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Gender Role Beliefs among Young Adults: An Exploratory Study of Selected Socio-Demographic Factors

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ABSTRACT

Gender roles are shaped by the values, expectations, and experiences that individuals encounter within their families and society. The present study was conducted to understand gender role beliefs among young adults and to examine their relationship with selected socio-demographic factors. The study included young adult respondents and considered variables such as age, gender, father's occupation, mother's occupation, caste, and ordinal position in the family. Data were collected using the Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS), which was used to assess the respondents' beliefs and attitudes towards traditional gender roles. The collected data were systematically analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to examine differences and relationships between gender role beliefs and the selected variables. The findings indicated variations in gender role belief scores among the respondents and highlighted the role of family and social background in shaping attitudes towards gender roles. The study emphasizes that gender role beliefs are influenced by the social environment in which individuals grow and develop. The findings also highlight the importance of education, family support, and awareness in encouraging more flexible and egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles. Overall, the study provides an understanding of how young adults perceive gender roles and highlights the need to promote equality, shared responsibilities, and freedom from rigid gender stereotypes.

Keywords: Gender role beliefs, Young adults, Gender roles, Gender equality, Family environment, Social factors, Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS)

INTRODUCTION

Gender role beliefs are an important aspect of social life because they influence how individuals understand the roles, responsibilities, behaviours and opportunities of men and women within the family and society. These beliefs include expectations about who should perform household work, make family decisions, earn an income, care for children, pursue education and careers, and participate in leadership and social activities. While traditional gender beliefs often associate women with caregiving and domestic responsibilities and men with earning and decision-making, contemporary perspectives increasingly support the sharing of responsibilities and equal opportunities between men and women. Thus, gender role beliefs can exist along a continuum from traditional to egalitarian perspectives.

Gender role beliefs develop through everyday social experiences and are influenced by family, culture, education, peers, media and the wider social environment. The family plays a particularly important role because children learn gender expectations by observing parental behaviour, division of household responsibilities and the opportunities provided to sons and daughters. Research in India has demonstrated the importance of intergenerational influence, with parental gender attitudes being significantly associated with adolescents' own gender attitudes (Dhar *et al*., 2019). Similarly, research among Indian adolescents has shown that gender attitudes are influenced by family, peer and community environments and that attitudes can become more egalitarian with age and changing social experiences (Patel *et al*., 2021).

Higher education provides another important context in which gender beliefs may be questioned and reshaped.

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Postgraduate students are particularly relevant to the study of gender role beliefs because they are young adults who are developing greater independence, making educational and career decisions, and forming expectations about their future family and professional lives. Their views regarding employment, marriage, household responsibilities, parenting and decision-making may therefore reflect an interaction between traditional beliefs acquired through socialisation and newer perspectives encountered through education and social interaction. A study conducted among 200 university students at Punjab Agricultural University found that half of the students had egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles, while 40.5 per cent had transitional attitudes. The study also reported that female students were more likely to hold egalitarian attitudes than male students (Nath *et al.,* 2023).

Gender role beliefs may also differ according to individuals' social and family backgrounds. Factors such as age, gender, parental education and occupation, socioeconomic conditions, caste, and birth order may contribute to differences in gender-related attitudes. Indian research has highlighted that family characteristics and social background are associated with adolescents' gender attitudes (Dhar *et al*., 2019; Patel *et al.,* 2021). In addition, studies of university students have indicated that factors such as parental socialisation, parenting practices, caste and family characteristics can be related to attitudes towards gender roles (Nath *et al*., 2023). These findings suggest that gender role beliefs should be understood within the broader social and family context in which individuals grow and develop.Such an understanding can contribute to a better appreciation of changing gender perspectives among educated youth and may provide useful insights for promoting more equitable attitudes within families, educational institutions and society.

Traditional Gender Role Beliefs of Men

Traditionally, men have been expected to take the role of the provider and protector of the family. A man is often seen as the person who should earn an income, meet the financial needs of the household and take responsibility for major family decisions. Men are also commonly expected to be strong, independent, confident and capable of handling difficulties without showing much emotional vulnerability. In many families, men are viewed as the head of the household and are expected to guide and protect other family members. These expectations can also influence the way boys and young men think about their future, particularly in relation to education, career, marriage and family responsibilities.

Traditional Gender Role Beliefs of Women

Traditionally, women have been closely associated with the roles of wife, mother, homemaker and caregiver. Women are often expected to take care of the home, children and the emotional wellbeing of family members. Qualities such as being caring, patient, gentle, understanding and supportive are commonly associated with the traditional feminine role. Women may also be expected to give greater importance to family responsibilities and to adjust their personal or career choices according to the needs of the family. In some traditional settings, women are expected to depend on male family members for important decisions, while their primary responsibility is seen as maintaining the home and raising children.

Changing Perspectives

However, these traditional expectations are gradually changing. With greater access to education, employment and social exposure, many young people increasingly believe that family and work responsibilities should be shared by both men and women. Men can participate in childcare and household work, while women can pursue education, careers and leadership roles. Therefore, studying gender role beliefs among postgraduate students is important because their views may reflect the changing understanding of what men and women can and should contribute to their families and society.

Objectives

1. To assess the gender role beliefs among postgraduate students.
2. To examine the differences in gender role beliefs among postgraduate students based on selected personal characteristics such as age, gender and ordinal position.
3. To determine the association between gender role beliefs and selected family and social characteristics such as parents' occupation and caste.

Review of Literature

Gender Role Beliefs among Adolescents and Young People

Patel *et al*. (2021) examined the factors influencing

gender-role attitudes among adolescents in India using data from the UDAYA longitudinal study conducted in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The study analysed data from 12,035 unmarried adolescents aged 10–19 years, consisting of 4,428 boys and 7,607 girls, who were followed across two rounds of the study. Data were collected during 2015–16 and 2018–19, and the researchers used descriptive, bivariate and linear fixed-effects regression analyses. The findings showed that gender-role attitudes became more egalitarian over time among both boys and girls, except among the older group of boys. Girls consistently held more egalitarian attitudes than boys. The study also found that gender attitudes were influenced by factors at the individual, family, peer, societal and community levels. The findings suggest that gender-role beliefs can change during adolescence and are shaped by the social environment in which young people grow up.

Ullrich *et al.* (2022) studied the development of gender-role attitudes from early adolescence to emerging adulthood using four waves of the German BIJU longitudinal dataset. The study included 3,828 participants at the first wave, with participants followed from approximately age 13 through adolescence and into young adulthood. The researchers examined differences according to sex, socioeconomic status and cognitive abilities using longitudinal growth models. The results showed that adolescents generally developed more egalitarian gender-role attitudes as they grew older. Although the difference between males and females decreased over time, females continued to show more egalitarian attitudes. The study demonstrates that gender-role beliefs are not completely fixed and may change as individuals mature and gain new experiences.

Dhanda and Pareek (2023) conducted a study entitled *"Gender Role Belief and Feminism: Exploring the Perspective of Young Adults"* to examine gender role beliefs and attitudes towards feminism among young adults. The study included 80 university students (40 males and 40 females) aged 18–24 years. Data were collected using the Gender Role Belief Scale, Attitude Towards Feminism Scale and other psychological measures. The findings revealed that female participants showed more egalitarian gender role beliefs and positive attitudes towards feminism than males. The study also highlighted the influence of religious fundamentalism and benevolent sexism on gender role beliefs.

Gender Differences in Gender Role Beliefs

Nath *et al.* (2023) conducted a study titled *Gender Differences in Attitude of University Students towards Gender Roles* at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab. The study was conducted during 2021–22 among 200 university students selected purposively. Data were collected using a structured and pre-tested questionnaire. The study found that 50 per cent of the respondents had an egalitarian gender-role attitude, while 40.50 percent had a transitional attitude. Female students were more likely to have egalitarian attitudes, whereas half of the male students had transitional attitudes. The authors suggested that the difference may be related to the male-dominated and patriarchal nature of Indian society. The study recommended greater gender sensitisation and encouraging boys to share responsibilities irrespective of traditional gender expectations. This study is particularly relevant to the present research because it was conducted among university students in India and directly examined gender-role attitudes. It also supports the inclusion of gender as an important variable when studying gender-role beliefs.

Dhar *et al*. (2022) conducted a study entitled *"Reshaping Adolescents' Gender Attitudes: Evidence from a School-Based Experiment in India"* to examine the effectiveness of school-based interventions in changing gender attitudes among adolescents. The study was conducted across 314 government secondary schools in Haryana, involving approximately 14,000 students. A two-year intervention involving classroom discussions on gender equality was implemented. The findings revealed that the intervention significantly improved adolescents' attitudes towards gender equality and reduced support for restrictive gender norms. The positive effects persisted even two years after the intervention, highlighting the importance of gender-sensitisation programmes in promoting egalitarian attitudes among adolescents.

Family and Parental Influence on Gender Role Beliefs

Dhar *et al.* (2019) examined the intergenerational transmission of gender attitudes in Haryana, India. The study included nearly 5,500 adolescents from 314 schools and their parents. The researchers examined adolescents' views concerning the appropriate roles and rights of women and girls. The findings showed a clear relationship between parents' and children's gender attitudes. When a parent held a more discriminatory gender attitude, the

child was approximately 11 percentage points more likely to hold the same view. The study also found that parents had a stronger influence on adolescents' gender attitudes than their peers, and mothers had a greater influence than fathers. Interestingly, the influence of parental attitudes was stronger among adolescents belonging to Scheduled Caste communities. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it demonstrates that family background and social group can be associated with gender-role beliefs. It also provides support for examining variables such as caste and parental characteristics in studies of gender attitudes.

Closson *et al.* (2023) examined gender-related attitudes among adolescent girls and family members in Karnataka, India. The study involved 2,457 adolescent girls and examined attitudes concerning gendered power inequities and their relationship with future aspirations. The findings showed that traditional gender expectations were present among girls and their family members, and differences in gender expectations within families were associated with adolescents' educational and future aspirations. The study emphasized the importance of family-level approaches for challenging restrictive gender norms. These findings demonstrate that the family is an important source of gender-role socialization, making parental and family characteristics relevant when examining gender-role beliefs.

Gender Role Beliefs and Caste/Social Background

The role of social background is important in understanding gender-role beliefs because individuals belonging to different social groups may experience different expectations and opportunities. Dhar *et al.* (2019), in their Haryana study of nearly 5,500 adolescents, specifically examined differences across caste groups. Their analysis indicated that parental gender attitudes had a stronger influence on children's attitudes among Scheduled Caste communities. This suggests that the social context in which gender socialisation occurs may influence the strength and pattern of gender-role beliefs.

Similarly, the UDAYA study by Patel *et al.* (2021) included caste among the background characteristics considered in examining adolescents' gender attitudes. The researchers found that gender attitudes were shaped by multiple levels of influence rather than by one demographic characteristic alone. These findings provide a basis for including caste as one of the demographic variables in the present study.

Socioeconomic Background and Gender Role Beliefs

Ullrich *et al.* (2022) specifically examined whether socioeconomic background contributed to the development of gender-role attitudes. Using longitudinal data from adolescence into young adulthood, the researchers found that gender-role attitudes became more egalitarian with age and that developmental patterns were related to individual and social characteristics. The study also demonstrated that the relationship between socioeconomic background and gender-role attitudes needs to be considered alongside gender and developmental changes rather than being viewed independently.

Patel *et al.* (2021), in their Indian longitudinal study, similarly showed that gender attitudes were influenced by several interconnected factors, including individual, family, peer and societal experiences. This suggests that socioeconomic background alone may not explain gender-role beliefs; rather, the experiences and social environment associated with one's background may also be important.

Gender Role Beliefs in the Indian Context

The available Indian literature suggests that traditional and egalitarian gender-role beliefs exist alongside each other. Young people are increasingly exposed to ideas of gender equality through education, employment opportunities, social media and changing family structures. At the same time, traditional expectations concerning household responsibilities, caregiving, marriage and decision-making continue to influence young people.The studies by Patel *et al.* (2021), Dhar *et al.* (2019) and Nath *et al.* (2023) collectively demonstrate that gender-role beliefs among Indian youth are influenced by gender, family environment, parental attitudes and broader social conditions. The evidence also indicates that these beliefs can change over time rather than remaining completely stable.

Pareek and Jain (2019) conducted a study entitled *"Traditional or Modern: Where Does India Stand on Gender Role Attitude Scale?"* to examine gender role attitudes among the Indian population. The study included 518 respondents aged 18–60 years from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Delhi NCR. Data were collected using a self-developed 35-item Gender Role Attitude Scale. The findings revealed that 63 per cent of respondents held transitional gender role attitudes, while 21 per cent showed traditional and 16 per cent showed modern attitudes. Male respondents exhibited

more traditional attitudes than females. Age, gender and religion were identified as important predictors of gender role attitudes. The study highlighted the influence of socio-demographic factors on individuals' perceptions of gender roles.

Age and Development of Gender Role Beliefs

Ullrich *et al.* (2022) examined the development of gender-role attitudes during adolescence and emerging adulthood using longitudinal data. The study began with 3,828 participants and followed their development across adolescence. The researchers examined the effects of sex, socioeconomic background and cognitive abilities. The results showed that gender-role attitudes generally became more egalitarian as participants grew older. Females tended to have more egalitarian attitudes than males, although the gender difference changed over time. The findings demonstrate that gender-role beliefs can change as young people mature and encounter new social experiences.

The UDAYA study by Patel *et al.* (2021) also provides strong evidence for the relationship between age and gender-role attitudes. Among younger adolescents, the proportion holding relatively egalitarian attitudes increased from 26.1% to 45.8% among boys and from 42.6% to 64.2% among girls between the two study waves. Regression results also showed that gender-role attitude scores improved with age among younger boys and girls and older girls.

Together, these findings suggest that age may be associated with a gradual movement towards more egalitarian gender-role beliefs, although this change may differ according to gender.

Birth Order in Gender Role

Kulik (2004) conducted a study entitled *"The Impact of Birth Order on Intergenerational Transmission of Attitudes from Parents to Adolescent Sons: The Israeli Case"* to examine the influence of birth order on the transmission of parental attitudes to adolescents. The study involved 294 participants, including 98 mothers, 98 fathers and 98 adolescent sons. The findings revealed that birth order influenced the transmission of certain parental attitudes, although no significant influence was observed on gender role attitudes. The study highlighted the role of parents in shaping adolescents' attitudes and the importance of family background in attitude development.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of 30 postgraduate students were selected for the study. The sample consisted of 15 male students and 15 female students, thereby maintaining an equal representation of both genders. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Students who met the predetermined criteria and were willing to participate in the study were included in the sample.

Inclusion Criteria

The following criteria were considered for selection of respondents:

1. Postgraduate students enrolled in the selected institution.
2. Students who were willing to participate voluntarily in the study.
3. Students who provided informed consent.
4. Students who completed the questionnaire adequately.

It was conducted among postgraduate students of University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, Karnataka. The present study adopted a descriptive research design to assess gender role beliefs among postgraduate students. The study also examined the association/ differences in gender role beliefs with selected socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, caste, parents' occupation, and ordinal position.

Test Material Used for Data Collection

In the present study, the following test measure was used for the collection of data:

Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS)

The Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS) was developed by Kerr and Holden (1996) to assess individuals' beliefs and attitudes regarding traditional and non-traditional gender roles. The scale consists of 20 items designed to measure the extent to which individuals endorse traditional gender-role expectations. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Undecided, 5 = Somewhat Disagree, 6 = Disagree, to 7 = Strongly Disagree.

The items assess beliefs related to the roles and responsibilities of men and women in areas such as family, marriage, household responsibilities, employment, parenting, and social expectations. The scale provides

an overall indication of an individual's gender role beliefs, with responses reflecting the extent to which the respondent agrees or disagrees with traditional gender-role expectations.

For scoring, the responses to the individual items are assigned numerical values according to the 7-point response format. Items 2, 3, 12, and 17 are reverse-scored so that the direction of scoring remains consistent across the scale. After reverse scoring the relevant items, the scores are summed to obtain the respondent's total gender role belief score. The total score is then used to assess the respondent's overall gender role beliefs.

The scale was selected for the present study because it provides a structured measure of gender role beliefs and is suitable for examining respondents' attitudes towards gender-related roles and expectations. The scale was administered to the selected postgraduate students after explaining the purpose of the study and providing appropriate instructions for completing the questionnaire.

Procedure

The researcher personally approached the selected postgraduate students and explained the purpose and nature of the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from the respondents before data collection. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents and adequate instructions were provided regarding how to record their responses. The completed questionnaires were collected and checked for completeness. The information obtained from the respondents was kept confidential and was used only for academic and research purposes.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were coded, tabulated, and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were calculated to describe the gender role belief scores. An independent samples t-test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference in gender role belief scores between male and female postgraduate students. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) may be used to examine differences in gender role belief scores among respondents belonging to different ordinal-position categories, namely only child, first-born, and second-born, provided the group sizes are adequate. The chi-square test may be used for examining associations between categorical variables where appropriate.The level of significance was considered at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The sample consisted of 30 respondents, with an equal representation of males and females (50.0% each). Regarding caste, the majority of respondents belonged to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category (46.7%), followed by the General category (30.0%), Scheduled Caste (SC) (20.0%), and Scheduled Tribe (ST) (3.3%). In terms of ordinal position, half of the respondents were second-born children (50.0%), followed by first-born children (40.0%), while only 10.0% were only children. With respect to fathers' occupation, the largest proportion were engaged in government service (43.3%), followed by farming (26.7%) and business (20.0%). The majority of mothers were housewives (83.3%), while 13.3% were employed in government service and 3.3% were farmers.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS) scores of the respondents. The respondents obtained a mean GRBS

Table 1 : Distribution of respondents according to selected personal characteristics (N=30)

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	15	50.0
Female	15	50.0
Total	30	100.0
Caste		
OBC	14	46.7
General	9	30.0
SC	6	20.0
ST	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0
Ordinal position		
Only child	3	10.0
First-born	12	40.0
Second-born	15	50.0
Total	30	100.0
Father's occupation		
Government service	13	43.3
Farmer	8	26.7
Business	6	20.0
Priest	1	3.3
Private employee	1	3.3
Missing/not reported	1	3.3
Mother's occupation		
Housewife	25	83.3
Government service	4	13.3
Farmer	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0

score of 97.50 with a standard deviation of 17.72. The scores ranged from 69 to 133, indicating considerable variation in gender role beliefs among the respondents. The standard deviation suggests that individual respondents differed to some extent in their GRBS scores.

Table 2 : Overall GRBS descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
GRBS score	30	97.50	17.72	69	133

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS) scores of the respondents. The respondents obtained a mean GRBS score of 97.50 with a standard deviation of 17.72. The scores ranged from 69 to 133, indicating considerable variation in gender role beliefs among the respondents. The standard deviation suggests that individual respondents differed to some extent in their GRBS scores.

Table 3 : Gender-wise GRBS scores + t-test

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Male	15	94.13	16.25
Female	15	100.87	19.02

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of GRBS scores according to ordinal position. The second-born respondents recorded the highest mean score (M = 104.33, SD = 17.02), followed by first-born respondents (M = 93.17, SD = 16.94). The only-child group recorded the lowest mean score (M = 80.67, SD = 7.57). The results indicate a descriptive variation in GRBS scores across the three ordinal-position groups. However, the only-child group consisted of only three respondents; therefore, its mean should be interpreted with caution.

Table 4 : GRBS according to ordinal position

Ordinal position	N	Mean	SD
Only child	3	80.67	7.57
First-born	12	93.17	16.94
Second-born	15	104.33	17.02

Table 5 presents the results of the one-way analysis of variance conducted to examine whether GRBS scores differed significantly according to ordinal position. The analysis showed that the differences in mean GRBS scores among only children, first-born, and second-born respondents were not statistically significant, $F(2, 27) = 3.273$, $p = 0.053$. Although the obtained p-value was close to the 0.05 level, it did not reach the conventional level of statistical significance. Therefore, ordinal position did not significantly influence GRBS scores in the present sample.

Table 6 presents the correlation between age and

Table 5 : One-way ANOVA: Ordinal position x GRBS

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between groups	1856.50	2	928.25	3.273	0.053
Within groups	7660.00	27	283.70		
Total	9516.50	29			

Gender Role Belief Scale scores. Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a very weak negative relationship between age and GRBS scores ($r = –.107$, $p = .574$). This indicates that as age increased, GRBS scores showed a very slight tendency to decrease. However, the relationship was not statistically significant ($p > .05$). Therefore, age was not significantly related to gender role belief scores among the respondents in the present study.

Table 6 : Correlation between age and GRBS

Variables	r	p
Age and GRBS	–0.107	0.574

The results indicate that there was no statistically significant association between gender role belief scores and father's occupation, $F = 0.156$, $p = 0.958$. Although the mean GRBS scores varied slightly across occupational groups, the differences were not statistically significant. Similarly, mother's occupation was not significantly associated with gender role belief scores, $F = 1.495$, $p = 0.242$. Participants whose mothers were homemakers had a mean GRBS score of 99.72, while those whose mothers were in government service had a lower mean score of 83.50. However, this difference did not reach statistical significance. There was also no statistically significant association between caste and gender role belief scores, $F = 1.069$, $p = 0.379$. The highest mean score was observed among participants belonging to the ST category (111.00), followed by OBC (101.71), General (95.78), and SC (88.00). However, the ST group consisted of only one participant, so this value should be interpreted cautiously.

Conclusion

The present study was undertaken to understand gender role beliefs among young adults and to see how these beliefs are related to selected factors such as gender, age, parental occupation, caste, and ordinal position in the family. The findings show that people may hold different views about the roles and responsibilities of men and women, and these views are shaped by the social and family environment in which they grow up.

The family plays an important role in developing

Table 7: Association between GRBS scores and selected family/social characteristics

Variable	Category	n	Mean ± SD	F-value	p-value
Father's occupation	Government service	13	95.77 ± 18.19	0.156	0.958
	Farmer	8	100.38 ± 17.94		
	Business	6	101.33 ± 19.13		
	Priest	1	104.00 ± —		
	Private employee	1	96.00 ± —		
Mother's occupation	Housewife	25	99.72 ± 17.47	1.495	0.242
	Government service	4	83.50 ± 17.02		
	Farmer	1	98.00 ± —		
Caste	General	9	95.78 ± 19.30	1.069	0.379
	OBC	14	101.71 ± 18.15		
	SC	6	88.00 ± 12.98		
	ST	1	111.00 ± —		

gender-related beliefs. From childhood, individuals observe how responsibilities are divided at home, how parents behave towards each other, and what expectations are placed on boys and girls. These experiences can influence the way young people understand and think about gender roles. At the same time, education, peer groups, and changing social environments can also influence these beliefs and may encourage young adults to question traditional expectations.

The study also shows that gender role beliefs are not determined by one factor alone. Different personal and family characteristics can contribute to how individuals view gender roles. As society continues to change, young people are increasingly exposed to ideas of equality, shared responsibilities, and freedom of choice. This can help in developing more flexible and balanced attitudes towards the roles of men and women.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of creating an environment where individuals are not restricted by traditional gender expectations. Families and educational institutions can play an important role by encouraging equal opportunities, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities among boys and girls. Promoting such attitudes from an early age can contribute to a more equal and inclusive society where individuals are free to choose their roles based on their abilities and interests rather than their gender.

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