



## Gender Differences in Attitude of University Students towards Gender Roles

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### ABSTRACT

Gender role attitude has gained considerable attention over the past three decades as the concern of society shifts from male dominance to the liberation of the female sex. This attitude of a country's population helps in explaining deep-rooted gender sensitivity in its society. The present research was carried out purposively in Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab, India in the year 2021-22 on 200 purposively selected students throwing light on the gender role attitude of University students. Primary data was collected using a structured pre-tested questionnaire. Findings revealed that half of the respondents had an egalitarian gender role attitude followed by 40.50 per cent who had a transitional attitude. The majority of the female students had an egalitarian attitude whereas half of the male respondents had a transitional attitude. This gap in gender role attitude can be expected because of the male-dominated and patriarchal nature of Indian society. It is suggested that parents should be sensitized to teach their sons to share responsibilities irrespective of gender role norms and also more emphasis should be laid on gender empowerment.

### INTRODUCTION

Gender refers to the beliefs people hold on regarding the appropriate role played by men and women in meeting work and family responsibilities (Bird et al., 1984) or a typical concept of acceptable conduct for men and women (Braun et al., 2008). Gender is not a predetermined state, according to Connell & Messerschmidt (2005), it is a condition that is always under construction. Gender role attitude are people's beliefs about the appropriate roles and obligations of women and men (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998). There are two main approaches of social gender roles: traditional approach and egalitarian approach. Within the framework of traditional gender roles, women are expected to take care of the home and refrain from engaging in business activities, while males are supposed to take care of his duties like earning a living and managing the household. However, within the egalitarian roles, men and women equally share the duties for family, career,

marriage, social life, and academics (Esen et al., 2017). However, another approach towards gender role attitude was identified by Hegelson (2012) and Hochschild & Machung (1989) which has been named as transitional attitude towards gender role. It is the attitude carried by the people who are changing their attitude from traditional towards egalitarian. It is that attitude on gender roles which makes it acceptable for women to dedicate time to both work and family responsibilities.

With an average annual GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth rate of 5.8 per cent over the past two decades, this nation's economic and social position has undergone a significant change. Socially, it has not advanced as quickly; Indian society is still patriarchal, meaning that men dominate in positions of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and property ownership. India is ranked 130<sup>th</sup> in terms of human development and 127<sup>th</sup> in terms of gender inequality index (HDR, 2022). In India, it can still be claimed that women are restricted to the

private sphere while men lead a “public life” and decide upon the distribution of wealth and power. In order to promote gender equality, it is necessary to understand people’s attitude and reasoning regarding gender roles. Youth are the future of any society. Training and sensitizing the young minds about egalitarian gender roles will contribute in slashing the prevailing gender stereotypes from the society as well as development towards gender equality. Thus, the present study was conducted to analyze gender differences in the attitude of university students towards gender roles.

### METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ludhiana city of Punjab state, India in the year 2021-22. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used for the current study. The students of Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana who belonged to Punjab state were purposively selected for the study in order to control the effect of culture on the attitude of university students. Hundred male and 100 female students were randomly selected for the study. Thus, the sample size consisted of 200 students. Survey research design was used for the present study and it is based on primary data. The data for the current study was collected personally from the respondents with the help of a pre-tested structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 45 statements to determine the egalitarian v/s traditional attitude of youth towards gender roles. The statements were related to productive, reproductive, household and community services roles and political roles. According to United Nations Productive role was referred to the role performed by the individuals that contribute to the income and economic welfare and advancement of the household and community, Reproductive role is the function that people carry out in order to procreate and take care of the family and its members. The term “household and community roles” refers to the everyday tasks that must be completed to suit the requirements of the family and the community, such as cleaning, education, health care, elderly care, and food processing and preparation. Political role is the term used to describe a person’s involvement in both formal and informal political activities as well as their work with development organizations (Mensh, 2023). The responses were sought on 5 point continuum ranging from strongly

agree to not at all agree. For each of the gender role, the responses were further categorized into traditional, transitional and egalitarian attitude on the basis of category interval method. The data was analyzed using different statistical techniques such as frequency, percentage, mean scores and Z test for group mean differences.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Gender wise mean difference of agreement of respondents towards productive roles

The findings in Table 1 shows that a significant difference ( $z=5.31, p<0.01$ ) was observed between females and males for the statement “I prefer that men should earn and women should take care of the family” in which female’s disagreement ( $\bar{x}=1.81$ ) was found to be more than males ( $\bar{x}=2.96$ ). Again, a significant difference ( $z=6.29, p<0.01$ ) was found between the agreement level of males and females in which majority of men agreed ( $\bar{x}=4.04$ ) and females disagreed ( $\bar{x}=2.71$ ) to prefer a field job as compared to an office job.

Table 1 reveals that a majority of the females disagreed ( $\bar{x}=2.33$ ) whereas males agreed ( $\bar{x}=3.95$ ) to prefer to be married to someone who makes more money than them. A significant difference ( $z=4.70, p<0.01$ ) was also observed for the statement “I believe that financial purchases and investments is the job of male members” where majority of the females disagreed with mean score of 1.97 and males disagreed with mean score of 2.95. While no significant difference was found between agreement of male and female respondents for rest of the productive gender role attitude statements. Both males and females were in agreement with equal job opportunities, salary and financial responsibilities for family. Thus, the youth has agreement with equal productive roles irrespective of gender. Duval (2023) also found no gender difference in attitudes and revealed that on an average men and women had egalitarian gender role attitudes.

#### Gender wise mean difference of agreement of respondents towards reproductive roles

Similarly, Table 2 reveals that a significant difference ( $z=4.01, p<0.01$ ) was found between females and males for the statement “I consider a woman more precious if she delivers a

**Table 1.** Gender wise mean difference of agreement of respondents towards productive roles

S.No.	Productive roles	Female (Mean score)	Male (Mean score)	z- value
1	I prefer that men should earn and women should take care of the family.	1.81	2.96	5.31**
2	I would prefer a field job as compared to an office job	2.71	4.04	6.29**
3	I would prefer to be married to someone who makes more money than me.	2.33	3.95	7.61**
4	I would prefer a male boss than a female boss at workplace.	2.38	2.58	0.95
5	I believe that financial purchases and investments is the job of male members.	1.97	2.95	4.70**
6	I prefer father/ husband should decide on how to use family income.	2.55	2.90	1.81
7	I believe that there is no need of special quotas for women in government jobs.	3.09	3.43	1.72
8	I believe that equal salary should be paid to the women and men for the same position/quantum of work.	4.47	4.46	0.06
9	I would prefer female member to do job even if the economic situation of the family is adequate.	4.44	4.34	0.62
10	I believe that the man is not only responsible for sustaining the family financially.	4.64	4.51	1.08

Mean score range 1-5; \*\*1% level of significance; \*5% level of significance

**Table 2.** Gender wise mean difference of agreement of respondents towards reproductive roles

S.No.	Productive roles	Female (Mean score)	Male (Mean score)	z- value
1	I consider a woman more precious if she delivers a boy.	1.74	2.62	4.01**
2	I would prefer husband to decide the place of delivery of the child.	2.00	2.56	1.61
3	I would prefer husband to decide about when to have a child after marriage.	1.99	2.60	2.80*
4	I would prefer husband and in-laws to decide about the type of food and medicine to be given to wife during her pregnancy.	2.11	2.94	3.90*
5	I would prefer husband and in-laws to decide the number of visits to doctor and ultrasounds during wife's pregnancy.	2.00	2.55	1.88**
6	I would prefer wife to decide than other members of the family about the preference of the health provider during her pregnancy.	3.95	3.83	0.33
7	I would prefer that wife along with husband should jointly decide on the time interval between consecutive children.	4.07	4.39	1.59
8	I would prefer wife and husband to jointly decide the number of children.	4.36	4.44	1.23

Mean score range 1-5; \*\*1% level of significance; \*5% level of significance

boy" in which females' mean score indicates more disagreement ( $\bar{x}=1.74$ ) than males ( $\bar{x}=2.62$ ). More females disagreed ( $\bar{x}=1.99$ ) to prefer husband to decide when to have a child after marriage than male respondents ( $\bar{x}=2.60$ ) with a significant difference ( $z=2.80$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Again, a significant difference ( $z=3.90$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) was observed between females and males when asked whether they would prefer husband and in-laws to decide about the type of food and medicine to be given to wife during her pregnancy for which more females disagreed with a mean score of 2.11 than males with a mean score of 2.94.

More females disagreed ( $\bar{x}=2.00$ ) than males ( $\bar{x}=2.55$ ) to prefer husband and in-laws to decide about the number of visits to doctor and ultrasounds during wife's pregnancy. Thus it can be concluded that both male and female respondents agreed on joint responsibility of both the genders towards reproductive roles. Both disagreed that control over choice of food, medicine and health provider should be with husband and in-laws. Although almost for all statements related to reproductive roles, more female respondents disagreed than male respondents.

#### **Difference of agreement of respondents towards household and community roles**

Table 3 shows that with a mean score of 2.56 females disagreed when asked that females should be responsible for cleanliness and order of the house whereas males showed neutral responses with a mean score of 3.18 and a significant difference ( $z=3.24$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) was found between females and males. Females agreed ( $\bar{x}=3.47$ ) whereas males gave neutral responses ( $\bar{x}=3.04$ ) for preference that men must perform tasks outside the home with a significant difference ( $z=1.95$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Interestingly, more males ( $\bar{x}=4.13$ ) agreed than females ( $\bar{x}=3.52$ ) for the preference that husband should stay at home with the child/children when they are ill with a significant difference ( $z=4.18$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, a significant difference ( $z=7.62$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) was found between females and males for preference that man should pay for the taxi, buy tickets or pay the bill in which females disagreed ( $\bar{x}=1.99$ ) while males agreed ( $\bar{x}=3.56$ ). Males' agreement could be the impact of social etiquettes learnt during the process of socialization. Although, this etiquette is decreasing in youngster's day by day.

Again, a significant difference ( $z=2.97$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) was found between females and males to the statement that "I believe that men should give up their seat to women on the train or bus" with a mean score of 2.73 and 3.30 for females and males respectively stating disagreement among females while neutral attitude of males. Whereas females' agreement ( $\bar{x}=4.80$ ) was found to be more than males' ( $\bar{x}=4.56$ ) for the statement "I believe that daughters should have equal authority over the inherited property and money" with a significant difference ( $z=2.11$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) between them. Thus, it can be concluded that youth wants to share the equal responsibility towards household and community roles. Primarily, the tasks like taking care of children, cooking, serving food were considered the responsibilities of females, now young males also want to participate in. In a study by Yadav et al., (2021), it was found that 84.2 per cent of the males had access to land, in comparison to 8.3 per cent females and only 7.5 per cent of both men and women had joint access to the property. The reason for this was because the head of the family was men, patriarchal system of society allows them access and control to property. Also, in the same study, it was reported that 50 per cent access to the cash was held jointly by both men and women, followed by 43.3 per cent of the men, whereas only 6.2 per cent of women alone had access to the money.

#### **Gender wise mean difference of agreement of respondents towards political roles**

The Table 4 reveals that a significant difference ( $z=3.33$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) between males and females was found where majority of the females strongly ( $\bar{x}=4.46$ ) believed that women are more likely to report their problems and participate actively if the leader of their village is a woman while as compared to less males' agreement ( $\bar{x}=3.41$ ). Findings from another study revealed that half of the women faced the issue of being doubted regarding their capabilities in the political sector and more than 55 per cent women accepted that they were never supported by their family to get in politics (Awasthi et al., 2020). The findings conclude that both males and females need to be sensitized for political roles in order to increase participation of women in political sphere. On the contrary, a significant difference ( $z=2.99$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) was found between females

**Table 3.** Gender wise mean difference of agreement of respondents towards household and community roles

S.No.	Household and community roles	Female (Mean score)	Male (Mean score)	z- value
1	I believe that female should be responsible for cleanliness and order of the house.	2.56	3.18	3.24**
2	I prefer that men must perform tasks outside the home.	3.47	3.04	1.95
3	I would prefer husband to stay at home with the child/children when they are ill.	3.52	4.13	4.18**
4	I believe that fathers should decide about the upbringing of children.	2.42	2.57	0.74
5	I believe that male members of the family should be fed first.	1.86	1.59	1.32
6	I would prefer the man to pay for the taxi, buy tickets or pay the bill.	1.99	3.56	7.62**
7	I believe that men should give up their seat to women on the train or bus.	2.73	3.30	2.97**
8	I believe that girls should learn cooking from a young age.	2.39	2.66	1.31
9	I believe that cooking and serving food suits women better.	2.00	2.10	1.01
10	I don't find it wrong if a woman tolerates violence in order to keep her family together.	1.81	1.92	1.29
11	I believe that women are better care givers than men.	3.13	3.55	1.26
12	I believe that male members should be given preference of choice in food than females.	2.14	2.73	2.65**
13	I believe that families should spend equally on the education of daughters and sons.	4.50	4.63	0.97
14	I believe that domestic work should be shared equally between spouses in the family.	4.33	4.55	1.68
15	I believe that female member's opinions are valuable & should be considered for household decision making.	4.58	4.64	0.48
16	I believe that daughters should have equal authority over the inherited property and money.	4.80	4.56	2.11**
17	I would prefer husband to participate in child rearing & household chores rather than leaving it all to the wife.	4.38	4.46	1.03
18	I would prefer husband to not take decisions regarding wife's life.	4.03	3.72	1.68

Mean score range 1-5; \*\*1% level of significance; \*5% level of significance

**Table 4.** Gender wise mean difference of agreement of respondents towards political roles

S.No.	Political role	Female (Mean score)	Male (Mean score)	z- value
1	I believe that women have less knowledge about politics than men.	3.35	3.00	1.72
2	I believe that irrespective of gender both male and female political leaders can have strong personalities.	3.80	3.78	0.08
3	I believe that female leaders are less corrupt.	3.12	3.26	0.70
4	I believe that the woman should have the power to vote according to her own choice.	4.12	4.08	1.19
5	I believe that women are more likely to report their problems and participate actively if the leader of their village is a woman.	4.46	3.41	3.33**
6	I believe that there is a need to increase number of females in political positions.	4.04	3.98	0.34
7	I believe that female political representatives in local government are merely a front for their male relatives.	4.15	4.65	2.99*
8	I believe that there should be equal numbers of men and women in positions of political power.	4.30	4.09	1.40
9	I believe that higher number of women in parliament leads to stronger attention to women's issues.	3.22	3.11	1.58

Mean score range 1-5; \*\*1% level of significance; \*5% level of significance

and males in which males strongly agreed with a mean score of 4.65 against females' mean score of 4.15 that female political representatives in local government are merely a front for their male relatives. Overall results show that except for two statements in the political role category, females' and males' attitudes are similar regarding political roles. It can be concluded that both male and female respondents, agreed for equal participation of men and women in politics.

#### Attitude of the respondents towards different gender roles

Based upon the responses, the respondents were distributed among three categories such as traditional, transitional and egalitarian. Attitude of respondents towards each of the gender roles are represented in Table 5. The productive gender role scale consisted of ten statements with score range of 10-50. Table 5 depicts that more than half of the respondents (56.00%) were found to have egalitarian attitude towards productive roles. Three

fourth of the female respondents (75.00%) had egalitarian attitude compared to around one third of the males (37.00%) while more than half of the males (54.00%) had transitional attitude. The transitional attitude in males compared to the egalitarian attitude in females can be understood by their responses towards productive roles wherein more females and fewer males disagreed that men should earn while women should take care of the family and also financial purchases and investments being the job of male members. Ana Raj et al., (2022) also pointed out in their study that decision making power of females was limited as compared to males.

Similarly, the reproductive gender role category consisted of eight statements with scores ranging from 8 to 40. The results revealed that majority (59.50%) of the respondents had egalitarian attitude towards reproductive gender roles out of which females constituted 66 per cent and males constituted 53 per cent. More females having egalitarian attitude towards reproductive roles can be justified from their responses where females disagreed to prefer

**Table 5.** Attitude of the respondents towards different gender role

Attitude category	Score range	Female (n=100) (%)	Male (n=100) (%)	Total (n=200)	
				Frequency	Percentage
<b>Productive roles</b>					
Traditional	10-23.3	5.00	9.00	14	7.00
Transitional	23.4-36.6	20.00	54.00	74	37.00
Egalitarian	36.7-50	75.00	37.00	112	56.00
<b>Reproductive roles</b>					
Traditional	8-18.7	4.00	8.00	12	6.00
Transitional	18.8-29.4	30.00	39.00	69	34.50
Egalitarian	29.5-40	66.00	53.00	119	59.50
<b>Household roles</b>					
Traditional	18-42	2.00	4.00	6	3.00
Transitional	43-66	30.00	55.00	85	42.50
Egalitarian	67-90	68.00	41.00	109	54.50
<b>Political roles</b>					
Traditional	9-21	4.00	4.00	9	4.50
Transitional	22-33	49.00	50.00	99	49.50
Egalitarian	34-45	47.00	46.00	93	46.50
<b>Overall gender roles</b>					
Traditional	45-105	5.00	13.00	18	9.00
Transitional	106-165	29.00	52.00	81	40.50
Egalitarian	166-225	66.00	35.00	101	50.50

husband and in-laws to decide about the food, medicine, place of delivery during pregnancy than males. The household and community roles category, eighteen statements with a score range of 18-90 were considered. Percentage of total respondents who supported egalitarianism was found out to be 54.50 per cent respondents, among which majority were females with 68 per cent while around half of the male respondents (55.00%) had transitional gender attitude. This is reflected from their responses wherein more females and fewer males disagreed that females were responsible for order and cleanliness of the house and also males to be given preference of choice in food. Also, their attitude can be justified from some responses where females agreed more than males for daughters having equal authority over inherited property and husbands not taking decisions regarding wife's life. This finding might be due to the fact that in the Indian context, society is still in the process of evolving to embrace women's employment in the public sector, and women still face significant challenges in balancing their professional and personal lives (Nglube, 2018). Although the government today supports working of women by providing facilities like childcare centres, flexible work schedules and maternity leave, etc. However, strongly embedded gendered ideology may be a part of the explanation for why males are still in the transitional stage when it comes to family and community gender responsibilities, such as caring for children, cooking, and helping with housework. Previous literature also reported that men have not made as much progress as women in adopting the egalitarian gender roles (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Literature also proves that egalitarian gender role attitudes are associated with a more gender-egalitarian division of household chores (Shelton & John, 1996). Contrary to this, another study finding from other European countries (Anderson & Johnson, 2002; Fortin, 2005) pointed out that both men and women show rather traditional

attitudes when it comes to the domestic sphere. The political role comprised of nine statements with a score range of 9-21. A large proportion of respondents (49.50%) in this category endorse transitional gender roles which comprised of 50.00 per cent males and 49.00 per cent females. The transitional attitude of both females and males towards political roles can be justified from their neutral opinion and not disagreement towards female leaders being less corrupt and also for women having less knowledge about politics than men. It has also been proven that egalitarian gender role attitudes are associated with a higher civic participation i.e. participation in various formal and informal activities including voting, volunteering, participating in group and community activities by people (Inglehart et al., 2003).

The overall gender role category was calculated on the basis of the entire different gender role categories. Overall, half of the respondents (50.50%) had egalitarian gender role attitude. More females had egalitarian attitude towards gender roles (66%) than males (35%) whereas more number of males (52%) had transitional attitude compared to the females (29%). This is in line with the study of Twenge (1997) who stated women exhibited significantly higher egalitarian gender role attitude than men. Also, female students were found to have a more egalitarian perspective of gender roles than male students in a study done to determine attitude about gender roles of university students in Turkey (Baykal, 1988).

## CONCLUSION

Majority of the total respondents had egalitarian attitude towards reproductive gender roles out of which females constituted 66 per cent and males constituted 53 per cent. 49.50 per cent endorsed transitional gender role regarding political roles. 50.50 per cent were having egalitarian gender role attitude whereas 40.50 per cent respondents reported transitional attitude and only 9.00

per cent respondents were having traditional attitude. It can be concluded that youth are moving towards egalitarian attitude towards gender roles with equal responsibilities to be shared between both sexes. It is suggested that gender sensitization programmes can be organized to sensitize the University students in order to improve their attitude towards gender roles. Men were found to have more traditional attitude than women in all the categories of gender roles. Thus, it is suggested that parents should be sensitized to teach their sons egalitarian attitude towards gender roles.

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