

## **Are women today more empowered than ever before?**

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In the wake of the increase in sexual assault accusations against numerous men in various industries, more light has been shed on the injustice that women, especially those in the working world, face. While these accusations have brought forth much concern and outrage from society, it has also sparked various movements such as the #metoo movement, giving women an online platform to speak out about their past experiences. Thus, this leads us to ponder on whether women today are more empowered than ever before. Some people might disagree, stating that women, especially in less developed countries are still not well supported and their voices and cries for help are still left unheard. Although it cannot be denied that women are still suppressed in society, I believe that they are more empowered than ever before today. With the United Nations listing Gender Equality as one of the seventeen sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2050, I believe that in the recent years, there have been more power and opportunities given to women to stand up for what they believe in. I am of the view that education, technology and the rise of the feminist movement have served to empower women today, and more so than ever before.

Some people might raise the fact that women in less developed countries are still not supported enough and are not given platforms to voice their concerns. This is evident in African countries, where girls still undergo genital mutilation and rape is extremely prevalent. Many of these girls are not given the opportunity to voice their discomfort and are instead forced to conform to these traditional norms that have prevailed for centuries. This, perhaps could be due to the traditional mindsets and lack of education of people living in these countries. There is also the mentality that boys are superior to girls, leading boys to be favoured over girls, and given more opportunities in education and work. Girls and women are hence deprived of such privileges and are instead confined to the four walls of their house, tasked with the cleaning and maintenance of their abode. With the staunch mindsets and mentality of people in these countries, little progress has been made to support these women and to give them more opportunities to achieve their potential.

Moreover, cynics might argue that women today are still generally suppressed and not treated fairly. Women, even in developed countries, are still prone to backlash when they come out with sexual allegations against men, especially well-known and powerful figures. There is also the tendency to believe men who deny these sexual allegations, especially if they hold higher positions in society, and hence have that added credibility. An example is none other than Donald Trump, the President of the United States. Allegations have been made by multiple women accusing him of groping them and inappropriately touching them. However, many of these women were initially met with scorn and backlash from the public, with Donald Trump denying these accusations. This highlights the fact that women today are still suppressed and are not given a voice to speak out. Even if they do, they are often met with disbelief and are not treated with respect. Also, women today still have to contend with the glass ceiling especially in the corporate world; a report in 2015 showed that women in all general sectors, except clerical work, still earned 10% less than their male counterparts, reflecting that they are indeed still suppressed and not treated equally.

However, I am of the opinion that women today are more empowered than ever before. Firstly, I believe that education has served to empower women. Education enables one to learn right from wrong and to formulate one's own opinion. Education has given rise to modern mindsets and deviation from traditional ones. Education has led to more people believing in fairness between the

two genders, and the belief that both genders should be given equal opportunities and access to their rights. For example, while many of the older Chinese generation in Singapore still hold the belief that boys are better than girls as they carry on the family lineage, education has led to the younger generations believing more in the equality of the sexes. Hence, women, especially in developed countries have enjoyed increased educational and work opportunities in recent years. It is safe to say that progress has been made in the empowerment of women today. Many women in Singapore have taken on high positions in the various sectors, with Dr Halimah Yacob being appointed the first female President of Singapore. The breaking of the glass ceiling in various sectors and industries has also led to women feeling more empowered and encouraged to take on higher positions in society and to climb up the social ladder in their careers.

Secondly, technology and the advent of social media have led to women around the world being given more platforms to bring attention to their plight. While technology is still not prevalent in developing countries, international organisations like the Human Rights Watch have sent out journalists to cover the issues of young child brides and genital mutilation of females in places like Nairobi, Kenya, and even parts of the Middle East. These organisations make documentaries of and short clips of interviews with these vulnerable women and girls, drawing attention to their plight through social media. Therefore, people from around the world who follow their accounts on the various social media platforms gain insight into the different plights faced by women in these countries. This leads to greater awareness and more support being given to these vulnerable women. Social media has also been a good platform for the proliferation of campaigns and movements such as the #metoo movement started by African American civil rights activist Tarana Burke. This movement explores the dark side of the entertainment industry, where men in power take advantage of and prey on female actresses. The #metoo movement has garnered much support around the world, with thousands of women pitching in to write about their sexual assault experiences. This common platform to share experiences unites and empowers women and encourages them to support one another. This can be attributed to the improvements in technology, something the past generations did not have much of. Hence, I believe that women today are given more power and opportunities, especially to voice their plights in a safe environment, than ever before.

Lastly, women are more empowered today than ever before due to the rise in the feminist movement. There has been a significant increase in the number of protests such as the Women's March in cities like London and Washington DC, aimed at congregating women together to march for their rights. These marches not only enable both females and males alike to literally voice their concern and desire for positive change, but also led to the increased empowerment of females. This is evident when the Women's March in Washington, DC in 2017 drew tens of thousands of people, all advocating for female rights. The shared act of protesting against gender inequality and the supporting of women encourages females all around the world. These marches have also removed the negative stigma tied to talking about sensitive issues like reproductive rights and abortion, and has instead paved the way for more dialogue about such issues. More platforms have been created to give women a chance to discuss feminism and the various issues they face with an example being that of UN Women. The Singapore branch of UN Women has organised dialogues on gender equality and movie screenings of 'Malala', which encourage participants to adopt a mindset that believes in the empowerment of females. The number of marches and dialogues have indeed increased in recent years which support the belief that women today are more empowered than ever before.

In a nutshell, while it is indeed true that women in all countries still face problems of inequality, I believe that the arrival of a new epoch has given women more opportunities to speak out.

Furthermore, women have enjoyed more educational and work opportunities in the recent years. Hence, I believe that education, technology and the rise of the feminist movement have all paved the way for the increase in the support and empowerment of females. There has indeed been progress made in the empowerment of today's women, much more than ever before.

**Comments:**

*Well done, Isabel! This was a such pleasure to read. Fluent, passionately argued and full of relevant and well-elaborated examples. The essay provides readers with significant insight into the topic, as it is approached from various angles. The use of certain phrases were not the most apt in some places and sentence structure could have been better. There was also a tendency towards having multiple points in the same sentence, which was slightly confusing. However, still a considerable attempt.*