

The role of women in society

Business



In the 21st century, women have undoubtedly achieved many advances regarding their role in society, at least in western countries. However, even there they may still experience difficulties. Women may believe that they have to behave like men to succeed, and avoid the responsibilities of having children in order to have a flourishing career. They have all the legal rights of men, and in theory have equal access to employment opportunities – yet in practice this may be hard to enforce. In some ways, the role of women is still a traditional one. Many countries are still highly patriarchal, expecting women to play a submissive and supportive role, and perhaps even denying them equal legal rights to men.

Even in progressive western countries, women often still bear the burden of responsibility for childcare, care of elderly relatives, and domestic tasks. Although the outlook is changing, certain professions are still seen as either male or female, and women experience difficulties entering traditionally male occupations such as science or engineering. Changes are slow to occur, but they are happening. In the 2017 parliamentary elections in the UK, almost a third of MPs elected were women, the highest number to date. In the US, women hold only around 20% of seats in the Senate, Congress, and House of Representatives. It is important for these numbers to increase, so that women are fairly represented at the highest levels.

Women can be equally capable as men, and if they enter more positions of power then not only will they be able to work to improve the situation of other women, but it will send a message that they should be regarded as equals. This creates a ‘trickle-down’ effect throughout society; if we see women in roles of importance, then other women (and men) begin to

understand that females are not only deserving of equal opportunities, but that they are every bit as capable as their male counterparts. Since we still have issues regarding equal opportunities in more liberal western societies in 2017, it can only be assumed that changes in more patriarchal societies will be much slower to occur. Yet again, there we see signs that changes may occur over time. Many countries have grass roots organisations working to improve the situation for women and girls, ensuring that they have equal access to education and to protect their rights.

Even in the most patriarchal society of all, Saudi Arabia, there have recently been small improvements in the ‘guardian system’, which requires women to have the permission of a male relative to access many services such as healthcare, education and obtaining a passport. A member of the Saudi royal family has even stated that he believes one day women will be permitted to drive, and that they will indeed play a greater role in society. This is acknowledging the great potential that women have, and the contribution that they can bring to the country and its economy – something that is as yet untapped. In conclusion, we must observe that the responsibility for changing the role of women to a more equal one is in many ways the responsibility of men. Returning to the example of Saudi Arabia, changes will only occur if men in power and in society agree to it. This is true to some extent everywhere.

But women must keep up the pressure worldwide to demand their rights, and demonstrate that they are every bit as capable as men. It is perhaps unfortunate that they must prove themselves, but it is a good way of showing that they are deserving.

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