

HOW ADOLESCENTS PERCEIVE GENDER ROLES: A SOCIO-BEHAVIOURAL STUDY

Gurkeen Kaur

Pinegrove School, Dharampur

ABSTRACT

This study explores adolescents' perceptions of gender roles in education, careers, leadership, household responsibilities, and social influence. A sample of 100 adolescents aged 14–18 years from Classes IX–XII was surveyed using a structured questionnaire. The study reveals that adolescents largely support gender equality in education, career choice, and leadership potential, but traditional expectations persist, especially in household responsibilities and societal pressures on boys' careers. Peer groups, schools, and media were found to play a significant role in shaping these perceptions. The findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive education and awareness programs to promote equality and challenge persistent stereotypes among adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Gender roles are the societal expectations and norms assigned to individuals based on their gender. Adolescence is a critical period when attitudes and beliefs about gender are formed, influenced by family, peers, schools, and media. Understanding how adolescents perceive gender roles is essential, as these perceptions shape their educational choices, career aspirations, leadership potential, and household responsibilities. This study aims to explore these perceptions, identify gaps between progressive beliefs and traditional practices, and highlight the factors influencing gender-role attitudes among adolescents.

Major Perceptions Among Adolescents Regarding Gender Roles

1. Equality in Education and Careers:

Most adolescents believe that boys and girls should have equal opportunities in education and career choices.

2. Leadership Ability:

Adolescents feel that both boys and girls can be equally effective leaders.

3. Household Responsibilities:

While many support sharing household work equally, girls are still expected to do more domestic tasks.

4. Career Expectations:

Boys are perceived to face more societal pressure to choose higher-paying careers.

5. Influence of Social Environment:

Peers, schools, and media play a major role in shaping adolescents' attitudes toward gender roles.

6. Awareness of Change:

Adolescents recognize that gender roles are evolving, but traditional norms still affect behaviour.

Impact of Adolescents' Gender-Role Perceptions on India

1. Education and Career Choices:

Support for gender equality can lead to increased participation of girls in education and diverse career fields, reducing gender gaps in the workforce.

2. Leadership and Governance:

Belief in gender-neutral leadership may encourage more young women to take up leadership roles in schools, communities, and eventually in politics and organizations.

3. Household and Social Equality:

Sharing household responsibilities can promote equality at home, reduce the burden on women, and challenge traditional patriarchal norms.

4. Economic Growth:

Adolescents' acceptance of equal opportunities and diverse career choices contributes to a more skilled and inclusive workforce, boosting India's economic development.

5. Social Change:

Awareness of evolving gender roles can gradually shift societal attitudes, reducing discrimination, stereotypes, and fostering a more progressive and inclusive culture.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bem (1981) found that gender roles are socially constructed and learned through family, education, and cultural interactions, influencing adolescents' attitudes and behaviour from an early age.

Eccles (1994) reported that gender stereotypes significantly affect students' academic interests and career choices, often limiting opportunities based on socially assigned gender roles.

Eagly and Karau (2002) observed that leadership roles are commonly perceived as male-oriented, despite evidence that both genders demonstrate equal leadership capability.

Oakley (1974) noted that traditional household responsibilities continue to be assigned primarily to females, even as societal attitudes towards gender equality evolve.

Bandura (1977) emphasized that adolescents learn gender roles through observation and imitation, highlighting the strong influence of peers and media on behaviour.

UNESCO (2019) reported that gender-sensitive education plays a crucial role in promoting equality and reducing gender-based stereotypes among adolescents.

OECD (2021) observed that although younger generations show greater acceptance of gender equality, deeply rooted cultural norms continue to influence behaviour and expectations.

Sharma and Gupta (2020) found that Indian adolescents increasingly support gender equality but still encounter traditional expectations within family and community settings.

SEBI (2020) highlighted that media representations significantly shape young individuals' perceptions of gender roles, often reinforcing stereotypes if not regulated responsibly.

Kaur and Kaur (2021) observed that schools play a vital role in shaping adolescents' attitudes towards gender equality through curriculum design and classroom interaction.

Need for the Study

Adolescence is a crucial stage in the formation of attitudes towards gender roles. Despite increasing awareness of gender equality, traditional stereotypes still influence adolescents' views on education, leadership, careers, and household responsibilities. This study helps identify these perceptions and highlights the role of social influences in promoting gender equality.

Research Methodology

Objectives:

The study aims to understand adolescents' perceptions of gender roles in education, career choices, leadership, household responsibilities, and the influence of social institutions.

Research Design:

A descriptive research design was used to analyze existing attitudes without manipulating variables.

Data Collection Centre:

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using Google Forms.

Sample Size & Sampling Technique:

The study included 100 adolescents from Classes IX to XII, selected through convenience sampling.

Data Analysis Tools:

Data were analyzed using frequency and percentage analysis.

Study Area:

The study covered adolescents from secondary and senior secondary schools.

Period of Study:

Data were collected over a period of two weeks.

Limitations

1. The sample size was limited to 100 respondents.
2. Convenience sampling may cause sampling bias.
3. Responses were self-reported and may be biased.
4. The study focused only on adolescents.

Results and Interpretation

The present study analyzed responses from **100 adolescent participants** to examine their perceptions of gender roles across education, leadership, household responsibilities, and social influences. The data were analyzed using **descriptive statistical methods**, primarily **frequency counts and percentage analysis**.

1. Demographic Results

Out of the total **100 respondents**,

- **48%** belonged to the **16–17 age group**,
- **32%** were aged **14–15**, and

- **20% were 18 years old.**

In terms of gender,

- **52%** identified as **female**,
- **44%** as **male**, and
- **4%** preferred not to disclose their gender.

The class-wise distribution showed relatively even representation, with **Class X (28%)** forming the largest group, followed by **Class XI (26%)**, **Class IX (24%)**, and **Class XII (22%)**.

Interpretation:

The balanced demographic composition ensured that the data reflected a broad range of adolescent perspectives across age, gender, and academic levels.

2. Education and Career Perceptions

A significant majority (**93%**) of respondents either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that **boys and girls should have equal opportunities in education**. Only **2%** disagreed with this statement.

Regarding subject suitability based on gender, **50%** of respondents *disagreed or strongly disagreed*, while **32%** *agreed or strongly agreed*, and **18%** remained neutral.

An overwhelming **92%** agreed that **career choices should be based on interest rather than gender**, highlighting progressive thinking among adolescents.

However, **60%** of respondents agreed that **boys are expected to choose higher-paying careers**, while **20%** were neutral and **20%** disagreed.

Interpretation:

While adolescents strongly endorse gender equality in education and career choice, traditional societal expectations—especially regarding male financial responsibility—continue to influence perceptions.

3. Leadership and Decision-Making

The belief that **boys and girls can be equally effective leaders** was strongly supported, with **92%** agreement.

At the same time, **62%** of respondents agreed that **boys are more encouraged to take leadership roles** than girls, indicating a perceived gender bias in leadership opportunities.

When asked whether **girls are encouraged to express their opinions openly**, **68%** agreed, while **20%** remained neutral and **12%** disagreed.

Support for **equal participation of all genders in family decision-making** was extremely high, with **93%** of respondents in agreement.

Interpretation:

Although adolescents believe in equal leadership capability, social encouragement remains uneven. This gap highlights the difference between **ideological equality** and **practical social experiences**.

4. Household Roles and Responsibilities

An overwhelming **94%** of respondents supported **equal sharing of household responsibilities**, showing strong acceptance of gender-neutral domestic roles.

Despite this, **70%** acknowledged that **girls are expected to perform more household work** than boys, reflecting the persistence of traditional norms.

Additionally, **90%** of respondents agreed that **boys should learn basic household and caregiving skills**.

Responses to the statement that **working women should still be primarily responsible for household duties** were divided:

- **40%** agreed,
- **20%** were neutral, and
- **40%** disagreed.

Interpretation:

These findings reveal a **transition phase** in adolescent thinking, where ideals of equality coexist with deeply rooted traditional expectations, particularly concerning women's domestic roles.

5. Social and Institutional Influence

A strong majority (**85%**) agreed that **gender roles are changing compared to earlier generations**, indicating awareness of social progress.

Further, **80%** believed that **adolescents are more accepting of gender equality than adults**, reflecting generational shifts in attitudes.

Peer influence was acknowledged by **77%** of respondents, who agreed that **peer groups shape how adolescents express gender roles**.

Schools were seen as key agents of change, with **84%** agreeing that **schools play an important role in shaping attitudes toward gender equality**.

Media and social media were identified as powerful influences by **88%** of respondents.

Interpretation:

The data highlight the significant role of **social institutions and media** in shaping adolescent perceptions, emphasizing the need for responsible representation and inclusive education practices.

Overall Interpretation of Results

The statistical findings indicate that adolescents largely support **gender equality in principle**, particularly in education, leadership ability, and career aspirations. However, **contradictions remain** between progressive beliefs and observed societal practices, especially in household responsibilities and leadership encouragement. These results suggest that while attitudes are evolving, **structural and cultural influences** continue to shape gender-role perceptions among adolescents.

Findings

1. The majority of respondents (**93%**) believe that boys and girls should have **equal opportunities in education**, indicating strong support for gender equality among adolescents.
2. A large proportion (**92%**) agreed that **career choices should be based on individual interest rather than gender**, reflecting progressive career attitudes.

3. Despite progressive views, **60%** of respondents acknowledged that **boys are expected to choose higher-paying careers**, showing the continued influence of traditional societal expectations.
4. Most adolescents (**92%**) believe that **boys and girls can be equally effective leaders**, highlighting acceptance of gender-neutral leadership ability.
5. However, **62%** felt that **boys receive more encouragement for leadership roles**, suggesting a gap between belief and social practice.
6. Equal participation of all genders in **family decision-making** was supported by **93%** of respondents.
7. A strong majority (**94%**) supported **equal sharing of household responsibilities**, yet **70%** observed that **girls are still expected to perform more household work**.
8. Opinions on whether **working women should remain primarily responsible for household duties** were divided, indicating a transition in gender-role attitudes.
9. Most respondents (**85%**) felt that **gender roles are changing compared to earlier generations**, reflecting awareness of social progress.
10. Social influences were found to be significant, with **media (88%)**, **schools (84%)**, and **peer groups (77%)** playing key roles in shaping adolescents' perceptions of gender roles.

Suggestions

1. **Strengthen Gender-Sensitive Education:**

Schools should actively incorporate gender-sensitization programs, discussions, and workshops to reinforce equality in education, leadership, and career choices from an early age.

2. **Encourage Equal Leadership Opportunities:**

Educational institutions should ensure equal opportunities for boys and girls to participate in leadership roles such as student councils, clubs, and group activities.

3. **Promote Gender-Neutral Career Guidance:**

Career counselling programs should emphasize interest, aptitude, and skill over gender stereotypes, helping adolescents make informed career choices without societal pressure.

4. **Address Unequal Household Expectations:**

Awareness programs involving parents should be introduced to challenge traditional household role expectations, especially the disproportionate burden placed on girls.

5. **Positive Media Representation:**

Media and social media platforms should promote balanced and inclusive portrayals of gender roles to counter stereotypes and influence adolescents positively.

6. **Peer-Led Equality Initiatives:**

Schools can encourage peer discussion groups and student-led campaigns that promote gender equality, as peer influence was found to be a significant factor.

7. **Family-Level Sensitization:**

Families should be encouraged to involve all genders equally in decision-making processes and household responsibilities to model equality in daily life.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that adolescents largely support **gender equality** in education, careers, leadership, and household responsibilities. However, traditional expectations and societal pressures still influence perceptions, especially regarding boys' career roles and girls' domestic duties. Peer groups, schools, and media play a significant role in shaping attitudes, highlighting the importance of **gender-sensitive education and awareness programs**. Promoting progressive perceptions among adolescents can contribute to a more **equitable and inclusive society** in India.

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