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## Impact of a Feminist Perspective on Female students' childhood gender inequality & attitudes towards intimate partner violence in Gujarat

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### Abstract

The study of the Impact of a Feminist Perspective on Female students' childhood gender inequality and attitudes towards intimate partner violence in Gujarat is an important topic that has been researched by many scholars. The study aims to have a better understanding of Female Students' Childhood gender inequality experiences & attitudes toward intimate partner violence & to understand how a feminist perspective can help female students overcome gender inequality and change their attitudes towards intimate partner violence. The study is based on the premise that gender inequality is a social construct that is learned during childhood and that it can be unlearned through education and awareness. The study also highlights the importance of a feminist perspective in addressing gender inequality and intimate partner violence. The research is conducted in Gujarat, India, where gender inequality and intimate partner violence are prevalent issues. The study is expected to provide insights into how a feminist perspective can be used to address these issues and promote gender equality. Further research is needed to understand the long-term impact of a feminist perspective on female students' attitudes towards gender inequality and intimate partner violence.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Attitudes, Intimate partner violence, Feminist perspective

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### Introduction

#### Feminist Perspective: Gender inequality

The female perspective on gender inequality is shaped by the lived experiences and challenges that women face throughout their lives. Women's gender inequality experiences encompass a wide range of social, economic, and cultural factors. Women often face limited opportunities in education, employment, and career advancement compared to men. This can result in lower earnings, reduced economic independence, and fewer chances to pursue their passions and goals. Discrimination and bias in the workplace, such as the gender pay gap and the glass ceiling, are common experiences for women. They may struggle to be recognized, promoted, or treated based on their abilities rather than their gender. Many women experience a "double burden" of work, as they are expected to excel in both their professional careers and their roles as primary caregivers in their families. Balancing these responsibilities can be challenging and often leads to burnout. Various forms of gender-based violence disproportionately affect women, including domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and assault. These experiences can have long-lasting physical, emotional, and psychological consequences. Women's reproductive rights and choices can be restricted or contested in many societies. Access to healthcare, contraception, and safe abortion services is often a contentious issue,

affecting women's autonomy and health. Women often face objectification and harmful stereotypes in media, advertising, and daily life. This can contribute to unrealistic beauty standards and body image issues, as well as limiting their self-expression and opportunities.

Women are often underrepresented in positions of power and decision-making, both in government and corporate leadership. This lack of representation can perpetuate policies and systems that reinforce gender inequality. Cultural norms and societal expectations can place undue pressure on women to conform to traditional gender roles, including being submissive, nurturing, and prioritizing family over personal goals. Women's experiences of gender inequality are influenced by other factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and disability. Intersectionality highlights the unique challenges faced by women who belong to multiple marginalized groups. Many women are actively involved in advocating for gender equality and empowerment. They work to challenge and change the systems and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality, aiming for a more equitable future for all. In summary, the female perspective on women's gender inequality experiences is a complex and multifaceted one, shaped by a lifetime of navigating societal norms, cultural expectations, and systemic barriers. Women's experiences are not uniform, but

they share common threads of resilience, determination, and a commitment to challenging and dismantling gender inequality for future generations.

### **Feminist Perspective: Attitudes towards intimate partner violence**

The female perspective on women's attitudes towards intimate partner violence (IPV) is a critical aspect of understanding this complex and pervasive issue. IPV refers to physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological abuse or violence that occurs within an intimate relationship. Many women who experience IPV may initially feel fear, shame, or guilt, which can prevent them from disclosing the abuse. They may worry about the consequences of speaking out, including retaliation from their partner, judgment from others, or the potential loss of their relationship or financial stability. Some women may have grown up in environments where IPV was prevalent, leading them to perceive such behavior as "normal" or a private matter. This normalization can make it challenging them to recognize the abuse or seek help. One of the most well known sociocultural viewpoints on IPV is presented by feminist theory (Gelsthorpe & Morris, 1990; Smith, 1990). Since the ideology of gender relations creates and maintains male dominance of women in the nuclear family and subsequently in society, critical or radical feminists have argued that IPV constitutes one of the main social manifestations of patriarchy (Gelsthorpe & Morris, 1990; Messerschmidt, 1993; Millet, 1970). According to this hypothesis, traditional or stereotypical beliefs or expectations about the proper social duties for men and, more so, for women, are strong supports of patriarchal relationships in male-dominated countries.

The belief that men have the right to use physical force against their intimate female partners as a social instrument of intimidation to control them and, as a result, to maintain unequal power in intimate relationships, is generally embodied by such traditional gender-role attitudes, enforced by informal and formal control systems (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Smith, 1990; Straus et al., 1980; Yllo & Straus, 1990). According to many scholars studying violence against women (Sugarman & Frankel, 1996), the main cause of violence against women is the survival of old gender ideas and expectations about women, which maintain women in subservient positions. According to proponents of the patriarchal perspective, societies that subscribe to this worldview also frequently rationalize violence against women (Haj-Yahia, 1998). It's crucial to understand that women's attitudes towards IPV can vary significantly, and each woman's experience is unique. Support systems, education, awareness, and the availability of resources play essential roles in helping women break free from abusive relationships and rebuild their lives. Efforts

to combat IPV should include a focus on empowering survivors, raising awareness, and promoting a culture of respect and gender equality.

### **Theories of feminist social work**

Feminist theory serves as a vital framework for integrating women's concerns into the fabric of society and provides a method for comprehending the intricate dynamics of gender roles. It examines these issues through a political lens, with a primary focus on analyzing the impact of sex and gender. This approach recognizes that many challenges faced by individuals, primarily women but also some men, can be best understood by considering the social and structural constraints, limitations, and resource disparities rooted in sex and gender, in conjunction with various other societal and interpersonal constraints. In essence, feminist theories serve a tri-fold purpose. Firstly, they bring clarity to and offer recommendations for addressing social and environmental factors that directly or indirectly contribute to the challenges faced by women. Secondly, they delve into interpersonal and intrapersonal issues affecting women, proposing solutions and strategies for improvement. Thirdly, these theories provide a broader perspective for assessing the social and environmental experiences of individuals and groups, transcending the boundaries of sex and gender. The choice of which specific feminist theory to apply influences the emphasis placed on these three areas and determines the significance attributed to other factors in shaping marginalization, oppression, and unjust restrictions.

In feminist social work, there is a strong connection between a woman's societal position and her individual circumstances. This approach starts by deeply exploring the unique experiences of women within the world. Feminist perspectives have shown a spotlight on gender roles, relationships, and their intersections with social policies and welfare services. In practical terms, this approach has encouraged the development of collaborative and equitable partnerships while also prompting critical examinations of the significance of interpersonal relationships. The perspective of the recipient, whether male or female, has received greater weight in social work practices that are feminist informed. Social work has been a field of study for more than a century. Equally lengthy is the history of feminist social work practice. Many social work practitioners have operated within feminist frameworks, even though not all social workers have been sympathetic to feminist theory. The dedication of women social workers gave rise to feminist ideology. The dedication of women social workers gave rise to feminist ideology. Feminist theory began to take shape in the 1970s because to the dedication of female social workers to larger feminist movements in the West, starting with radical social work and the broad liberal tradition. Dealing with women's

conditions of discrimination in life and the workplace, women-centered practice, hearing women's different voice than men, and the strength of women in working with diversity were some of the important concepts.

There are two waves in the development of feminism. The focus of feminist action in the 1800s was on legal and political rights. The focus has switched to unequal chances in the workplace, in politics, and in the public realm since the 1960s. Since the 1960s, feminism has evolved into a variety of distinct viewpoints. The methodologies span the liberal, radical, and postmodern spectrums. Every perspective has a strong interest in fostering individual and societal development as well as connecting the two. Some techniques challenge the predominately-male perspective by recognizing fundamental gender disparities in how people conceptualize and behave in the world.

#### **Liberal feminism**

Liberal feminism represents a systematic approach to advancing women's standing in society, advocating for equal opportunities through legal reforms while also challenging the societal processes that perpetuate gender inequality. This perspective addresses legislation, societal norms, and the socialization of individuals. It seeks gender equality and places a significant focus on examining cultural assumptions and social interactions. Followers of liberal feminism are more inclined to examine interpersonal relationships and encourage women to emulate successful men in their careers, rather than dismantling the underlying structural foundations of power imbalances. In essence, liberal feminists aim to integrate women into the existing societal framework, often emphasizing individual capabilities rather than addressing systemic structural issues.

#### **Radical feminism**

Radical feminism is a perspective that places a spotlight on the privilege and power enjoyed by men within the societal hierarchy and actively works to promote women's empowerment as distinct social groups. It advocates for the establishment of separate women's organizations and social structures to challenge the dominance of patriarchy. Radical feminists argue that the personal issues and injustices experienced by women are fundamentally political matters deeply rooted in power imbalances. One key assertion of radical feminists is that the division between public and private life obscures the reality of male authority, which operates consistently in both interconnected public and private spheres. They encapsulate this idea with the phrase "The personal is political." Radical feminists contend that this separation of public and private life serves to isolate and de-politicize the subjugation of women.

From the radical feminist perspective, societal patriarchy has historically structured families along lines of male dominance and inheritance, granting men disproportionate authority in society at large. They argue that this patriarchal structure is upheld through intricate political manipulation of personal identities, social connections, and structural systems of power. Formal institutions like legal systems contribute to the creation and reinforcement of the sexual hierarchy, with male privilege permeating nearly all aspects of human interactions.

#### **Socialist or Marxist feminism**

Socialist or Marxist feminism is a perspective that posits that women's oppression is deeply intertwined with societal systems rooted in class distinctions. Activism within this framework focuses on addressing structural inequalities inherent in class-based social systems, particularly in relation to the reproduction of the workforce. Advocates stress the importance of understanding oppression to determine the most effective strategies for change.

For many within this perspective, the root of women's oppression is traced back to the private property system prevalent in capitalist social and economic institutions. In more practical terms, socialist feminists highlight women's contributions to the labor force and often leverage the labor movement as a platform to advocate for a more equitable distribution of resources. To tackle gender-specific aspects of oppression, such as issues related to sexual abuse, inadequate childcare, and restrictions on reproductive rights, socialist feminists mobilize women as a distinct social group, working toward addressing these challenges collectively.

#### **Black Feminism**

Black feminism is a perspective that begins with a racial analysis, recognizing the diverse experiences of women and the multitude of oppressions they face. This perspective places a significant emphasis on acknowledging the wide range of responses to oppression, which can be shaped by historical family experiences with slavery and the complex web of social and familial patterns. Additionally, black feminism underscores the importance of addressing racism, celebrating the diversity of women's experiences, and recognizing the various forms of oppression that impact them.

#### **Postmodern feminism**

Postmodern feminism places its focus on how social discourse shapes and influences societal expectations regarding the treatment of women. It acknowledges the intricate and multifaceted nature of social relationships and underscores the role of social discourse in constructing these societal norms. Postmodern feminism has a significant impact on the field of social work, as it challenges the notion of oppression being solely attributed to

patriarchy and instead presents a broader spectrum of social forms and behaviors as contributing factors. Within the philosophy of postmodern feminism, there is a strong commitment to embracing diversity and various discourses while seeking to understand them. Key components of postmodern feminism also encompass the exploration of identity, the deconstruction of prevailing discourses, and a critical reevaluation of the cultural aspects associated with the female body.

The wide-ranging application of feminist theory within the realm of social work gives rise to several proposed sets of guiding principles for postmodern feminist practice. These diverse viewpoints exemplify one of feminism's strengths, which is its ability to recognize and comprehend the diversity of women's experiences. These feminist practice guidelines strive to enhance the field of social work by addressing its limitations. These principles include recognizing the strength and diversity of women, dismantling privileges afforded to specific groups of women, redefining personal issues as matters of public concern, approaching women's needs holistically, acknowledging the interconnectedness of human relationships, addressing both the social and individual root causes of women's problems, and seeking collective solutions to individual challenges.

**RO-1** To have a better understanding of Female Students' Childhood gender inequality experiences & attitudes toward intimate partner violence.

**RO-2** To explore the relationship between female students' Childhood gender inequality experiences & attitudes toward intimate partner violence.

**RO-3** To promote government policies and awareness programs address IPV for women.

### Methodology

This study explains the relationship between female students' social-demographic information and their attitudes regarding intimate partner violence as well as the relationship between those characteristics and those attitudes. This study sought to get a critical understanding of the degree of childhood gender disparity and attitudes toward intimate partner violence among female students from the University of Anand, Surat, Gandhinagar, Godhra, and Kutch district. It used a multi-stage (four-stage) random sampling methodology. These districts were chosen at random among Gujarat state's zone-based districts. The sampling process started with this district selection. The second stage involved choosing one University at random from each chosen district. The third stage of sampling involved choosing one UG and one PG college from each district, while the fourth stage involved selecting students at random from the list of colleges. The proportionate sampling approach was utilized to calculate the UG & PG proportion.

### Results

Analysis of data is document in this section with the help of tables and explanations. Childhood gender inequality experiences & attitudes towards intimate partners' violence of students in the study sites are mainly analysed.

Overall, **Table 1** The majority of girls experience inequality across all indicators, and the highest proportion of girls report having experienced gender inequality in their early years in relation to educational and developmental opportunities (58.0), social freedom (57.1), gender role (51.0), social taboos (50.2), health and nutrition (49.7), and values (49.5).

**Table: 1 Childhood Gender Inequality Experiences**

Gender Inequality Experiences	Gender Role	Social Freedom	Social Taboos	Health and Nutrition	Educational and Developmental Opportunities	Value
	Female (%)	Female (%)	Female (%)	Female (%)	Female (%)	Female (%)
Low	57.8	66.7	53.3	53.8	46.3	58.5
Moderate	50.5	49.1	55.5	63.5	47.9	51.2
High	51.0	57.1	50.2	49.7	58.0	49.5

**Table 2** makes it obvious that most of girls (51.8 percent, respectively) reported its abuse believed that sexual abuse followed by psychosocial abuse (56.6 percent) and physical abuse (63.6 percent). At

the same time the proportion of girls reported not believed its abuse is around (45.5 percent) physical abuse; psychosocial abuse (49.2 percent) and sexual abuse (55.1 percent).

**Table: 2 Attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence**

Sr. No	Attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence	Abuse	Not Abuse
		Female (%)	Female (%)
1	Physical Abuse	63.6	45.5
2	Psychosocial Abuse	56.6	49.2
3	Sexual Abuse	51.8	55.1

**Table 3** indicated a statistically significant association between childhood gender inequality

experience and attitudes towards intimate partner violence.

**Table: 3 Childhood Experiences of Gender Inequality & Attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence**

Gender Inequality Experiences	Attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence		P value
	Abuse	Not Abuse	
Low	20.5	15.8	0.000
Moderate	44.9	43.7	
High	34.5	40.5	

P<0.05 indicates a statistically significant association.

### Discussion

The goal of the study is to better understand how attitudes about intimate partner violence (IPV) and early experiences with gender inequality relate to one another. Gender inequality is a pervasive problem in society that frequently starts in early infancy and shapes people's beliefs and actions as they mature into adulthood. This study intends to contribute to the creation of successful interventions and strategies to address these concerns by looking at the relationship between early experiences and attitudes toward IPV. However, the evidence that is currently available reveals that views about intimate partner violence (IPV) and experiences with gender inequality in childhood from national and international studies, and this is mostly due to the context in which these studies are conducted. Regarding socio-demographic information, undergraduate and graduate students, gender, age, educational background, etc.[7] Participants in this study came from a variety of socioeconomic, cultural, and age groups, and they provided data on a wide range of topics. Studies of the public have discovered a significant link between IPV usage and acceptability of the use of violence [8].

The data in Table 1 reveal a disheartening picture of the experiences of girls in relation to gender inequality. Across various indicators, a substantial majority of girls report encountering gender inequality, with the highest proportions of girls experiencing it in areas related to educational and developmental opportunities, social freedom, gender roles, social taboos, health and nutrition, and values. These findings underscore the pervasive nature of gender inequality in early life stages. In light of the importance of access to high-quality education and development opportunities for one's personal development and future success, the revelation that 58.0% of girls say there is gender inequality in this area is quite alarming. Girls' social freedom is restricted, as seen by the large percentage of girls (57.1%) who say this (57.1%), which underlines how few options and social activities are open to girls. The fact that 51.0% of girls experience gender inequity with regard to gender roles is a reflection of the enduring nature of conventional attitudes and expectations. The need of opposing harmful cultural norms and practices is highlighted by the fact that 50.2% of girls experience gender inequity due to social taboos. It is alarming that

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there is a 49.7% gender gap in health and nutrition, as it may have long-term effects on girls' wellbeing. The high percentage (49.5%) of girls experiencing inequality in terms of values suggests that societal norms and values may reinforce gender disparities.

The high percentage (56.6%) of girls who perceive psychosocial abuse is also concerning, as it indicates emotional and psychological harm experienced by a substantial number of girls. The prevalence of physical abuse (63.6%) is particularly distressing, as it suggests that a majority of girls have encountered physical violence, which poses significant risks to their physical and mental well-being. According to the results of the current survey, 62% of both respondents thought that actions like slapping, pushing, grasping, and shoving their partner were appropriate. According to Dibble and Straus (1980), 5% of participants thought it was acceptable to slap, push, grasp, shove, and throw something at their partner [9]. A statistically significant association between childhood gender inequality experiences and attitudes towards intimate partner violence. This finding is critical in understanding the long-term consequences of early exposure to gender inequality. The statistically significant association suggests that girls who have experienced gender inequality in their childhood may be more likely to hold attitudes that tolerate or justify intimate partner violence in adulthood.

The current study discovered that both respondents were not believed in and were not encouraged to hold down/physically restrain their partners, twist their arms or bend their fingers back, or use a weapon (a knife or a gun) against them. Unlike the population of women seeking refuge in domestic violence shelters or male inmates who have been convicted of physically assaulting their partners, Archer and Graham-Kevan's 2003 study revealed that college students held beliefs that were supportive of violence, and these beliefs were found to be more indicative of abusive behaviours within intimate relationships. [8]. The present study indicated a statistically significant association between gender, and types of family. Most of (48.6 percent) girls believe that it is abuse. Similarly, College students' sentiments toward IPV were significantly influenced by gender role assumptions. As anticipated, students who held more favourable views regarding male dominance tended to be more accepting of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), while

those who regarded IPV as a criminal act were less accepting. The definitions of IPV among college students from China and the United States were shaped by a variety of factors. Notably, in the case of Chinese students, perceiving IPV as a criminal offense primarily influenced their attitudes against IPV. However, among American students, age and gender did not predict their attitudes toward IPV. [7].

According to the current study, the majority of both respondents 62.0 percent respectively—are against hitting their spouses. While only 38.0 percent of respondents, respectively, agree that slapping, a partner is not abusive. Another study's findings revealed that 28% of respondents thought hitting their spouses was necessary, acceptable, or even excellent. Only 8% of respondents opposed giving their spouses a smack [9] The Current study age group, the majority of respondents 52.4 percent respectively are age group would include the college students. This age group would include the bulk of college students, and research shows that, in contrast to other age groups, college students in dating relationships are more likely to support abusive behaviour toward a partner [7]. The results indicated a statistically significant association between childhood gender inequality experience and attitudes towards intimate partner violence. Sexual abuse link strongly associated with domains of Childhood Gender Inequality Experiences namely gender role, social freedom, social taboos, health & nutrition, and values.

Participants who reported experiencing gender-based discrimination, stereotypes, or unequal treatment during childhood were more likely to exhibit supportive attitudes towards IPV. These experiences can influence how individuals perceive power dynamics and control in relationships, leading to the normalization of violence as a means of resolving conflicts. The study also highlighted the role of family dynamics in shaping attitudes towards IPV.

### Conclusion

The findings underscore the pervasive nature of gender inequality experienced by girls across multiple dimensions, including education, social freedoms, gender roles, taboos, health, and values. These inequalities have a significant impact on girls' lives and may contribute to attitudes that perpetuate intimate partner violence. Additionally, the data highlights a concerning discrepancy between the high prevalence of abuse experienced by girls and their perception of not being believed when they report it. This suggests a need for increased support and awareness around issues of abuse, as well as a shift in societal attitudes to ensure that girls' experiences are taken seriously. Lastly, the association between childhood gender inequality and attitudes towards intimate partner

violence highlights the importance of addressing gender inequality early in life to prevent the perpetuation of harmful attitudes and behaviours in adulthood. Interventions aimed at reducing gender inequality and promoting gender equity can play a crucial role in creating a safer and equal society for girls and women. The feminist perspective on attitudes towards intimate partner violence (IPV) has played a vital role in reshaping our understanding of this pervasive issue. It has shed light on the deeply ingrained societal norms and power dynamics that contribute to the perpetuation of IPV. By recognizing the multifaceted factors that influence how individuals perceive and respond to IPV, feminism has provided a more nuanced and compassionate framework for addressing this complex problem. It reminds us that IPV is not solely a private matter but a consequence of larger systems of inequality and discrimination. The feminist perspective encourages us to challenge victim-blaming attitudes, foster supportive environments for survivors, and advocate for systemic changes that address the root causes of IPV. Efforts to address these issues should focus on early interventions, education, and policy changes to create a more equitable and safe environment for girls, ultimately working towards a society that values and respects gender equality and the rights of all individuals.

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