

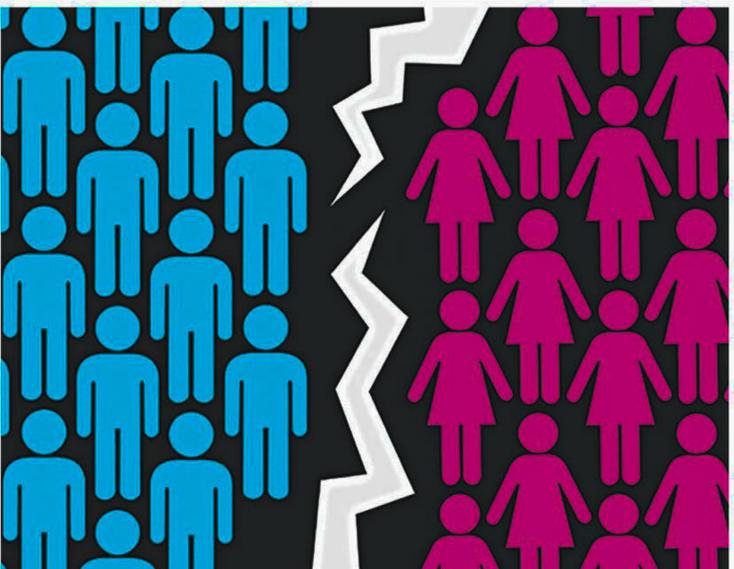
# COMBATTING SYSTEMATIC MISOGYNY



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*The past decade has seen progress being made for movements to support equality. The #MeToo and Time's Up movements helped start conversations within the general public worldwide on the topics of sexual harassment and misogyny.*

*The power of conversation helped bring into the mainstream the many problems women face on the daily – in their social lives, workplaces, and even their homes. Activists who came forward to speak against the many incidents of sexism and sexual harassment have been essential to the fightback against the systematic misogyny that is embedded into our culture and societies.*



When exploring the topic of systematic misogyny, we were able to learn just how ingrained it is in our daily lives. Women face misogyny in almost every aspect of their lives, and the only way to combat something that is part of the basic system of how our societies operate, is to raise awareness on the different dimensions of a woman's life where she is discriminated. Raising awareness is only the first step; it will help further shape the conversation towards a future where women are treated equally.

**MISOGYNY AT HOME**

Being a woman is tough. The streets are filled with unwanted stares and catcalling. But sometimes a woman doesn't even need to exit the safety of her own home to come face to face with a form of misogyny. Sometimes it is at the hands of their parents and siblings, and sometimes relatives, that they witness misogyny rear its ugly head.

When asked about her experience, second-year university student Tasnia Alam\* shared, "I've been criticised for not being fair, for not being tall, or not 'feminine' enough. I've been subjected to body shaming for as long as I can remember by my mother and some of my relatives. There is a constant feeling of never being treated with the same respect as my brother and I've come to make my peace with it. And even though, to cope, I've created a world of my own outside of my family, which motivates me to be who I want to be, no matter how empowered I become, I feel like there will always be this stinging feeling of never being accepted and cherished by my own family."

If the parents are concerned with the behaviour of their daughters rather than that of society, we need to re-evaluate our priorities. The entire blame doesn't fall on

our parents' generation, instead the situation is a by-product of cultural upbringing.

**MISOGYNY IN SOCIAL GROUPS**

Women often find themselves discriminated by even their closest friends. When asked about systematic misogyny that she face in her social groups, Odhora Islam\*, a university student, said, "Back when I was in kindergarten, my school thought it was okay for them to make the girls take dance classes while the boys were allowed to go for sports. The girls in my class, including myself, who showed immense interest in outdoor sports, were never allowed to attend these classes with the boys, because according to the school, we were 'too weak'."

Exposure to such social constructs from an early age shapes the way our mentalities evolve. It isn't uncommon to see misogynistic comments being passed in friend groups, only to be considered and then shrugged off as a joke. Sometimes we even have friends who promote feminism and equality, but are unaware how certain comments that they make are a contradiction to their support for women.

Thus, combating misogyny will often require you to go up against the people that are close to you. Some educational institutions also have to stop associating subjects such as Home Economics as a degree or course designed specifically for women. Instead, they should open their doors for women to partake in whichever academic pursuit they wish to.

**MISOGYNY AMONG WOMEN**

Misogyny at the hands of other women is a common sight in our societies. The way in which our societies have developed over the course of history is the prime cause of women being misogynistic towards other women.

Another university student, Antara Kabir\* had this to say on the matter: "I find myself in these situations repetitively. Whether I am dressing in more Western clothes, or working long hours at a job that requires me to stay out late, I've heard my neighbour make comments about me being too 'modern' and that I am a disgrace to my parents. Hearing such comments from another woman hurts more, as I believe we should be supporting each other rather than engaging in petty backbiting."

However, even though societies tend to dictate certain gender stereotypes for women, when someone breaks out of these social constructs, it's extremely important to see it as a step forward for women. Whenever a woman breaks through a glass ceiling, it becomes a step towards empowerment for women everywhere; empowered women help in empowering other women, thus helping

society to evolve as well.

**MISOGYNY AT WORKPLACE**

Misogyny in the workplace isn't a newfound phenomenon. Women in the workplace are more often than not shown a lack of respect, mostly when compared to how a man is treated. Similar to the problems faced by women in social groups, the same gender stereotypes exist here as well. Men in the workplace often leave women out of certain work-related activities, mainly due to their assumptions about women's capabilities based on pre-existing gender stereotypes.

When asked about the issue of exclusion, Maliha Ahmed Khan\* (24), working in the development sector, said, "Usually the discrimination comes in the form of exclusion, especially from certain activities and roles. For example, a woman might not be assigned a task, like going to a remote area for fieldwork, that she is capable of doing simply because it is assumed that the role is more suited for males."

All of the women we talked to suggested similar measures to combat the problems and discrimination that they face on a daily basis -- being there for women to raise their own voices and stand up for their rights, as they are equally as capable as the men they work alongside.

**MISOGYNY IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Relationship dynamics are often seen to be dictated by misogynistic ideologies. Misogynistic partners will typically display signs of micro-managing, because they need to feel that they are in control of the relationship. It is their belief that women are incapable of taking and being in control. Their misogyny might be displayed in small decisions, like them choosing where to go on a date or which movie to watch, even when their significant others or wives may have stated their own choice. They will justify making decisions all the time by saying that they do it better than you, because you are a woman and therefore indecisive and bad at decision-making. This is a direct reflection of the superiority complex that misogynists thrive on.

A misogynistic partner is also likely to devalue the success of their female partners, because things in which women excel are of less importance than the things which they do. This is one of the main reasons why being a "housewife" is seen as a job that has no value to it. Women are also likely to be blamed for anything and everything that goes wrong in the relationship, because misogynists assume women mess up because they are sentimental and unprofessional.

Anika Tabassum\* shares from her personal experience, "In the beginning I thought his controlling attitude was a

gesture of love, and that he didn't want me to worry about things, and so he did them himself. However, the more time we spent together, the more I understood how little he actually thought of me. He started labelling all of my opinions as wrong. He treated me like a child, who has no idea about how the world works."

There is often no fix for misogynistic partners. Trying to hold on to such toxic relationships only makes life harder for women, and it becomes an endless cycle, with them trying to justify the actions of their partners. And the more time women spend trying to cut them some slack, the more they feel that they have power over a woman and her actions. If you are a woman with a misogynistic partner, it's high time you stop justifying their irrational behaviour; misogynists don't need excuses made for them, instead put your foot down and move on.

When asked about how women can rise up and fight against the many forms of misogyny they face, Afsana Islam, Assistant Professor at the Department of Women and Gender Studies in University of Dhaka, explained, "Sexism is an ideology under the shelter of patriarchy which helps to uphold misogyny and creates impediments to women's empowerment. We have to work on the factors behind them. Firstly, women have to be self-confident. Secondly, women should gain adequate knowledge and awareness about their rights. And thirdly, engaging men and boys from the early in their childhood to change cultural misconception is vital to solving the problem. Men's awareness and involvement is also a necessity to overcome misogyny."

The way the world views women is slowly changing, and it's our responsibility to get behind this change and help it climb up the slope of misogyny, for a future where men and women are treated equally is essential.

While some topics allow for everyone to have their personal opinion and perspective, the case regarding misogynistic treatment is not the same. There is no dialogue for opposition, because when the issue becomes one that denies women their fundamental and basic human rights, it no longer has any further option for discourse.

\*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals

Aaqib loves petting doggos. Send him pictures of your "good boys" at [aaqibhasib94@gmail.com](mailto:aaqibhasib94@gmail.com)

Megha is probably going to be a dropout of university. If you think you are going to do the same, you can find her at [megharahman26@gmail.com](mailto:megharahman26@gmail.com) and share your thoughts.

