

Gender and Women Development Studies

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Abstract

The paper addresses gender and women development studies. Gender is a unique sociocultural identity that reflects an individual's preferred sexuality. Common gender identities in the contemporary society include male gender, female gender, transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, pangender, genderqueer, two-spirit and third gender inter alia. Issues emerging from gender in the contemporary society are many and they include gender bias, gender inequality, gender integration, gender stereotyping and gender based violence. In all, women are the most affected by the identified gender issues. Women are deemed to be the weaker vessels. They are usually the prime targets of gender based violence and allied malevolence in human societies; hence the need for women development studies. Women development studies has grown to be a remarkable field in the contemporary society. It is concerned with practical and tactical ways of improving on the quality of life of women. Following a synoptic survey of gender and women development studies in Africa, the researcher made some recommendations among which was that efforts should be made to give women more opportunity for self-development for adjustment purposes.

Keywords: gender, women, development, studies

Introduction

Gender and women development are topical issues in the contemporary society. Gender is a socially constructed identity. It pertains to norms, behaviours and roles associated with masculinity and femininity. The society has been fraught with genderized principles and practices that tend to relegate women to the background. The sequel part of this treatise will x-ray the concept of gender, highlight emergent gender issues in the society and shed light on women development studies.

Gender

Gender is the psychosocial dimension of being male or female. Lindqvist et al. (2021) elucidated that gender consists of the social, mental, cultural and behavioural aspects of being a male, female, or other gender identification. Depending on the context, this may consist of sex-based social systems (that is gender roles) and gender expression. Most cultures use a gender binary, wherein gender is split into two classes, and those are taken into consideration as part of the opposite (males and females); individuals who are outside those groups might also fall under the umbrella term non-binary. Some

societies have particular genders outside "male" and "female", including the hijras of South Asia; these are regularly called third genders (and fourth genders, and many others).

Many people agree that gender is a relevant feature for social organization (Sigelman & Rider, 2017). As a social system, gender tends to differ from society to society and can change over time. Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with different social and financial inequalities. Gender-based discrimination intersects with other elements of discrimination, including ethnicity, socioeconomic popularity, incapacity, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others. This is what is known as intersectionality (Iwundu, 2023).

Maddux and Winstead (2019) disclosed that gender interacts with, but is not like sex, which refers to the one-of-a-kind organic and physiological traits of women, adult males and intersex individuals, inclusive of chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. Gender and intercourse are associated with but different from gender identification. Gender identity refers to a person's deeply felt, internal and individualistic experience of gender, which can also or might not correspond to the individual's physiology or special sex at birth (Iwundu, 2014).

Gender influences humans' experience of an access to healthcare. The way that health services are organized and supplied can restrict or permit a person's healthcare information, help and offerings, and the outcome of those encounters. Health services need to be affordable, available and perfect to all, and they must be supplied with first-class fairness and dignity.

Gender identification refers to a personal identification with a particular gender and gender position in the society. The term female has historically been used interchangeably with reference to the girl child, even though most atimes this usage has been regarded as debatable by a few feminists (Spade & Valentine, 2011).

Social theorists have sought to determine the unique nature of gender when it comes to biological sex and sexuality, with the end result being that culturally established gender and sex have become interchangeable identifications that signify the allocation of a specific 'biological' intercourse in a categorical gender. The second wave feminists' view that gender is socially constructed and hegemonic in all societies remains modern-day in some literary theoretical circles (Lindqvist et al., 2021).

Some forms of gender in contemporary society

Commonly recognized genders in the contemporary society include:

1. Male gender: Male gender is the sex of an organism that produces the gamete (sex cellular) known as sperm, which fuses with the larger female gamete, or ovum,

within the system of fertilisation. In human beings, the word male can also be used to refer to gender, within the social experience of gender role or gender identity (Spade & Valentine, 2011).

2. Female gender: Female gender refers to the nouns and pronouns naming the female opposite sex of humans, animals and other living things. The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines the female gender as one which fuses with the male gamete.

3. Transgender: Transgender refers to a scenario in which an individual's preferred gender is different from the one assigned to him or her at birth. Transgendered individuals tend to assume any gender that they are more comfortable with.

4. Gender neutrality: Gender neutrality also called gender-neutralism or the gender neutrality motion, is the concept that rules, language, and other social institutions (social systems or gender roles) have to avoid distinguishing roles in line with humans' sex or gender.

5. Nonbinary: Nonbinary is one term human beings use to explain genders that do not fall into the sort of two classes, male or female.

6. Agender: Agender on its part is defined as not having a gender. Some agender humans describe it as having neither male nor female organs, or both.

7. Pangender: Pangender relates to a person whose gender identification is not restrained to one gender and who may also feel like a member of all genders at the same time.

8. Genderqueer: Genderqueer is an identification embraced by individuals who regard themselves as neither female nor male, as both, or as somewhere in between.

9. Two-spirit: Two spirit refers to someone who identifies as having both masculine and feminine spirit, and is utilized by some indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or religious identification.

10. Third gender: Third gender is an idea in which people are categorized, either by themselves or by the society, as neither a male nor female individual. It is also a social category found in societies that accommodate three or extra genders (Heinemann, 2012).

Gender related issues

The various gender identities tend to influence and are influenced by emergent issues such as gender bias, gender inequality, gender integration, gender stereotyping and gender based violence. Below is a synoptic survey of such issues:

a) Gender bias is the tendency to offer preferential treatment towards one gender over the other, or have prejudice towards a certain gender. Gender bias is a type of unconscious bias, in which someone may stereotype or preserve preconceived notions towards other people based totally on private or learned experiences (Iwundu, 2014).

b) Gender inequality on its part is the social phenomenon wherein human beings are not treated equally on the basis of gender. This inequality may be caused by gender discrimination or sexism. The treatment may additionally arise from differences regarding biology, psychology, or cultural norms frequent within the society. Some of

those distinctions are empirically grounded, even as others appear like social constructs. While current guidelines round the sector cause inequality among individuals, it is the females who are most affected. Corroborating this fact, Puts (2010) averred that gender inequality weakens ladies in lots of areas such as fitness, schooling, and business existence.

c) Gender integration is an approach for making the worries and stories of females, males and those with various gender identities an essential measurement of the layout, implementation, monitoring and assessment of policies and programmes. This is done so that all individuals may additionally benefit similarly, so that inequality is not perpetuated (Spade & Valentine, 2011).

d) Gender stereotyping refers to the practice of ascribing to an individual female or male precise attributes, characteristics, or roles based on a subjective belief system (Iwundu, 2014).

e) According to the UN, gender based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for harmful acts of abuse perpetrated against someone's attribute, characteristics, or roles based on a subjective belief system.

Gender based violence can manifest in numerous ways. Some of those encompass: bodily violence, inclusive of assault or slavery; emotional or mental violence, which include verbal abuse or confinement; sexual abuse, including rape; harmful practices, like toddler marriage and female genital mutilation; socio-monetary violence, which incorporates denial of resources; and sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse (Lindqvist et al., 2021).

Women Development Studies

This is an academic field of study concerned with promoting the welfare and well-being of women through research. Women development studies is geared towards the improvement of the standard of living of women. This field of study is germane to the actualization of an egalitarian society devoid of the inhibition of the feminine gender.

Leckenby (2007) espoused that women development studies is an academic discipline that promotes feminist and interdisciplinary strategies to place women's lives and reviews at the centre of attention, while examining social and cultural constructs of gender; systems of privilege and oppression; and the relationships between strength and gender as they intersect with other identities and social places inclusive of race, sexual orientation, socio-monetary magnificence, and disability.

Popular ideas that are related to the field of women development studies encompass feminist principle, standpoint concept, intersectionality, multiculturalism, transnational feminism, social justice, affective research, business enterprise, bio-politics, materialism, and embodiment (Dill & Zambrana, 2009).

Concomitantly, research practices and methodologies related to women's studies encompass ethnography, autoethnography, attention businesses, surveys, community-based studies, discourse evaluation, and studying practices associated with essential concept, put up-structuralism, and queer concept. The subject researches and critiques special societal norms of gender, race, class, sexuality, and different social inequalities.

Furthermore, women development studies is related to the fields of gender research, feminist research, and sexuality studies, and more widely related to the fields of cultural studies, ethnic studies, and African-American studies.

Conclusion

Gender is basically concerned with masculinity and femininity. However, mutant variants of the two gender identities have evolved overtime; most of which are controversial given that gender is sociocultural by nature. Women face lots of gender based injustice which debilitates or militates against their growth and development. Women development studies is an intellectual attempt geared towards consolidating the concerted efforts of well-meaning individuals to better the lot of women.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the researcher recommended as follows:

- 1) Women development studies should be integrated into primary and secondary school curriculum to nip the maltreatment of women and by extension the female gender in the bud.
- 2) Requisite and exquisite policies geared towards the development of women should be implemented in the society.
- 3) Efforts should be made to give women more opportunity for self-development for adjustment purposes.

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