

Value Added Course

Women and Society in India

UNIT-I

❖ WOMEN'S POSITION FROM VEDIC TIMES TO PRESENT :-

The position of women in Indian society has seen significant changes from Vedic times to the present day. Here's a summary of this evolution:

Vedic Period (c. 1500 - 500 BCE)

- **Status and Education:** Women enjoyed a high status and respect in society. They had the right to education and could participate in philosophical debates.
- **Roles:** Women were both educated and engaged in domestic responsibilities. Some women were known as seers and composed hymns.
- **Marriage and Freedom:** Women had the freedom to choose their partners through a practice called 'Swayamvara.' Widow remarriage was allowed.

Post-Vedic Period (c. 500 BCE - 500 CE)

- **Decline in Status:** The status of women began to decline. Their role became more confined to household duties.
- **Manusmriti:** Texts like Manusmriti reinforced patriarchal norms, restricting women's rights and freedoms.
- **Education:** Access to education for women diminished, and they were largely excluded from intellectual and spiritual pursuits.

Medieval Period (c. 500 - 1500 CE)

- **Further Decline:** Women's status deteriorated further during this period. Practices such as child marriage and purdah (veil) became common.
- **Sati:** The practice of Sati, where widows self-immolated on their husband's funeral pyre, was prevalent in certain regions.

Colonial Period (c. 1500 - 1947)

The status of women in Indian society has changed from time to time. Their status has been variously estimated and there are many views regarding her place in civilization. There is so much variability in the relation of women to society during different time period that it is difficult to make a general statement. Categorically, her utility, resourcefulness in domestic life, refreshing company and affectionate care for children have always proved a great asset to her partner in life and have to a considerable extent determined her status at different stages of civilization. Throughout the Vedic period, women in India especially of the upper caste were given equal status with men. In view of this equality of status, women participated in sacrificial rites and had to be men's equals in upholding "*Dharma*". Women had been able to hear and learn the Vedas, during 600 B.C. In Rig-Veda, the husband and wife appear to have occupied equal status –both of them were designated as "*Dampati*".

- **Reform Movements:** Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotirao Phule fought against practices like Sati and child marriage. They advocated for women's education and widow remarriage.
- **Education:** Efforts were made to promote women's education and improve their social status. Schools for girls were established.
- **Women's Rights:** The movement for women's rights gained momentum, with women participating in the freedom struggle and advocating for equal rights.

Post-Independence (1947 - Present)

- **Constitutional Rights:** The Indian Constitution guarantees equality and prohibits discrimination based on gender. Women have equal rights in education, employment, and politics.
- **Legislation:** Laws were enacted to protect women's rights, including the Hindu Marriage Act, the Dowry Prohibition Act, and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.
- **Education and Employment:** Significant progress has been made in women's education and employment. Women are now present in various fields, including politics, business, science, and technology.
- **Challenges:** Despite progress, women still face issues like gender-based violence, discrimination, and societal pressures. Efforts continue to address these challenges and promote gender equality.

Modern Era

- **Empowerment Initiatives:** Numerous government and non-government initiatives aim to empower women through education, skill development, and entrepreneurship.
- **Representation:** Women have increasingly taken up leadership roles in various sectors, including politics, corporate, and academia.
- **Social Movements:** Movements like #MeToo have brought global attention to issues of sexual harassment and gender inequality, leading to increased awareness and changes in policies.

The journey of women's position in Indian society reflects a trajectory from high respect and freedom in the Vedic period, through decline during medieval times, to a resurgence of rights and status in modern times. Despite significant advancements, the quest for complete gender equality continues.

❖ SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AND GENDER ROLES:-

The social construction of gender and gender roles refers to the idea that society and culture create and reinforce gender norms and expectations, rather than these differences being purely biological. This process influences how individuals perceive themselves and others, and it shapes behaviors, opportunities, and interactions. Here's a detailed overview:

Social Construction of Gender

1. **Definition:**
 - **Gender vs. Sex:** Sex refers to biological differences, while gender is a social and cultural construct related to behaviors, roles, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women.
2. **Cultural Norms and Values:**
 - Societies establish norms and values about what it means to be male or female. These norms are learned from a young age through socialization.
3. **Agents of Socialization:**
 - **Family:** Parents often treat sons and daughters differently, encouraging behaviors that align with societal gender expectations.
 - **Education:** Schools may reinforce gender norms through curricula, teacher interactions, and peer relationships.
 - **Media:** Television, movies, advertising, and social media often portray stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity.
 - **Peers:** Peer groups can enforce conformity to gender norms through social interactions and expectations.
4. **Gender Identity:**
 - This is how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. It can align with the sex assigned at birth or differ from it.

Gender Roles

1. **Definition:**
 - Gender roles are societal expectations regarding appropriate behaviors, activities, and attributes for men and women.
2. **Traditional Gender Roles:**
 - **Masculine Roles:** Often associated with strength, independence, assertiveness, and leadership.
 - **Feminine Roles:** Often associated with nurturing, emotional sensitivity, passivity, and supportive roles.
3. **Impact on Individuals:**
 - **Career Choices:** Gender roles can influence career aspirations and opportunities, with certain professions being labeled as more suitable for men or women.
 - **Domestic Roles:** Traditional gender roles often dictate that women handle domestic chores and caregiving, while men are seen as breadwinners.
4. **Gender Role Socialization:**
 - This process starts early in life, as children are exposed to gendered toys, activities, and expectations. For example, boys might be given trucks and action figures, while girls receive dolls and play kitchens.
5. **Resistance and Change:**
 - **Feminist Movements:** These have challenged traditional gender roles and advocated for equal rights and opportunities for women.
 - **LGBTQ+ Activism:** This has highlighted the diversity of gender identities and expressions, challenging the binary understanding of gender.
 - **Policy Changes:** Efforts to promote gender equality in the workplace, education, and other areas have helped to shift traditional roles.

Contemporary Perspectives

1. Fluidity of Gender:

- Modern understandings recognize that gender is not binary but exists on a spectrum. Individuals may identify as non-binary, genderqueer, or genderfluid.

2. Intersectionality:

- Gender intersects with other social categories such as race, class, sexuality, and ability, leading to varied experiences of oppression and privilege.

3. Global Variations:

- Different cultures have unique constructions of gender. For instance, some Indigenous cultures recognize more than two genders, and the Hijra community in South Asia has a long history of existence outside the male-female binary.

Impact on Society

1. Gender Inequality:

- Societal constructions of gender contribute to inequality, including wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership positions, and differential access to education and healthcare.

2. Mental Health:

- Rigid gender roles can negatively impact mental health, contributing to issues like depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, particularly for those who do not conform to these roles.

3. Social and Legal Reforms:

- Ongoing efforts aim to dismantle harmful gender norms and promote gender equality through legislation, education, and awareness campaigns.

Understanding the social construction of gender and gender roles is crucial for addressing gender inequality and promoting a more inclusive and equitable society.

❖ SOCIALIZATION-AGENCIES OF SOCIALIZATION:-

By now you must have become familiar with the term 'socialization' and how there is constant interaction of the individual with the society. You have also seen how the process of socialization enables a living organism to become a social being. As an ongoing process it continues from 'womb to tomb' and from generation to generation. Individuals are nurtured and shaped by various agencies in the society. The purpose of this Unit is to introduce you to the various agencies of socialization and how each agency contributes to the moulding of an individual's personality. We all agree that individuals cannot live in isolation. S/he has a natural instinct for sociability. There is constant interaction with family members, peers, teachers, schoolmates, relatives and members of the community. In modern times with the advance in science and technology, we can also feel the influence of social media, networking, etc. It is this interaction with the society that makes her/him a human being. In this unit, we revisit the concept of socialization and the agencies of socialization at micro, meso and macro levels. We will also try to understand the process of socialization at each level.

1. Family

- **Primary Agent:** The family is the first and most influential agent of socialization. It provides the initial environment where children learn language, norms, values, and social roles.
- **Influence:** Parents and siblings influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. For example, through reinforcement and modeling, parents teach children what is considered acceptable behavior in their culture.
- **Gender Socialization:** Families often play a key role in gender socialization by encouraging behaviors deemed appropriate for boys and girls.

2. Education

- **Formal Socialization:** Schools are critical for the formal socialization of children. They impart knowledge, skills, and cultural values.
- **Hidden Curriculum:** Beyond academic learning, schools teach norms, values, and expectations through what is known as the hidden curriculum, which includes things like punctuality, discipline, and cooperation.
- **Social Interactions:** Interaction with teachers and peers helps children learn social norms and develop social skills.

3. Peer Groups

- **Peer Influence:** As children grow, peer groups become significant agents of socialization. Peers influence behaviors, attitudes, and interests, often providing a sense of belonging and identity.
- **Adolescence:** During adolescence, peer groups can have a particularly strong impact, sometimes even surpassing the influence of family in certain areas, such as fashion, music preferences, and social behaviors.

4. Mass Media

- **Information and Entertainment:** Television, radio, newspapers, the internet, and social media provide information, entertainment, and cultural norms.
- **Shaping Perceptions:** Media shapes perceptions of reality, influences opinions, and reinforces societal norms and stereotypes. It plays a role in the dissemination of cultural values and ideologies.
- **Advertising:** Through advertising, media also teaches consumer behaviors and ideals related to beauty, success, and happiness.

5. Religion

- **Moral and Ethical Guidance:** Religious institutions and practices provide moral and ethical guidance, teaching individuals about right and wrong.
- **Community and Identity:** Religion often offers a sense of community and identity, helping individuals find their place in the world and understand their role in society.
- **Rituals and Traditions:** Religious rituals and traditions reinforce cultural norms and values across generations.

6. Workplace

- **Adult Socialization:** The workplace is a crucial site for adult socialization, where individuals learn professional norms, values, and behaviors.
- **Professional Identity:** Through social interactions and organizational culture, individuals develop their professional identity and understand their roles within the larger society.
- **Social Networks:** Workplaces often provide social networks that can influence personal and professional development.

7. Government and Legal Systems

- **Civic Education:** Governments play a role in socializing citizens through laws, regulations, and policies that define acceptable behavior.
- **Civic Engagement:** Civic education programs and initiatives encourage individuals to participate in societal and political processes.
- **Social Order:** Legal systems enforce societal norms and values, contributing to the maintenance of social order.

8. Community and Cultural Organizations

- **Community Influence:** Local community groups, cultural organizations, and clubs provide socialization opportunities through activities, events, and interactions.
- **Cultural Continuity:** These organizations help preserve cultural heritage and pass on traditions and values to future generations.
- **Social Support:** They offer social support networks and a sense of belonging, reinforcing community values and norms.

Conclusion

Socialization is a lifelong process, influenced by various agencies that shape individuals' understanding of their social world. Each agency plays a unique role in imparting the knowledge, skills, norms, and values necessary for individuals to function effectively within their society. Understanding these agencies helps to appreciate how individuals are shaped by and contribute to the social fabric of their communities.

❖ **WOMEN IN FAMILY-MARRIAGE, EMPOWERMENT MEASURES:-**

The position of women within the family and marriage has evolved significantly over time, influenced by social, cultural, legal, and economic factors. In recent decades, various empowerment measures have been implemented to promote gender equality and enhance the status of women. Here is a comprehensive overview

Traditional Roles

- **Domestic Responsibilities:** Traditionally, women have been seen as the primary caretakers of the home and children. They were responsible for household chores, childcare, and maintaining family relationships.
- **Subordinate Position:** In many cultures, women held a subordinate position to men, with limited decision-making power within the family.

- **Marriage Norms:** Marriages were often arranged, and women's roles were defined by their relationship to their husbands and children.

Changing Roles

- **Increased Education:** Access to education has empowered women to seek employment and participate in decision-making processes within the family.
- **Dual-Income Families:** With more women entering the workforce, the traditional model of single-income families has shifted towards dual-income households, changing dynamics within the family.
- **Shared Responsibilities:** There is a growing trend towards shared domestic responsibilities, with men taking on more roles in childcare and household tasks.

Empowerment Measures

Legal Reforms

- **Marriage Laws:** Legal reforms in many countries have aimed to protect women's rights within marriage. Laws such as the prohibition of child marriage and the legalization of divorce and alimony support women's autonomy and security.
- **Inheritance Rights:** Reforms ensuring equal inheritance rights for women have strengthened their financial independence and security.
- **Protection from Violence:** Laws against domestic violence and marital rape provide legal protection and recourse for women facing abuse within marriage.

Economic Empowerment

- **Employment Opportunities:** Policies promoting equal employment opportunities and pay equity have enabled women to achieve financial independence.
- **Microfinance and Entrepreneurship:** Access to microfinance and support for women entrepreneurs has empowered women to start and grow their own businesses.
- **Workplace Policies:** Initiatives such as maternity leave, childcare facilities, and flexible work arrangements support women in balancing family and career responsibilities.

Education and Skill Development

- **Access to Education:** Efforts to ensure girls' access to education have significantly improved literacy rates and educational attainment among women.
- **Vocational Training:** Programs offering vocational training and skill development enhance women's employability and economic prospects.
- **Scholarships and Mentorship:** Scholarships and mentorship programs encourage women to pursue higher education and leadership roles.

Health and Well-being

- **Reproductive Rights:** Access to reproductive health services, including contraception and safe abortion, empowers women to make informed choices about their bodies and family planning.

- **Maternal Health:** Initiatives to improve maternal health care reduce mortality rates and enhance women's health outcomes.
- **Mental Health Support:** Providing mental health services and support networks addresses the psychological well-being of women, particularly those facing domestic pressures.

Social and Political Empowerment

- **Political Representation:** Efforts to increase women's representation in political institutions promote gender-sensitive policies and governance.
- **Advocacy and Awareness:** Campaigns and movements advocating for women's rights raise awareness and drive social change towards gender equality.
- **Community Support:** Women's self-help groups and community organizations provide a platform for collective action and support, fostering empowerment at the grassroots level.

Conclusion

The status and roles of women in the family and marriage have undergone significant transformation, driven by legal reforms, educational opportunities, economic empowerment, and social advocacy. Empowerment measures continue to address the challenges women face, promoting gender equality and enhancing women's autonomy, security, and well-being. As societies evolve, ongoing efforts are crucial to ensure that women can fully exercise their rights and contribute to all aspects of life.

❖ **WOMEN AND GLOBALIZATION:-**

Globalization has had profound impacts on the roles, opportunities, and challenges faced by women around the world. While it has opened up new avenues for economic participation, education, and empowerment, it has also brought about significant challenges and inequalities. Here is a detailed overview of the relationship between women and globalization:

Positive Impacts of Globalization on Women

Economic Opportunities

- **Employment:** Globalization has created job opportunities for women, especially in manufacturing, services, and information technology sectors. Women have increasingly entered the global workforce, gaining financial independence.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Access to global markets has enabled women entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses. E-commerce and digital platforms have provided new avenues for women to engage in business activities.
- **Microfinance:** Global microfinance initiatives have provided women with access to credit, empowering them to invest in small enterprises and improve their economic standing.

Education and Skill Development

- **Access to Education:** Globalization has facilitated greater access to education for women and girls through international funding, scholarships, and educational programs.
- **Skill Development:** Women have benefited from skill development programs and training initiatives aimed at enhancing their employability and professional growth.

Health and Well-being of Women

The health and well-being of women are crucial for the overall development and progress of society. Addressing women's health requires a holistic approach that includes physical, mental, and social well-being. Women have unique health needs and challenges that must be understood and addressed to provide them with comprehensive health benefits and well-being.

Key Components of Women's Health and Well-being

1. **Reproductive Health:** Reproductive health plays a significant role in women's lives. It includes safe motherhood, proper care during pregnancy and childbirth, family planning, and the prevention of reproductive diseases.
 - **Pregnancy and Childbirth:** Regular medical check-ups and proper nutrition are essential during pregnancy. Safe childbirth and neonatal care are also critical.
 - **Family Planning:** Women should have access to information and resources for family planning to plan their families at the right time and in the right way.
2. **Nutrition:** Proper nutrition is vital for women's health. Women need special nutrition during pregnancy, breastfeeding, and menstruation.
 - **Iron and Calcium:** Women should consume adequate amounts of iron and calcium to prevent anemia and bone weakness.
 - **Balanced Diet:** A balanced diet, including proteins, vitamins, minerals, and fiber, helps maintain women's health.
3. **Mental Health:** Mental health is an integral part of overall health. Addressing issues like anxiety, stress, depression, and other mental health problems is essential.
 - **Support and Communication:** Social support and open communication are necessary for dealing with mental health issues.
 - **Yoga and Meditation:** Yoga and meditation are effective ways to improve mental health.
4. **Hygiene and Healthcare:** Hygiene and healthcare are crucial for women, especially during menstruation.
 - **Menstrual Hygiene:** Maintaining hygiene during menstruation and using safe sanitary products is essential.
 - **Regular Health Check-ups:** Women should have regular health check-ups to detect and treat illnesses at an early stage.
5. **Exercise and Physical Activity:** Regular exercise and physical activity play a vital role in maintaining women's physical and mental health.
 - **Yoga and Fitness:** Activities like yoga, aerobics, swimming, and walking are beneficial for women's health.

6. **Health Education and Awareness:** Providing health education and awareness to women is necessary so that they can understand their health needs and make informed decisions.
 - **Health Camps and Workshops:** Organizing health camps and workshops can raise awareness about health and hygiene among women.

Challenges in Women's Health and Well-being

- **Access to Healthcare Services:** Access to healthcare services is a significant challenge for women in rural and remote areas.
- **Social and Cultural Barriers:** Social and cultural barriers often prevent women from availing of healthcare services.
- **Economic Problems:** Economic issues hinder women's access to healthcare services, preventing them from benefiting from necessary medical care.
- **Lack of Education:** Lack of education makes it difficult for women to understand and address their health needs.

Solutions and Initiatives

- **Improving Access to Healthcare Services:** Expanding mobile health clinics and telemedicine services can improve access to healthcare in rural and remote areas.
- **Education and Awareness:** Organizing health education and awareness programs can make women aware of their health needs.
- **Economic Support:** Providing economic support to women can help them access healthcare services.
- **Community Support:** Community support and cooperation can promote women's health and well-being.

The health and well-being of women are essential for the overall development and progress of society. By providing healthcare services, education, nutrition, and support, we can build a healthy and empowered society.

Social and Political Empowerment

- **Advocacy and Rights:** Globalization has bolstered international advocacy for women's rights, leading to policy changes and legal reforms in various countries.
- **Networking and Solidarity:** Women's organizations and movements have leveraged global networks to build solidarity, share strategies, and amplify their voices on a global stage.
- **Political Participation:** Increased global attention on gender equality has encouraged more women to participate in politics and leadership roles.

Challenges and Negative Impacts of Globalization on Women

Economic Inequality and Exploitation

- **Wage Disparity:** Despite increased employment opportunities, women often face wage disparities and are concentrated in low-paying, insecure jobs.
- **Exploitation:** Women in developing countries may experience exploitation in sweatshops, with poor working conditions and little job security.
- **Informal Economy:** Many women are employed in the informal economy, lacking legal protections, benefits, and job security.

Cultural and Social Backlash

- **Cultural Resistance:** Globalization can sometimes lead to a backlash against perceived Western cultural influences, reinforcing traditional gender roles and norms.
- **Gender-Based Violence:** Increased mobility and economic pressures can contribute to higher rates of gender-based violence, including trafficking and exploitation.

Health and Environmental Risks

- **Health Risks:** Women working in certain industries may face health risks due to exposure to hazardous conditions and lack of adequate healthcare.
- **Environmental Degradation:** Global industrial activities can lead to environmental degradation, disproportionately affecting women who rely on natural resources for their livelihoods.

Unequal Access to Benefits

- **Digital Divide:** Women, particularly in rural and low-income areas, may have less access to digital technologies and the internet, limiting their ability to benefit from globalization.
- **Educational Gaps:** While globalization has improved access to education, disparities persist, with many girls still lacking access to quality education due to socio-economic barriers.

Global Initiatives and Policies for Empowerment

International Agreements and Frameworks

- **CEDAW:** The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) provides a framework for addressing gender inequalities.
- **SDGs:** The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include specific targets for achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

Global Organizations and Campaigns

- **UN Women:** This UN entity works globally to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through advocacy, policy development, and on-the-ground programs.
- **#HeForShe Campaign:** This solidarity movement encourages men to advocate for gender equality, promoting global awareness and action.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

- **Inclusive Policies:** Many multinational corporations have adopted inclusive policies and practices, such as gender diversity initiatives and equitable pay structures.
- **Supply Chain Standards:** Efforts to enforce ethical standards in global supply chains aim to improve working conditions and protect the rights of women workers.

Conclusion

Globalization has brought both opportunities and challenges for women worldwide. While it has facilitated economic participation, education, and empowerment, it has also highlighted and, in some cases, exacerbated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Continued efforts at the international, national, and local levels are essential to ensure that the benefits of globalization are equitably shared and that women are protected from its adverse effects. Promoting gender equality in the context of globalization remains a crucial goal for achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

❖ HEALTH ISSUES OF WOMEN IN INDIA: HEALTH PROBLEMS, MATERNAL HEALTH, MATERNAL MORTALITY:-

Women in India face a range of health issues influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and biological factors. Understanding these issues is crucial for developing effective healthcare policies and interventions. Here is a detailed overview:

Health Problems of Women in India

Common Health Issues

- **Anemia:** A significant health problem among Indian women, particularly due to poor nutrition and menstrual blood loss. Anemia can lead to fatigue, weakness, and complications during pregnancy.
- **Malnutrition:** Many women suffer from malnutrition due to inadequate dietary intake, socio-economic constraints, and cultural practices that prioritize men and children for food allocation.
- **Reproductive Health Issues:** Women face various reproductive health issues such as menstrual disorders, infertility, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS.
- **Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs):** Increasing rates of NCDs like diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and cancers (particularly breast and cervical cancer) are major concerns.
- **Mental Health:** Depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues are prevalent among women, often exacerbated by gender-based violence, socio-economic stressors, and limited access to mental health care.

Maternal Health

- **Antenatal Care:** Access to quality antenatal care is essential for monitoring the health of both mother and fetus. However, disparities exist, particularly in rural areas where healthcare services are limited.
- **Postnatal Care:** Postnatal care is crucial for the health of both mother and newborn, yet many women do not receive adequate postnatal support and follow-up care.

Maternal Mortality

- **Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR):** Although India has made significant progress in reducing the MMR, it remains a major issue. The MMR is higher in rural areas compared to urban centers.
- **Causes of Maternal Mortality:**
 - **Hemorrhage:** Severe bleeding during or after childbirth is a leading cause of maternal deaths.
 - **Infections:** Postpartum infections, including sepsis, contribute to maternal mortality.
 - **Preeclampsia and Eclampsia:** These conditions, characterized by high blood pressure and seizures, are critical causes of maternal deaths.
 - **Obstructed Labor:** Prolonged or obstructed labor can lead to maternal and neonatal complications if not managed timely.

- **Unsafe Abortions:** Lack of access to safe abortion services results in complications and deaths.

Factors Contributing to Women's Health Issues

- **Socio-Economic Barriers:** Poverty, lack of education, and limited access to healthcare services disproportionately affect women's health.
- **Cultural Practices:** Cultural norms and practices, such as early marriage and preference for male children, negatively impact women's health.
- **Healthcare Infrastructure:** Inadequate healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas, limits access to essential health services for women.
- **Gender-Based Violence:** Physical, sexual, and emotional violence against women has severe physical and mental health consequences.

Initiatives and Interventions

Government Programs

- **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY):** A scheme aimed at reducing maternal and neonatal mortality by promoting institutional deliveries among poor pregnant women.
- **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA):** An initiative providing free antenatal care and diagnostic services to pregnant women on the 9th of every month.
- **National Health Mission (NHM):** Includes various programs focused on improving maternal and child health, such as the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) approach.

Healthcare Services

- **Maternal and Child Health Services:** Strengthening maternal and child health services through improved healthcare facilities, skilled birth attendants, and emergency obstetric care.
- **Nutrition Programs:** Initiatives like the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the National Nutrition Mission aim to address malnutrition among women and children.
- **Awareness and Education:** Programs aimed at raising awareness about health issues, promoting healthy practices, and encouraging women to seek timely medical care.

Conclusion

Women's health issues in India are complex and multifaceted, requiring comprehensive and targeted interventions. While significant progress has been made in areas such as maternal health and reducing maternal mortality, challenges remain, particularly in rural and underserved regions. Continuous efforts are needed to address socio-economic and cultural barriers, improve healthcare infrastructure, and promote gender equality to ensure the overall well-being of women in India.

- **Sexual Harassment:** Many women experience sexual harassment in the workplace, which can create a hostile work environment and impact their mental health and career.

- **Reporting and Support:** Fear of retaliation, stigma, and lack of proper reporting mechanisms often deter women from reporting harassment.

Underrepresentation in STEM

- **STEM Fields:** Women are underrepresented in STEM fields, facing challenges such as gender bias, lack of mentorship, and limited access to opportunities.

Initiatives and Measures for Empowerment

Legal Frameworks and Policies

- **Equal Pay Laws:** Many countries have implemented equal pay laws aimed at reducing the gender pay gap.
- **Anti-Discrimination Laws:** Laws and regulations that prevent gender discrimination and promote equal opportunities in the workplace.
- **Maternity and Parental Leave:** Policies that provide maternity and parental leave, ensuring job security and support for working parents.

Corporate Initiatives

- **Diversity and Inclusion Programs:** Many organizations have implemented diversity and inclusion programs to promote gender equality and create an inclusive work environment.
- **Mentorship and Sponsorship:** Initiatives to provide mentorship and sponsorship opportunities for women, helping them to advance their careers and achieve leadership positions.

Flexible Work Arrangements

- **Remote Work:** The rise of remote work and flexible work hours has provided women with more opportunities to balance work and family responsibilities.
- **Part-Time and Job-Sharing:** Part-time work and job-sharing arrangements are becoming more common, allowing women to manage their work-life balance better.

Supportive Workplace Culture

- **Gender Sensitization:** Training and workshops on gender sensitization to create awareness and promote respect for gender diversity in the workplace.
- **Zero Tolerance for Harassment:** Establishing strict policies and procedures to address and prevent workplace harassment, ensuring a safe environment for women.

Global and Local Advocacy

- **International Organizations:** Organizations like UN Women, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and various NGOs advocate for gender equality and women's rights in the workplace.

- **Local Initiatives:** Local advocacy groups and women's networks work towards empowering women, providing support, and raising awareness about workplace issues.

Conclusion

While significant strides have been made in promoting gender equality in the workplace, there is still much work to be done. Addressing challenges such as the gender pay gap, work-life balance, the glass ceiling, and workplace harassment is crucial for creating a more equitable and inclusive work environment. Continuous efforts from governments, organizations, and society at large are essential to ensure that women can fully participate and thrive in the workforce. Promoting gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also a driver of economic growth and innovation.

❖ **WOMEN AT THE WORKPLACE, CHANGING WORKING CONDITIONS AND WORK PLACE RELATED ISSUES:-.**

Women at the Workplace

The role of women in the workplace has evolved significantly over the past few decades. More women are entering the workforce, taking on diverse roles, and achieving leadership positions. However, they still face unique challenges and issues that require ongoing attention and action.

Increased Participation and Diverse Roles

- **Labor Force Growth:** The participation of women in the workforce has increased significantly, contributing to various sectors such as healthcare, education, finance, technology, and more.
- **Leadership and Entrepreneurship:** More women are stepping into leadership roles and becoming entrepreneurs, driving innovation and economic growth.

Changing Working Conditions

Technological Advancements

- **Remote Work:** The rise of digital technology has enabled remote work, offering greater flexibility and opportunities for women to balance work and family responsibilities.
- **Automation and AI:** Technological advancements have transformed the nature of work, creating new job opportunities while requiring continuous skill development and adaptability.

Legal and Policy Changes

- **Equal Pay and Anti-Discrimination Laws:** Legislation aimed at promoting fairness and equality in the workplace has been enacted, including the Equal Pay Act and various anti-discrimination laws.

- **Maternity and Parental Leave:** Policies providing maternity and parental leave, job protection, and family-friendly benefits have been established to support working parents.

Work-Life Balance

- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Companies are increasingly offering flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting, flexible hours, and part-time work, to help employees balance work and personal life.
- **Family-Friendly Policies:** On-site childcare, paid family leave, and support for working parents are becoming more common, enhancing work-life balance.

Workplace Environment

- **Gender Sensitization:** Training programs and workshops on gender sensitivity are being implemented to create a more inclusive and respectful workplace culture.
- **Zero Tolerance for Harassment:** Organizations are establishing strict policies against sexual harassment and creating mechanisms for reporting and addressing complaints.

Workplace-Related Issues

Gender Pay Gap

- **Wage Disparity:** Despite progress, women often earn less than men for the same roles, a disparity that exists across various industries and countries.
- **Contributing Factors:** Factors contributing to the gender pay gap include occupational segregation, differences in work experience, and discrimination.

Career Advancement

- **Glass Ceiling:** Women frequently face barriers to advancement known as the "glass ceiling," which prevents them from reaching top management and executive positions.
- **Bias and Stereotypes:** Gender biases and stereotypes can hinder women's career growth and opportunities for leadership roles.

Workplace Harassment

- **Sexual Harassment:** Many women experience sexual harassment in the workplace, which can create a hostile work environment and impact their mental health and career.
- **Reporting and Support:** Fear of retaliation, stigma, and lack of proper reporting mechanisms often deter women from reporting harassment.

Underrepresentation in STEM

- **STEM Fields:** Women are underrepresented in STEM fields, facing challenges such as gender bias, lack of mentorship, and limited access to opportunities.

- **Encouraging Participation:** Efforts to encourage women to pursue careers in STEM through education, mentorship, and supportive policies are ongoing.

Initiatives and Measures for Empowerment

Corporate Initiatives

- **Diversity and Inclusion Programs:** Many organizations have implemented diversity and inclusion programs to promote gender equality and create an inclusive work environment.
- **Mentorship and Sponsorship:** Initiatives to provide mentorship and sponsorship opportunities for women help them to advance their careers and achieve leadership positions.

Global and Local Advocacy

- **International Organizations:** Organizations like UN Women, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and various NGOs advocate for gender equality and women's rights in the workplace.
- **Local Initiatives:** Local advocacy groups and women's networks work towards empowering women, providing support, and raising awareness about workplace issues.

Conclusion

While significant strides have been made in promoting gender equality in the workplace, challenges such as the gender pay gap, work-life balance, the glass ceiling, and workplace harassment remain. Continuous efforts from governments, organizations, and society are essential to ensure that women can fully participate and thrive in the workforce. Promoting gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also a driver of economic growth and innovation.

❖ SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN WORKPLACE (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION AND REDRESSAL ACT-2013-VISHAKHA JUDGEMENT):-

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a pervasive issue that undermines the dignity, safety, and equality of women. Recognizing the gravity of this problem, India has implemented significant legal frameworks and judgments to prevent, prohibit, and redress sexual harassment at work. The most notable of these are the Vishakha Guidelines and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013.

Vishakha Guidelines

The **Vishaka Guidelines** were a set of procedural guidelines for use in India in cases of sexual harassment. They were promulgated by the Indian Supreme Court in 1997 and were

superseded in 2013 by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act.

Background

Pre-1997 the person facing sexual harassment at workplace had to lodge a complaint under Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code 1860 that deals with the 'criminal assault of women to outrage women's modesty', and Section 509 that punishes an individual/individuals for using a 'word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman. During the 1990s, Rajasthan state government employee Bhanwari Devi who tried to prevent child marriage as part of her duties as a worker of the Women Development Programme was raped by the landlords of the community. The feudal patriarchs who were enraged by her (in their words: "a lowly woman from a poor and potter community") 'guts' decided to teach her a lesson and raped her repeatedly. The rape survivor did not get justice from Rajasthan High Court and the rapists were allowed to go free. This enraged a women's rights group called Vishaka that filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court of India. This case brought to the attention of the Supreme Court of India, "the absence of domestic law occupying the field, to formulate effective measures to check the evil of sexual harassment of working women at all work places."

Vishakha vs. State of Rajasthan

In 1997, the Supreme Court passed a landmark judgment in the same Vishaka case laying down guidelines to be followed by establishments in dealing with complaints about sexual harassment. **Vishaka Guidelines** were stipulated by the Supreme Court of India, in Vishakha and others v State of Rajasthan case in 1997, regarding sexual harassment at workplace. The court stated that these guidelines were to be implemented until legislation is passed to deal with the issue. The court decided that the consideration of "International Conventions and norms are significant for the purpose of interpretation of the guarantee of gender equality, right to work with human dignity in Articles 14, 15 19(1)(g) and 21 of the Constitution and the safeguards against sexual harassment implicit therein."

What is sexual harassment

Sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour (whether directly or by implication) as: a) physical contact and advances; b) a demand or request for sexual favors; c) sexually colored remarks; d) showing pornography; e) any other unwelcome physical verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Where any of these acts is committed in circumstances where the victim has a reasonable apprehension that in relation to the victim's employment or work whether she is drawing salary, or honorarium or voluntary, whether in government, public or private enterprise such conduct can be humiliating and may constitute a health and safety problem.

It is discriminatory for instance when the woman has reasonable grounds to believe that her objection would disadvantage her in connection with her employment or work including recruiting or promotion or when it creates a hostile work environment.

Adverse consequences might be visited if the victim does not consent to the conduct in question or raises any objection thereto.

Thus, sexual harassment need not involve physical contact. Any act that creates a hostile work environment - be it by virtue of cracking lewd jokes, verbal abuse, circulating lewd rumours etc. counts as sexual harassment.

The creation of a hostile work environment through unwelcome physical verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature may consist not of a single act but of a pattern of behavior comprising many such acts.

Thus, it is important that the victim report such behavior as soon as possible and not wait for it to become worse. In some cases, the psychological stigma of reporting the conduct of a co-worker might require a great deal of courage on the part of the victim and they may report such acts after a long period of time. The guidelines suggest that the complaint mechanism should ensure time bound treatment of complaints, but **they do not suggest that a report can only be made within a short period of time since the incident occurred.**

Often, the police refuse to lodge FIRs for sexual harassment cases, especially

Employer's obligations

Note that the Vishaka Guidelines are not sufficient for legal compliance for employers as the same has been replaced by a full fledged statute of the Parliament. Although the statute mostly retains the framework provided in the Guidelines, there are significant differences and it is the statute that the employers must follow. For instance, the definition of sexual harassment has significantly changed. From this perspective, the Vishaka Guidelines is of only historical and academic importance now. It will also be relevant in cases that were brought up before 2013 enactment of the law.

Recently the minister for Women's Welfare Maneka Gandhi has stated that government will take tough steps against any organisations, including NGOs that do not implement the new law. It is a good idea to use a checklist to make sure that your organisation is compliant with the law. A sample checklist for sexual harassment compliance is available here.

Internal Complaints Committee and Local Complaints Committee:

The Sexual Harassment Act requires an employer to set up an 'Internal Complaints Committee' ("ICC") at each office or branch having more than 10 employees of any gender. The government is in turn required to set up a 'Local Complaints Committees' ("LCC") at the district level to investigate complaints regarding sexual harassment from establishments where the ICC has not been constituted on account of the establishment having less than 10 employees or if the complaint is against the employer.

The Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 also sets out the constitution of the committees, process to be followed for making a complaint and inquiring into the complaint in a time bound manner.

Interim Reliefs : The Sexual Harassment Act empowers the ICC and the LCC to recommend to the employer, at the request of the aggrieved employee, interim measures such as (i) transfer of the aggrieved woman or the respondent to any other workplace; or (ii) granting leave to the aggrieved woman up to a period of 3 months in addition to her regular statutory/contractual leave entitlement. In addition to ensuring compliance with the other provisions stipulated, the Sexual Harassment Act casts certain obligations upon the employer to, inter-alia,

- provide a safe working environment
- display conspicuously at the workplace, the penal consequences of indulging in acts that may constitute sexual harassment and the composition of the Internal Complaints Committee
- organise workshops and awareness programmes at regular intervals for sensitizing employees on the issues and implications of workplace sexual harassment and organizing orientation programmes for members of the Internal Complaints Committee
- treat sexual harassment as a misconduct under the service rules and initiate action for misconduct.
- The employer is also required to monitor the timely submission of reports by the ICC. If an employer fails to constitute an Internal Complaints Committee or does not comply with any provisions contained therein, the Sexual Harassment Act prescribes a monetary penalty of up to INR 50,000 (approx. US\$1,000). A repetition of the same offence could result in the punishment being doubled and / or de-registration of the entity or revocation of any statutory business licenses.

Complaints mechanism

All women who draw a regular salary, receive an honorarium, or work in a voluntary capacity in the government, private sector or un-organised sector come under the purview of these guidelines.

- All workplaces should have an appropriate complaints mechanism with a complaints committee, special counsellor or other support services.
- A woman must head the complaints committee and no less than half its members should be women.
- The committee should include an NGO/individual familiar with the issue of sexual harassment.
- The complaints procedure must be time-bound.
- Confidentiality must be maintained.
- Complainants/witnesses should not experience victimization/discrimination during the process.

Preventive steps

- Sexual harassment should be affirmatively discussed at workers' meetings, employer-employee meetings, etc.
- Guidelines should be prominently displayed to create awareness about the rights of female employees.
- The employer should assist persons affected in cases of sexual harassment by outsiders.
- Central and state governments must adopt measures, including legislation, to ensure that private employers also observe the guidelines.
- Names and contact numbers of members of the complaints committee must be prominently displayed.

From Guidelines to Act

The Sexual harassment at workplace Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on the 2nd of September, 2012. It is now The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. It defines sexual harassment as laid down by the Supreme Court in Vishakha and others v State of Rajasthan (1997) case.]

Recommendations

National Commission for Women has asked the government to ensure constitution of Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) in accordance with Supreme Court guidelines in its departments, institutions and autonomous bodies to address such cases. It has also recommended conducting gender sensitisation workshops for top level management officials.

NCW recommended publicizing committee using posters, etc. and explicitly mention the contact details of the members. The commission also highlighted the need for orientation programs for employees to sensitize them on sexual harassment. Another recommendation was to enhance communication strategies to combat violation against women.

The rules for the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 have come into force on 9th Dec, 13.