Male labours are preferred rather than female labours. If female labours are employed, they are paid less as compared to the male labours.

3. In workplace, Gender Polarization sustains occupational segregation, which means that certain jobs are dominated by one particular gender only. For instance, nursing, teaching, baby sitting are often seen as female professions, where as Engineering, Construction are considered as male domains. This division also develops wage gaps as male dominated fields are higher paying and has more advanced opportunities. Women and gender minorities enter the male captured domains face scepticism or they have to prove their competence.

4. Gender Polarized workplaces uphold toxic masculinity, competitiveness, emotional detachment and dominance, such an environment is hostile to women and other gender minorities and they often face harassment and are excluded from the decision making process.

5. Due to gender roles women have to balance their work and family responsibilities together, which makes it very difficult for them and also leads to deterioration of their health, depression, etc. Men are not given paternity leave or traditionally they are not considered as primary caregivers, such expectations hinder the life of both men and women from achieving healthy and successful work life balance.

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VOL 12, ISSUE 01   www.puneresearch.com/scholar   FEB MAR 2026
(IMPACT FACTOR 4.15 CJIF) INDEXED, PEER-REVIEWED / REFEREED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

IMPACT ON PSYCHOLOGY

1. Individuals who do not conform to traditional gender roles face profound psychological implications because of Gender Polarization. Since childhood individuals are given the message about what is 'accepted' or 'expected' . This message is engraved so deeply in the minds of the children that they shape themselves accordingly.

2. Transgenders, non- binary or gender fluid, struggle with societal acceptance which makes them alienated and have low self esteem. They are constantly miss gendered or invalidated that leads to depression and anxiety. Soft hearted men may suppress the emotions due to fear of being seen as weak ,while women may limit their bold nature to avoid being labelled as aggressive.

3. Society reinforces Gender Polarization to idealized body types. For instance - beauty standard set for women are that they should be slim, fair, long hair, etc and men should be tall, muscular, strong, etc. Such unrealistic beauty standards contributes to body dissatisfaction and unhappiness among individuals which can lead to depression, low self esteem, and disordered eating habits for fitting into the shoes this unrealistic standards.

4. Gender polarization adds on to the mental health disparities. Studies today have found increase number of cases of anxiety, depression, eating disorders and suicidal thoughts among individuals, especially women and gender minorities . On the other hand, men are less likely to seek help for mental health issues due to the stigma associated with vulnerability and emotional expression. To sum up we can say that gender polarization leads to anxiety, depression ,affects the well being of individuals and difficulty in self expression .

5. To conclude we can say that , the effects of Gender polarization are hazardous to all the genders, as it forces limits on gender identity , capability of an individual and their social interaction . When the cycle of gender polarization continues , it hinders the path of equality and progress and hence it should be addressed with utter seriousness and sensitivity.

Gender polarization has a negative impact on education employment and psychology of individuals. But we can tackle this problem by keeping in mind that all individuals are humans rather than labelling them as male, female or gender minorities. Following are some discussions which can help us to tackle the above problem :

HOW TO TACKLE GENERAL POLARIZATION IN EDUCATION

1. Educational institutions should address students equally. All the students should be treated with respect without making any assumptions based on their gender.

2. Critically examining and then reviewing curriculum materials and textbooks for gender bias and stereotypes and encouraging mixed gender collaboration and participation , in all activities can help tackle the problem of gender polarization to some extent.

3. Avoiding gender based terms like guys, girls etc and using gender neutral words like students, class etc .

4. Individuals from various genders and backgrounds should be featured in curriculum materials, teaching professionals and guest speaker programs .

5. Raising awareness by conducting activities and discussions about gender equality and gender rules, also spreading awareness about polarization and stereotypes and what impact it has on the lives of individuals and society . Parents and guardians too play an important role in spreading awareness about gender equality and stereotypes at home. They should foster open and honest communication with their children about it.

6. Educators should not only communicate with their students about gender equality but also with the parents of the students and encourage them to support their child in pursuing their interest regardless of gender.

7. Quality education should be ensured not only for boys but for girls as well, so that they can pursue careers of their choice in all the fields.

8. Strictly addressing, bullying and harassment in educational institutions on the basis of gender and create a safe and secure place for students.

9. According to UNESCO " Gender equitable education system can contribute to reduction in school related gender based violence and harmful practices , including child marriage and female genital mutilation . Gender equitable education system help keep both girls and boys in school, building prosperity for entire countries." This quote emphasizes the importance of gender equality in education for societal wellbeing.

HOW TO TACKLE GENDER POLARIZATION IN EMPLOYMENT:

1. First and foremost important point to tackle gender polarization is to foster a culture of respect and understanding for all employees irrespective of their gender identity.

2. Strict rules should be laid down for discrimination and harassment based on gender. Zero tolerance approach should be emphasized for all forms of gender based discrimination or harassment and strict disciplinary action should be taken.

3. Training should be provided to employees on using a respectful and inclusive language at the workplace. Training should also be given for recognising and mitigating unconscious biases that can affect hiring promotion and performance evaluation.

4. Another important thing that employers should consider is equal pay for equal work irrespective of what gender an individual belongs to. Standardized pay scale should be established for same work or similar rules not based on gender but on objective factors.

5. Next the employer should see that the work environment is safe for all genders, no discrimination should be done on the basis of gender nor should there be any sort of harassment or bullying for any gender .The workplace should have gender neutral facilities including restrooms to promote, an inclusive environment. Workplaces should have flexible work hours. It should also have working options like remote work, compressed weeks to make working easier for employees, especially women, as many working women have to give up their jobs once they are married or have kids as the working hours are too lengthy .

6. Gender neutral parental leaves should be encouraged to parents so that they can balance their work as well as family responsibilities together. This will also help women and they won't have to quit their jobs as the responsibility will be shared by both parents, Child care facility would be another cherry on the cake , if a workplace provides it for its employees . Such a facility will be a boon to women who have to quit their careers and take care of their children.

7. By implementing the above strategies organizations can make the workplace a safe, secure and inclusive for all the genders and make it a place where they can thrive and flourish.

BELOW ARE SOME POINTS HOW TO TACKLE GENDER POLARIZATION IN PSYCHOLOGY :

Gender polarization should be dealt sensibly and carefully when it comes to psychology. The psyche of each individual is different , so it becomes difficult to tackle this problem easily . Family and friends play a major role in solving the problems here . One can tackle gender polarization in Psychology in the following ways :

1. Gender biases should be challenged actively . Individuals, especially children should not be encouraged to accept assumptions and stereotypes, in fact parents, mentors, guardians should encourage children to question things, when they find it incorrect, parents should be encouraged to raise their children in such a way that they challenge gender biases and stereotypes and promote equality .

2. One should listen carefully to the perspective of others even when they differ from your own perspective .

3. Healthy environment should be created , where individuals should feel comfortable in discussing issues related to gender , without the fear of being judged .

4. Common misconceptions and misleading information about gender should be debunked by providing accurate information .

5. In educational institutions and workplaces gender neutral words should be used like students , class instead of he or she , colleagues, team etc while addressing an office meeting , this gives a feeling of inclusiveness to all irrespective of their gender .

6. Create environment where one feels valued wanted and respected for who they are irrespective of what gender they belong to .

7. Media too plays an important role in tackling gender polarization . Media outlets should portray inclusive and vivid images of all people from all genders which will help to avoid harmful stereotype.

8. People should actively participate with organizations that take initiative in promoting gender equality and are challenging gender biases .

In the end we can say that we cannot break the cycle of gender polarization by just policy making or education , but by changing the mindset of people. It is a collective effort that has to be made to transform society into a more just , free and humane place for everyone to live.

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