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Gender Differences in Gender Socialization and Gender Role Attitudes among Postgraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

The current research sought to explore how gender socialization and gender role attitudes are shaped among postgraduate students, and to identify differences between genders in various aspects of gender socialization. The study utilized a quantitative comparative approach. It included 30 postgraduate students, with 15 male and 15 female participants. Data were gathered using a modified version of the Gender Socialization Scale, which consisted of nine categories: Traditional Gender Roles, Acceptant and Egalitarian, Nice and Pleasant, Anti-Gay Attitude, Big and Tough, Body Consciousness, Sexual Double Standard, Abstinence, and Sex Positive attitudes. The data was analyzed using measures such as mean, standard deviation, and independent-samples t-test, with statistical significance set at the 0.05 level. The results showed significant gender differences in six out of the nine dimensions. Male students demonstrated significantly higher scores in Traditional Gender Roles, Nice and Pleasant, Anti-Gay Attitude, and Big and Tough, while female students had significantly higher scores in Acceptant and Egalitarian and Sexual Double Standard. No significant differences were found in Body Consciousness, Abstinence, and Sex Positive attitudes. The results suggest that both traditional and more accepting gender attitudes are present among postgraduate students, with notable gender differences still present in several areas of gender socialization. The research highlights the need to encourage gender-sensitive and egalitarian viewpoints in higher education environments.

Keywords: Gender Socialization, Gender role attitudes, Gender differences, Egalitarian attitudes, Postgraduate

INTRODUCTION

Gender is not only a biological distinction but is also shaped by social and cultural expectations regarding how males and females are expected to behave, think and perform different roles. Gender socialization refers to the process through which individuals learn these gender-related expectations, values and behaviours from family, peers, educational institutions, media and the wider society. This process begins early in life and continues across the life span, influencing perceptions of masculinity, femininity, relationships, responsibilities and social roles.

An important outcome of gender socialization is the development of gender role attitudes, which represent individuals' beliefs regarding appropriate roles and responsibilities of men and women. These attitudes may range from traditional orientations, which support clearly differentiated roles for males and females, to egalitarian orientations, which emphasize equality, shared responsibilities and freedom from rigid gender expectations. Although social and educational changes have contributed to greater acceptance of gender equality, traditional gender norms continue to influence attitudes and behaviour in many areas of everyday life.

Emerging adulthood and the postgraduate period are particularly important for understanding gender role attitudes. During this stage, young adults experience greater independence, higher education, changing peer relationships and preparation for employment, marriage and family responsibilities. Exposure to diverse ideas and social experiences may encourage more egalitarian attitudes; however, beliefs acquired through earlier family

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and cultural socialization may continue to influence their perceptions of gender roles.

Previous research among college and university students has generally indicated a movement towards more egalitarian gender role attitudes, while also demonstrating differences between males and females. Female students have frequently been found to express more egalitarian and less traditional attitudes than male students. These differences suggest that higher education alone may not completely eliminate the influence of gender socialization and that traditional and egalitarian beliefs can coexist among educated young adults.

Gender socialization is also multidimensional and extends beyond general beliefs about male and female roles. It may involve expectations related to toughness, socially acceptable behaviour, body image, sexuality, relationships and equality. Examining these different dimensions can therefore provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gender-related beliefs are expressed among young adults.

In the Indian context, rapid social change, increased educational opportunities and greater emphasis on gender equality coexist with established cultural expectations regarding gender. Understanding the attitudes of postgraduate students is particularly relevant because they represent an educated group preparing to enter professional, marital and family roles. Hence, the present study was undertaken to examine gender socialization and gender role attitudes among postgraduate students and to compare their different dimensions between male and female students. The findings may contribute to understanding contemporary gender attitudes among educated young adults and highlight areas where gender-sensitive educational efforts may be beneficial.

Review of Literature

Spence and Hahn (1997) examined changes in gender role attitudes among college students using the Attitudes Toward Women Scale. The findings indicated a gradual shift towards more egalitarian attitudes across different cohorts. However, female students consistently expressed less traditional gender role attitudes than male students, suggesting that gender differences continued to exist despite changing social attitudes.

Bryant (2003) investigated changes in gender role traditionalism among college students over four years of higher education. The study found that students generally became less traditional during their college years. Female students, however, demonstrated more egalitarian attitudes than male students both at the beginning and later stages of college. Educational experiences, peer interactions and exposure to diverse perspectives were associated with changes in gender role attitudes.

Frieze *et al.* (2003) studied gender role attitudes among university students in the United States, Slovenia and Croatia. The findings showed that male students generally expressed less egalitarian and more traditional or sexist attitudes than female students. The study demonstrated that gender differences in attitudes towards the roles of men and women can persist across different cultural contexts.

Nath *et al.* (2023) examined gender role attitudes among 200 university students at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India. The findings revealed that a substantial proportion of students held egalitarian or transitional gender role attitudes. Female students showed a greater tendency towards egalitarian attitudes than male students, highlighting continuing gender differences even among educated young adults.

Research Gap

The available literature indicates a gradual movement towards egalitarian gender role attitudes among young adults, particularly among female students. However, traditional gender expectations continue to coexist with egalitarian beliefs. Most previous studies have focused broadly on traditional and egalitarian gender role attitudes, while comparatively less attention has been given to examining multiple dimensions of gender socialization among postgraduate students in the Indian context. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to examine different dimensions of gender socialization and gender role attitudes among male and female postgraduate students.

Objectives:

1. To assess the different dimensions of gender socialization and gender role attitude among postgraduate students.
2. To compare gender socialization and gender role attitude between male and female postgraduate students.

Hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis (H_0)

There is no significant difference in the dimensions

of gender socialization and gender role attitude between male and female postgraduate students.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1)

There is a significant difference in the dimensions of gender socialization and gender role attitudes between male and female postgraduate students.

Level of significance:

The hypothesis was tested at the 5 per cent level of significance ($p<0.05$).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted quantitative comparative research design to assess gender socialization and gender role attitudes among postgraduate students. It was intended to compare gender socialization and gender role attitudes of male and female postgraduate students.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, Karnataka. This selection was justified considering the fact that it was easier to get postgraduate students willing to participate in the study from this university, which was needed for accomplishing the study's objectives.

Sample

The pool of participants consisted of thirty postgraduate students (fifteen male and fifteen female). The sample size was justified considering the fact that it would be possible to make the comparison between male and female students. The inclusion of equal number of female and male students enabled the accomplishment of the objective of comparing the gender socialization and gender role attitudes of male and female students.

Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling technique was used based on the ease of recruitment.

Tool Used

Gender Socialization Scale (GSS) was used as a tool for data collection. However, the scale was adapted for the current study. It consisted of 63 items measuring different aspects of gender socialization and gender role attitudes.

Nine dimensions were covered by the items, namely Traditional Gender Roles, Acceptant and Egalitarian, Nice and Pleasant, Anti-Gay Attitude, Big and Tough, Body Consciousness, Sexual Double Standard, Abstinence and Sex Positive attitudes. Each of the items was measured using a four-point Likert-type scale with the options of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree.

Scoring Procedure

For each item, the respondent was supposed to choose one of the four options provided. Subsequently, scores were assigned to the items based on the choices made. In particular, Strongly Disagree corresponded to 1, Disagree to 2, Agree to 3 and Strongly Agree to 4. Then, scores for items corresponding to the same dimension were added up. Thus, the higher the score for an item, the more positive was the attitude towards a certain aspect of gender socialization.

The number of items included and the way of scoring did not match the original GSS. Therefore, the instrument was regarded as an adapted version of GSS used for the current study.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants. The adapted questionnaire was then distributed to postgraduate students, and those who had agreed to participate in the study responded to the questions honestly, providing responses based on their own attitudes and experiences. The participants were able to complete the questionnaires on their own. The completed and returned questionnaires were checked for completion and accuracy and then entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis involved calculation of frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation and independent-samples t-test. Frequencies and percentages were used for descriptive analysis. The mean and standard deviation scores correlation were used to analyze the data related to the gender role attitudes. Next, independent-samples t-test was employed to evaluate differences in the gender role attitudes and gender socialization of male and female students. The null hypotheses were rejected at 5 per cent level of significance ($p < 0.05$).

Ethical considerations

Prior to the data collection, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study. In addition, they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and their consent was obtained. The data were collected for research and academic purposes only.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study examined gender socialization and gender role attitudes among 30 postgraduate students, comprising 15 males and 15 females. The collected data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent-samples t-test and Pearson's correlation coefficient to identify gender differences and relationships among selected dimensions (Table 1).

The study included an equal proportion of male (50.00%) and female (50.00%) postgraduate students, allowing a balanced comparison between the two groups.

Table 1 : Socio-demographic profile of postgraduate students (N = 30)

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	15	50.00
	Female	15	50.00
Age (years)	21–22	12	40.00
	23–24	15	50.00
	25–26	3	10.00
Social category (caste)	General	8	26.67
	OBC	13	43.33
	SC	6	20.00
	ST	3	10.00
Family type	Nuclear	19	63.33
	Joint	8	26.67
	Extended	3	10.00
Place of residence	Rural	17	56.67
	Urban	13	43.33
Religion	Hindu	24	80.00
	Muslim	3	10.00
	Christian	2	6.67
	Other	1	3.33
Monthly family income (Rs.)	Below 25,000	9	30.00
	25,000–50,000	11	36.67
	50,001–1,00,000	7	23.33
	Above 1,00,000	3	10.00
Family size	Up to 4 members	14	46.67
	5–6 members	12	40.00
	7 or more	4	13.33
Mother's employment	Homemaker	18	60.00
	Employed	12	40.00
Year of PG study	First year	16	53.33
	Second year	14	46.67

Table 2 shows that the study included 30 postgraduate students, with equal representation of males and females. Male students constituted 50 per cent (n = 15) and female students constituted 50 per cent (n = 15) of the total sample.

Table 2 : Distribution of postgraduate students according to gender

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	15	50.00
Female	15	50.00
Total	30	100.00

Fig. 1 visually presents the differences in mean scores between male and female postgraduate students. The graph clearly shows the larger gender differences in dimensions such as Traditional Gender Roles and Anti-Gay Attitude, while relatively smaller differences can be observed for dimensions such as Body Consciousness and Sex Positive attitudes.

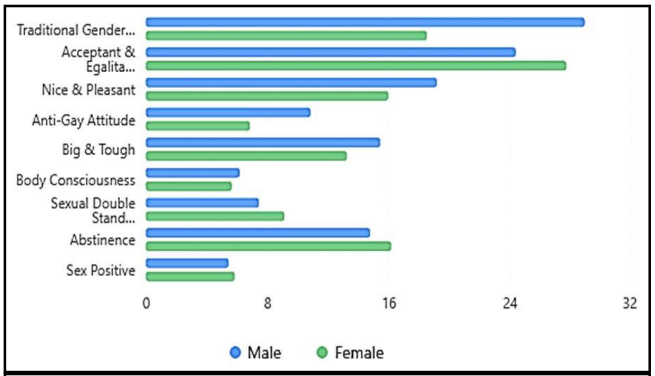

Fig. 1 : Comparison of mean scores of male and female postgraduate students across dimensions of gender socialization

Table 3 indicates noticeable differences in the mean scores of male and female students across several dimensions. Male students recorded higher mean scores for Traditional Gender Roles, Nice and Pleasant, Anti-Gay Attitude, Big and Tough and Body Consciousness. Female students recorded higher mean scores for Acceptant and Egalitarian, Sexual Double Standard, Abstinence and Sex Positive dimensions.

The greatest difference was observed in Traditional Gender Roles, where males obtained a mean score of 28.87 compared with 18.47 among females. Females, however, recorded a higher mean score for Acceptant

Table 3 : Mean and standard deviation of gender socialization dimensions among male and female postgraduate students

Dimensions	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Traditional Gender Roles	28.87	5.88	18.47	3.16
Acceptant and Egalitarian	24.33	4.20	27.67	2.32
Nice and Pleasant	19.13	3.23	15.93	2.05
Anti-Gay Attitude	10.80	2.27	6.80	1.21
Big and Tough	15.40	2.10	13.20	2.27
Body Consciousness	6.13	1.19	5.60	1.50
Sexual Double Standard	7.40	1.35	9.07	1.87
Abstinence	14.73	4.32	16.13	2.47
Sex Positive	5.40	1.76	5.80	1.82

and Egalitarian attitudes (27.67) compared with males (24.33).

Table 4 reveals that six out of the nine dimensions showed statistically significant gender differences. Significant differences were found for Traditional Gender Roles ($p < 0.001$), Acceptant and Egalitarian ($p = 0.013$), Nice and Pleasant ($p = 0.004$), Anti-Gay Attitude ($p < 0.001$), Big and Tough ($p = 0.010$), and Sexual Double Standard ($p = 0.010$).

Table 4 : Gender differences in dimensions of gender socialization among postgraduate students

Dimensions	t-value	p-value	Inference
Traditional Gender Roles	6.04	<0.001	Significant
Acceptant and Egalitarian	–2.69	0.013	Significant
Nice and Pleasant	3.24	0.004	Significant
Anti-Gay Attitude	6.02	<0.001	Significant
Big and Tough	2.75	0.010	Significant
Body Consciousness	1.08	0.290	NS
Sexual Double Standard	–2.80	0.010	Significant
Abstinence	–1.09	0.288	NS
Sex Positive	–0.61	0.546	NS

Note: Significant at $p < 0.05$; NS = Not Significant.

No statistically significant gender differences were observed for Body Consciousness ($p = 0.290$), Abstinence ($p = 0.288$), and Sex Positive attitudes ($p = 0.546$).

Overall, the results indicate that male and female postgraduate students differed significantly on several dimensions of gender socialization. Males obtained significantly higher scores on Traditional Gender Roles, Nice and Pleasant, Anti-Gay Attitude and Big and Tough, whereas females obtained significantly higher scores on Acceptant and Egalitarian and Sexual Double Standard. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected for six dimensions and was not rejected for the remaining three dimensions.

Table 5 Pearson's correlation analysis indicated a significant negative relationship between Traditional Gender Roles and Acceptant and Egalitarian attitudes ($r = –0.691$), suggesting that higher endorsement of traditional gender roles was associated with lower endorsement of egalitarian attitudes.

Table 5 : Correlation among dimensions of gender socialization

Sr. No.	Variables Correlated	Pearson's r	Inference
1.	Traditional Gender Roles and Acceptant and Egalitarian	-0.691	Significant
2.	Traditional Gender Roles and Big and Tough	0.439	Significant
3.	Traditional Gender Roles and Anti-Gay Attitude	0.405	Significant
4.	Acceptant and Egalitarian and Sexual Double Standard	0.153	Not Significant
5.	Nice & Pleasant and Traditional Gender Roles	0.775	Significant

Traditional Gender Roles showed significant positive relationships with Nice and Pleasant ($r = 0.775$), Big and Tough ($r = 0.439$) and Anti-Gay Attitude ($r = 0.405$). However, the relationship between Acceptant and Egalitarian attitudes and Sexual Double Standard was not statistically significant ($r = 0.153$).

Overall, the findings indicate that several dimensions of gender socialization were significantly associated with one another, while others showed relatively independent patterns.

The present study revealed significant gender differences in several dimensions of gender socialization and gender role attitudes among postgraduate students. The findings suggest that traditional and egalitarian gender beliefs continue to coexist among educated young adults, reflecting the influence of social and cultural expectations alongside changing perspectives on gender equality.

Male students demonstrated significantly higher scores on Traditional Gender Roles, whereas female students recorded higher scores on Acceptant and Egalitarian attitudes. This suggests that males in the present sample were more likely to endorse conventional gender-role expectations, while females expressed comparatively greater support for gender equality and shared responsibilities. These findings are consistent with Spence and Hahn (1997), Bryant (2003), Frieze *et al.* (2003), and Nath *et al.* (2023), who reported that female

students generally expressed more egalitarian gender-role attitudes than their male counterparts.

Significant gender differences were also observed in Nice and Pleasant, Anti-Gay Attitude and Big and Tough dimensions, with male students obtaining higher scores. These differences may reflect gender-related expectations concerning behaviour, emotional expression, toughness and sexuality that develop through family interactions, peer relationships and broader sociocultural influences. The significant difference in Sexual Double Standard further indicates that male and female students differed in their responses to expectations concerning sexual behaviour. However, the interpretation of this dimension requires caution because the study used an adapted questionnaire.

The correlation findings provide additional insight into the relationships among gender-socialization dimensions. The significant negative relationship between Traditional Gender Roles and Acceptant and Egalitarian attitudes suggests that students who expressed stronger traditional gender-role beliefs tended to demonstrate lower egalitarian attitude scores. Furthermore, the positive relationships of Traditional Gender Roles with Nice and Pleasant, Big and Tough and Anti-Gay Attitude suggest that conventional gender-role beliefs were associated with other gender-related behavioural and social expectations.

Interestingly, no significant relationship was observed between Acceptant and Egalitarian attitudes and Sexual Double Standard. This may indicate that endorsement of gender equality does not necessarily correspond uniformly with responses concerning sexual norms. Similarly, the absence of significant gender differences in Body Consciousness, Abstinence and Sex Positive attitudes suggests that certain aspects of gender socialization may be relatively similar among male and female postgraduate students.

Overall, the findings highlight the multidimensional nature of gender socialization. While higher education may expose young adults to progressive perspectives, traditional beliefs and socially learned expectations may continue to shape their attitudes. The findings emphasize the relevance of gender-sensitive educational initiatives that encourage equality, mutual respect and critical reflection on gender stereotypes.

The results should be interpreted cautiously because the study involved a small sample of 30 postgraduate students and an adapted questionnaire. Furthermore, the observed correlations indicate associations rather than causal relationships.

Conclusion

The present study concluded that gender socialization and gender role attitudes differed significantly between male and female postgraduate students in six of the nine dimensions examined. Male students generally recorded higher scores on Traditional Gender Roles, Nice and Pleasant, Anti-Gay Attitude and Big and Tough, whereas female students demonstrated higher scores on Acceptant and Egalitarian attitudes and Sexual Double Standard.

Correlation analysis further revealed that Traditional Gender Roles were negatively associated with egalitarian attitudes and positively associated with several other dimensions of gender socialization. These findings suggest that gender-related beliefs are interconnected and that traditional and egalitarian attitudes may coexist among postgraduate students.

The study highlights the continuing influence of gender socialization on the attitudes of educated young adults and emphasizes the importance of promoting gender equality, shared responsibilities and freedom from rigid gender stereotypes through educational programmes and awareness initiatives. Further research involving larger and more diverse samples and validated assessment tools is recommended to develop a more comprehensive understanding of gender socialization among young adults.

Recommendations

- Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:
- Gender-sensitization programmes may be organized in higher educational institutions to promote more equitable attitudes among students.
- Workshops and discussions can address traditional gender stereotypes, masculinity norms, equality and respectful interpersonal relationships.
- Gender equality concepts may be incorporated into student orientation programmes, seminars and extracurricular activities.
- Educational institutions can provide opportunities for open and respectful discussion of changing gender roles and social expectations.
- Future studies should include larger and more

diverse samples from different universities and sociocultural backgrounds.

- Future research may examine factors such as family background, media exposure, peer influence and educational experiences in relation to gender-role attitudes.

Limitations

The study was limited to a small sample of 30 postgraduate students, with 15 males and 15 females. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the wider population of postgraduate students. The study was also based on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by social desirability. In addition, an adapted version of the Gender Socialization Scale was used; therefore, findings relating to individual dimensions should be interpreted within the context of the present study.

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