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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal provided dedicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

CULTURAL RECONFIGURATIONS: THE IMPACT OF GENDER ROLE CHANGES ON FAMILY AND WORK LIFE

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ABSTRACT:

This piece aims to examine how traditional gender norms and societal expectations have restricted women from public life and how they have evolved after long drawn struggles and fights, while emphasizing the roles of families and how they are treated in families themselves. It explores the traditional and historical context of gender restrictions, the societal and cultural implications of changing gender roles and the psychological effects of this transactions. The piece also discusses new trends in family structures and workplace arrangements as gender roles shift, and provides recommendations for policymakers to promote fairness, tolerance, and collective accountability in the face of evolving gender norms.

Keywords; gender roles, society, family, workplace discrimination, gender stereotypes, empowerment.

INTRODUCTION:

Men have it hard. A man has to protect his family. A man who cannot earn money to sustain his family is not a man. These are some phrases male dominated societies have created for their men. A person, be it a man or a woman is trapped under the gender norms of a society. While it is a topic of debate for why this gender ideology and discrimination exists, it is not topic for a debate of who has got the short end of the stick.

A person by just the virtue of being a female is subjected to various rules and notions, by simply taking birth as one. You should take care of the family, you should support your husband and you are not a human but a fragile, less abled woman who cannot survive without a man's

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presence in your life. Today the society has seen women coming out of their trapped houses and taking a stand for themselves and breaking all the traditional gender norms. And it is celebrated, however is it a fact to be celebrated?? Ought we celebrate the liberation of a human when they are still facing difficulty to have equal pay, fight to be with their babies, be a leader and excel at what they do but still be compared to a man and regarded as inferior beings? This is not the justice that the people who have fought against patriarchy and struggled for years wanted and deserved, just so that their daughters and mothers can have a prejudice and judgement free life. We still have a long way to go.

This piece aims to understand how the society and traditional norms have restricted women from public life and how they have been evolving over the years, while placing an important emphasis on how this has affected families and how the root cause may be from families itself.

Historical context:

Taking a peek into the history of humankind, we see how gender restrictions and differences originated. Men were always seen as the bread winners of the family. They were looked upon and supported to fend their family. They were also the main decision makers as seen by checking through the number of kings to the number of queens. This just does end with the royal class, this seeped onto the commoners, the clergies and then to the next generation. A woman was seen as an object or if luckier a person who does the chores around a house and takes care of their family needs. While men were out fighting in the war, they were entrusted to take care of their children and household duties. Pre historic men used to go hunt and forage into the woods for their survival, when tribes fought against each other, women bore the brunt of their tribe's defeat. One might argue that women were not considered strong or fast enough to hunt animals or protect themselves from aggressors and which may be agreed upon, but how does that set the tone of how a woman is perceived in the centuries after that era? This practice of viewing women as less abled dim witted and not able to handle complex tasks has evolved and carried on for centuries.

Gender restrictions and discrimination are also a factor in how people were forced to behave. A man should be big and burly often intimidating while a woman has to be soft compassionate and offer warmth. Many a times the people were forced to fit into these societal notions. Hence this strengthened their belief that a woman should not venture beyond the safety of her house

where she should use these qualities to good use like teaching her daughters how to be a good wife like her.

However, they were always women who dared to venture these restrictions and obtain freedom. However, they were seen as misfits in the society up until the recent times. They were discriminated and had to distance themselves from the society. While the women were held captive and forced to work tirelessly without pay, it was still not considered a job and was regarded as sitting idly without a real job. A girl child was thought by her mother that she as a girl has the sole purpose of taking care of the family and being a good mother and wife.

A change in this situation came in the period of world wars, where the men were sent to the lines to battle and women had to stay back and support the country with their skills. Feminist movements albeit slower prior to this gained more strength when the wars ended. Women proved that they could add value to the society, and they were not to be locked down by chores and motherly duties.

Impact of Gender Role Changes on Family & Work Life:

The process of gender reconfiguration has gained traction over the years with the onset of education, social media and open mindedness. This is also due to the changes in cultural and religious aspects, where once women were restricted from venturing out of their homes. People are more accepting and normalize women who can stand up for themselves, and it has also helped that the traditional gender roles are changing for the better. While men were burdened to work before, they are mostly free from this role.

With the growing trends this generation is the closest we have ever had in regards to gender equality. More young mothers are employed more than ever and generally people are more receptive of the change. However, people who assume the traditional gender identities of masculinity and femineity still prevail. A man who identifies to be masculine while facing pressure at work leaves the other aspects of his life to sacrifice himself to the job. While a feminine female is often drawn towards their families from work by incidents where they believe they can be of value better than a workplace. A female quitting her job to take care of her child is not a rare occurrence.

Males and females who do not align themselves with the traditional gender ideologies are generally found to be present in both work and life as equals. A man does not see his identity as a worker and the female does not see her identity solely as a homemaker, hence helping them retain their own identities and helping them spend more efforts into their family and work respectively.

Research has found that women who do not align themselves with the traditional gender identity fare better in their work life, they are motivated, and aspiring compared to other women. While this shows that being more committed to the work role, though not socially desirable for women, perceptible to the competing expectations in the family realm, especially when they wish to devote themselves to meet work challenges.

However, this also poses an issue of how family life can be continued for them. Having children while having a job and excelling at it takes massive effort, and hard work. While the financial incentives and personal growth are added caveats to the situation it is not a surprise that one aspect of their life should be sacrificed if they feel the need to live comfortably and content. This might be also the reason why parenting has evolved into different forms, like nuclear parenting single child parenting or no children at all. While the concept of a working woman is accepted now the concept of not having a family is not. It is expected from a woman that her having a job does not take away from the fact that she is still another and should assume the role as caretaker for the family. This to some point take away what a woman wanted to achieve by working and being treated equal to a man.

Ultimately it is the decision of the women on how she wants to be seen, but this decision is clouded by the society and other norms. If a woman decides to not have a child and focus on her job, she may be ostracised and has to face judgements and statements from her family and others.

Many women still find it hard to not break free of these societal norms due to the pressure and religious aspects. All religions say how a woman should stay home and rear children and going against that may be difficult.³ Support from family members is very important in these matters, both for women who want to change their identity or those who are already working. There

³ Jonathan Evans, N.S. (2022) 3. *gender roles in the family*, Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/03/02/gender-roles-in-the-family/>.

are examples of countless woman who could reach heights with unwavering support from their families.

Gender plays a big role in workplaces. Women have been getting more chances in the workplaces like never before. As traditional gender roles are evolving companies have had to adapt to the change.

Women now hold positions throughout the workforce from daily wage to the CEOs of the companies. This has led to more inclusive and supportive workplace. This also leads to greater cultural diversity and can improve the employee's mentality.

However the availability of opportunities is very low for women continue to be restricted the gender inequalities, which shape the jobs with patriarchal expectations.

Women continue to experience high level of pressure from their jobs, when they are present in an environment where gender inequality and discrimination is present. They are left doubting their abilities and decisions which in turn may affect their performance providing more ammunition to the stereotype. Gender specific behaviour demotivates and demoralizes women in the workplace, and in an organizational setting negative feelings about a woman's performance or efficiency may damage their future career advancements. If a woman does not get enough support, then she might not perform at her optimum.

Even when a woman is in a leadership role of some sort many men have reluctance to follow the orders given as they do not see a woman capable of giving orders. This stems from a traditional gender stereotype that men are naturally authoritative and demand respect, while women are meek, kind and soft natured. This presumption dulls the authority a woman in leadership role has, and is difficult to overcome that barrier. This presumption starts from the moment a woman is called out for a job interview, as they see a woman who has other engagements like having a family after some years, giving birth to children. A married woman is not given enough consideration a an unmarried one as they believe marriage takes up the responsibility of the women and will be less focused on hr job. The first questions they get asked is what are their plans for the next 5 years which is quite invasive and one which a male does not face. Women do not mandatory maternal leave in many companies and private firms as they see this leave of absence as hindrance to the work done. These all pose extra difficulties

to women and held back by the society. Women in lower level of the work chain are treated more harshly with objectification, harassment and even sexual abuse from their colleagues, juniors and even bosses. There is also the stereotype that women who are outspoken are not People who should be treated right, and are egoistic and worthy of decent human interaction or respect. Many a times such women haven't to battle the wrong rumors and presumptions about them. Women do not get justice for the wrongdoings they have faced in the workplaces. The various representatives, committees and other incentives are nothing are than namesakes as any issue that are brought up by the women are not taken seriously or heavily encouraged to suppress the matter up. They are coerced into not filing additional complaints by threats of power and ill reputation. Even when a woman is rewarded for her good work the patriarchal society find a way to ill name them by passing indecent remarks or calling them unworthy promotions.

While the society and workplaces are treating women well to some extent there is still a long way to go to achieve equality and safe working place for everyone, which can only be possible by the male counterparts working and supporting them.

Societal and Cultural Implications:

While the genders were trapped in societal norms before with the advent of new age, this situation is evolving every day at a slow speed. Women being the bread winners and contributing to the household is not considered a taboo or a wrong in the eyes of the society. Nowadays the genders decide how the society and cultural expectations are evolving. People have come to terms with how women are an integral part in the society, more and more women are being enrolled for higher studies and more chances are given for women in workplaces. This change in these ideologies has also ushered in new and far consequences, occupations that were considered to be possible and open for only one gender are now open for women as well. We see numerous female astronauts, pilots and military officers now. Women are breaking stereotypes and limits by achieving greatness in male dominated fields, while men have also started taking a dive in the field of humanities and arts. Women have started to realize their worth and do not want to settle for less. The framers of the constitution were aware of the challenges that women would face in a society dominated by men. They included provisions to protect women's rights, and over time, new laws and amendments were introduced to improve the status of women in India. Article 14 ensures equality under the law for all citizens,

including women, but society has still failed to give women an equal status in the society because of the persistent internalised misogyny.⁴ Article 15(1) prohibits discrimination based solely on gender, but women face discrimination at their workplaces every now and then, and even within their families.⁵ Article 15(3) allows the government to take action to help women overcome social, economic, and political disadvantages.⁶ Article 21, which protects the right to life and personal liberty,⁷ also includes the right of women to be treated with respect and dignity, but are they actually treated with basic decency? Or are they given the respect that they deserve? That still remains the question. Article 39 directs the State to secure equal pay for equal work for men and women,⁸ but the pay disparity still exists. Article 42 directs the State to make provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief,⁹ but women's marital status is asked first instead of their hard-earned accomplishments. They are believed to be less efficient and less committed to their as compared to men because it is believed that women have to deal with their household responsibilities as well.

Hence, legislations have been made but the implementation is yet to be done. The entire society has to come together and put collaborated efforts to make that possible.

Media has also played an important role in changing gender norms and stereotypes. The media has helped in shaping and pivoting the gender role landscape. Entertainment sector like movies, TV shows, advertisements show women who fight the patriarchy and break traditional norms which creates the culture in the viewers and the society. Social media is also a platform for amplifying the issues and providing a platform for influencers and normal people to voice their concerns and to challenge the gender stereotypes and to promote a more inclusive scenario. This has started a trend where the society is greatly influenced through media.

The changing traditional and gender norms has also brought out changes in the feminist and gender equality movements. As the society improves the demands and aspirations of these societies evolve as the situation has still not achieved the optimum effectiveness and perfection. More people come towards the support and betterment of the gender. Government has also

⁴ INDIA CONST. art. 14.

⁵ INDIA CONST. art. 15, cl. 1.

⁶ INDIA CONST. art. 15, cl. 3.

⁷ INDIA CONSTI. art. 21.

⁸ INDIA CONSTI. art. 39.

⁹ INDIA CONSTI. art. 42.

started various schemes to protect and help these societies. However, there is still very massive job to do as this problem has actually not gone away.

The gender pays gap remains a significant issue in the economic sphere. Women are paid less for the same job that a man does. Critics argue that this is a voluntary choice as men are considered to be the main bread winners of the family and hence paid more than women, however it is also seen that women in higher level occupation earn less than their colleagues. Earlier this pay gap could be attributed to discrimination, segregation and societal norms this practice still has not changed even after such a big leap in gender and traditional role changes. As gender roles change this also affects the families, as earlier families were often men centric as in men were the sole breadwinners of the family¹⁰. This then changed to women contributing slightly to the household expenses and now it has reached a level where women can earn more and considered the higher earner and contributor if the house. Dual income households are generally well off with healthcare, expenditure and education and does not rely on one single person and thereby reducing the amount of stress. However, this shift should also take domesticated roles into account as well as women continue to be underpaid in domestic help sphere, despite the increasing work commitments¹¹.

Psychological and Mental Impact:

The effects of gender role changes have also sparked physiological and mental changes in society. As the society changes many people are found in crossroads of pressure and confusion of whether to conform to the societal standards or form their own decisions. These can lead to severe anxiety, depression and other mental health issues. This might also create a sense of self-doubt and confusion of their identities. The transition to gender fluid roles can be marred with backlash and disagreement from societies and might face alienation. This can lead to isolation and increased psychological distress for those who do not conform to traditional gender roles. Furthermore, the fear of judgment for not conforming to traditional gender norms can prevent individuals from being their authentic selves. For instance, women may feel pressured to display characteristics of both nurturing and assertiveness, causing a conflict between societal expectations and personal goals. This pressure can result in what is known as

¹⁰ Zenithresearch. Available at: http://zenithresearch.org.in/images/stories/pdf/2013/JULY/EIJMMS/10_EIJMMS_VOL3_ISSUE7_JULY2013.pdf

¹¹ Khan, M. (2024), Shifting gender roles in society and the workplace: Implications for environmental sustainability, Zenodo. Available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/7634130>.

"gender role stress," which can lead to increased psychological distress, especially for women balancing multiple roles. Additionally, not everyone may embrace the shift towards more equal gender roles in society. Some individuals may struggle with this change, feeling confused or uncertain about their identities. This confusion can manifest in various ways, such as heightened anxiety and difficulties in forming relationships, as individuals navigate the challenges of new societal norms.¹²

Gender roles are likely to shift as society progresses, becoming more fluid and inclusive. One important forecast is that traditional gender stereotypes will be further dismantled, allowing people to express themselves authentically without fear of being judged or discriminated. This transition will be driven by increased knowledge and campaigning for gender equality, as well as increased portrayal of varied gender identities in the media and popular culture.

Another expected trend is the continuous rethinking of established gender roles in relationships and families. There will most certainly be a stronger emphasis on shared duties and equal partnership, challenging the idea that certain jobs or functions are necessarily linked to a single gender. This growth will encourage healthier and more balanced relationships, allowing individuals to prosper both personally and professionally.

Gender roles will become much more inclusive and accepting in the future. Society will increasingly welcome and celebrate the diversity of gender identities, acknowledging that gender occurs on a spectrum rather than in binary. This transition will pave the way for a more inclusive society in which people of all genders are treated equally and respected.

New Trends in Family Structures and Workplace Arrangements:

As gender roles shift, we should expect to see new patterns in family structures and employment arrangements that reflect these changes. One such trend is the increase in dual-income homes, in which both couples contribute equally to the family's financial well-being. This transition will challenge traditional assumptions of the male breadwinner and female homemaker, encouraging a more balanced approach to work and family life.

¹² Çoban, S. (2022) Gender and telework: Work and family experiences of teleworking professional, middle-class, married women with children during the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey, Gender, work, and organization. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8251034/>

Another developing trend is greater flexibility in work arrangements, such as remote work and flexible timetables. This tendency will allow people, regardless of gender, to better balance their work and personal duties, eliminating pressure to conform to traditional gender norms.¹³ Employers will need to respond to these shifting needs by implementing more accommodating work practices that promote gender equality and work-life balance.

In the future, there will be an increased emphasis on shared parental leave and childcare obligations. As gender roles evolve, both mothers and fathers will be expected to play an active role in raising their children. This trend will challenge the belief that childcare is entirely the responsibility of women, supporting a more equitable approach to family life.

It is critical that legislators put policies in place that assist families and workplaces in adjusting to the ongoing evolution of gender roles. The recommendations that follow are meant to promote an atmosphere of fairness, tolerance, and collective accountability.

- Encouraging adaptable work schedules: Promoting flexible work arrangements like job-sharing, flexible scheduling, and remote work can assist people in striking a balance between their personal and professional obligations. Parents and other caregivers especially benefit from this flexibility, which enables them to balance their responsibilities without sacrificing their professional goals.
 - Putting in place comprehensive policies for parental leave: Normalizing shared childcare obligations can be aided by establishing fair parental leave regulations that incentivize both parents to take time off. Policies that support a culture where caregiving is acknowledged as a shared role rather than a gendered expectation should adequately compensate mothers and fathers for their leave. This strategy helps lessen the stigma attached to men taking parental leave in addition to fostering family unity.¹⁴
- Encouraging gender-neutral daycare providers: Helping working families means making investments in high-quality, reasonably priced, and easily accessible childcare. Policymakers can lessen the load on women, who frequently bear childcare responsibilities disproportionately, by offering gender-neutral childcare options. Both parents are able to participate more completely in the workforce thanks to this support.

¹³ Lu, L. et al. (2020) Gender diversity and work-life conflict in changing times, International Journal of environmental research and public health. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7731024/>

¹⁴ Changing Dynamics of family structure in India | current affairs | vision IAS. Available at: <https://visionias.in/current-affairs/weekly-focus/2024-03-08/social-issues/introduction>,

- Promoting diversity of gender in leadership: Conventional gender stereotypes can be challenged in part by encouraging gender diversity in leadership roles across a range of industries. Establishing incentives or quotas to encourage the recruitment and advancement of women and non-binary people into leadership positions can improve workplace equity and set an example for next generations.
- Encouraging education initiatives for gender equality: Early on, gender roles can be reshaped in society through the inclusion of gender equality education in school curricula. Children can be empowered to question conventions and cultivate a more inclusive perspective through programs that raise awareness of gender stereotypes and nurture critical thinking about established roles.
- Creating policies that are gender-responsive in every sector: Gender effect should be evaluated in all policy areas, including healthcare, education, and employment. Ensuring equitable access to opportunities and resources can be facilitated by gender-responsive policies that take into account the diverse needs and obstacles encountered by individuals of all genders. This entails tackling job segregation and supporting programs for equitable compensation.
- Promoting community involvement and support systems: The development of family support networks through community activities can aid people in navigating the challenges posed by shifting gender roles. Families can exchange experiences and methods for striking a balance between work and home life by taking use of the resources, peer support, and mentoring that these programs can offer.
- Tracking and assessing initiatives for gender equality: It is crucial to set up systems for observing and assessing how well gender equality initiatives are working. In order to ensure that initiatives to support families and workplaces are effective and supported by evidence, disaggregated data on gender outcomes can be gathered to help identify gaps and advise future policy.

Conclusion:

Women have always been subjected to discrimination and segregation for a long time. The struggle for equality has been going on for long and has achieved success but there is still a long way to go. True equality can only be achieved when women are seen as able people who can take their own decision and are responsible, it is high time that regressive societal norms and gender roles are broken. We should also strive to give our unwavering support to those

who have achieved this feat, making homes, schools and workplaces a safe place for all genders equally. Nevertheless, the ongoing struggle for gender equality presents opportunities for creating more just and equitable societies, as we continue to challenge traditional gender roles and work towards a future of greater inclusivity and respect for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

