

Gender Role Attitudes among Married, Working Men and Women in India, and its Relationship with Psychological Distress and Life Satisfaction

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The present study aimed to examine the differences in gender role attitudes among married, working men and women in India aged between 25-40 based on specific demographic variables. It also examined the relationship between gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction. Totally, 154 participants completed the survey form measuring the three variables. Results showed that majority of the participants held an egalitarian gender role attitude. Women, those aged between 25-30 and those who did not have children, were comparatively less traditional in their attitudes. Furthermore, significant correlation was identified between psychological distress and life satisfaction. Results suggest the changing views towards the construct of gender roles in the Indian society, having significant implications from both psychological and social lens. Further studies can be conducted to understand the behavioural translation of these attitudes as multiple situational factors can influence such changing attitudes.

Keywords: Gender, Gender roles, Gender role attitudes, Psychological distress, Patriarchy

Since ages, a lot of stereotypes and duties are attached to men and women in the form of gender roles. Gender roles are the sociocultural expectations and duties that are expected from a person based on the gender assigned to them at birth, which are also supposed to be followed in public and private realms (Tong, 2012). Typical gender roles include women being the caretaker and men as the breadwinner of the family. (Dicke, Safavian & Eccles., 2019). On the basis of gender, different societies across borders developed a patriarchal outlook. India was one among them. According to Catherine J. Nash (2009),

“Patriarchy is a system of relationships, beliefs, and values embedded in political, social, and economic systems that structure gender inequality between men and women.

Attributes seen as “feminine” or pertaining to women are undervalued, while attributes regarded as “masculine” or pertaining to men are privileged.”

There were explicit rules that restricted women’s engagement in areas like education and career development. They were expected to be faithful wives and devout mothers, which restricted women from having any aspirations beyond marriage (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). Overtime, women started accepting their subordinate position and resisted any breakage in the set rules, even if it involved economic and personal hardship. One of the reasons for the resistance was that they associated higher social status with following these social rules and roles. In addition, the old normative ways were slipping away with not much empowering

alternatives (Jackson, 2010). Hence, people became a part of this conditioning process. Although various gender rights movements were initiated, society ingrained these rules as a part of its culture in many implicit ways.

The 19th and the 20th century witnessed the development of technologies that helped women carry out the household work efficiently. However, because gender roles persisted, machine development did not reduce the workload they experienced. On the other hand, there was social and economic growth that changed the nature of the society in terms of the job market. Developments in public education demanded more teachers and the growing industries required more workers. Employers identified that they could hire women workers at lower wages. Hence, in the 1970s, married women began entering the labour force in great number (*History of the Organization of Work - Women in the Workforce* | Britannica, 2023).

However, gender duties have not yet faded away. Rather, women try to fulfill their traditional gender-based duties by simultaneously managing their career. According to an article, Indian women spend almost 352 minutes every day in household work while managing their career, which is 577% more than men. (Tish Sanghera, 2019). The need to perform multiple roles place excessive demand on one's bodily resources, leading to physical and mental health concerns. One such potential mental health issue is distress. Psychological distress is explained as an emotional state associated with stressors that are difficult to deal with for an individual (Arvidsdotter et al., 2016).

Studies have shown positive relationship between dual role engagement and the stress experienced. A quantitative study (Sousa & Ferreira, 2013) conducted to understand the interaction between work-

family conflict, job dissatisfaction and burnout in working women who have children, found that women who identified more with the mother-role identity experienced more work-family conflict than those who didn't. Subsequently, it was also found that women who faced work-family conflict suffered more from burnout and distress than others. Two more qualitative studies conducted in Bangladesh and the United Kingdom gave similar results. Gender roles led to significant stress and burnout among working women because of dual roles, and lack of spouse's support affected the participants' physical and mental wellbeing (Uddin, 2021). Women engaged in more domestic activities than their spouse, affecting their work-life balance. Increased interference of domestic chores and office work caused distress and tension. (Adisa et al., 2021). The problems of dual or multiple roles are related to distress and burnout, causing poor physical health and mental illnesses. A study conducted in Spain to understand the gender differences in the health-related quality of life in caregivers found that women who experienced higher rates of domestic and caregiving burden reported poor quality of physical health, increased rates of depression and anxiety than men. (del Río Lozano et al., 2017).

With sufficient evidence supporting the relationship between adherence to gender roles and stress, there is a possibility to have negative implication in one's quality of life and life satisfaction due to these norms. However, few research studies showed that gender self-stereotyping directly promoted life satisfaction (Li, Liu, Song., 2022). Self-stereotyping is defined as the process by which members belonging to stigmatized social group implant these stereotypes about them into their self-concept (Latrofa, Vaes, Pastore, Cadinu., 2009). Results showed that when people meet the social conditions and ingrain group identity into their self-

perception, their life satisfaction increases. Another study on the similar line found that the relationship between femininity and life satisfaction occurred in women with higher level of interdependence and social relationships, which is considered to be a feminine role (Pilar Matud et al., 2014). A global level research reported that women experienced higher levels of life satisfaction compared to men despite the less favorable conditions they lived in (Joshnloo & Jovanoviæ, 2020). A recent study in India also showed that women are more satisfied than men. It was opposed to what the researchers expected because they took into account the patriarchal outlook of the society which has a negative impact on women (Johri & Anand, 2022).

While adherence to gender roles can have various implications, one's adherence to gender roles is determined by multiple elements, where attitude is one of them (Weissberg, 1965). In addition, multiple demographic factors influence the development of specific gender role attitudes. Literature shows gender as one such element. Because gender roles provide privileged and unprivileged position to people belonging to male or female category respectively, belonging to a specific group and living these roles influence how they see the construct (Çifçi et al., 2022). In general, women are seen to have more egalitarian attitudes than men (Martin et al., 1980). Previous studies also recognize age cohorts as an important factor influencing attitudes (T. Calasanti, 2007). Specially, the life experiences of different cohorts is noted to predict their gender role attitudes in women (Lynott & McCandless, 2000). Apart from gender and age, other demographic components like educational levels, family background and having a working mother also affects the kind of gender role attitude an individual develops (Boehnke, 2011).

Most of the above literatures that speak about gender roles and psychological distress were qualitative, done in the COVID-19 context, and outside the Indian population. In addition, very few studies that has tried to understand gender roles and life satisfaction together. With gender role attitudes seeming to have an association with psychological distress and life satisfaction in other cultural contexts, the first objective of this study is to understand the prevalence of and differences in gender role attitudes in the Indian population. It is important because India was ranked 135 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2022. Out of the four subdivisions that every country was rated on, India was ranked the least in the "health and Survival" component, reflecting the physical and mental health condition in the Indian context (Correspondent, 2022).

The next objective of the study is the determine the relationship between gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction. Understanding gender role attitudes in the Indian population and its relationship with psychological distress and life satisfaction is also necessary from a psychological lens as attitudes is one among many other personal and situational variables that determine behaviour (Weissberg, 1965). Possessing a more egalitarian or traditional gender role attitudes in turn can control the level of dual role engagement in women, determining their physical and mental health, altering their life satisfaction levels. It can provide insight about married working men and women in India who are more vulnerable to dual role engagement. By taking into account the part gender roles play in one's life, appropriate interventions can be developed based on these interactions to promote better physical and wellbeing.

Based on the above cited studies, the author hypothesized the following:

- 1) There is a difference in gender role attitudes between Generation Z (aged

- 25 – 30) and Millennials (aged 31 – 40 in the sample)
- 2) There is a difference in gender role attitudes among men and women
 - 3) There is a difference in gender role attitudes between those who have children and those who do not have children
 - 4) There is no relationship between gender role attitudes and psychological distress
 - 5) There is no relationship between psychological distress and life satisfaction
 - 6) There is no relationship between gender role attitudes and life satisfaction.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted 154 married, working men ($n = 57$) and women ($n = 97$) in India between the age range 25 – 40. Individuals belonging to the age range of 20-40 are in the developmental stage of young adulthood. Two main tasks of this developmental period are creating a career for oneself and starting a family. Also, according to the recent survey report in India, the most common age of getting married was 25 (Mishra, 2022). Hence the lower limit for the sample age was set as 25. Those who were diagnosed with any physical or mental disorder were excluded from the study.

Measures

Gender Role Attitudes Scale (GRAS): The test consists of 20 questions which is answered on a 5-point Likert scale. The first 7 questions measure transcendent attitudes. Here, 1 corresponds to “Strongly disagree” and 5 corresponds to “Strongly agree”. Questions 8 to 20 measures sexist attitudes. Here, 1 corresponds to “Strongly agree” and

5 corresponds to “Strongly disagree”. Higher score represents more egalitarian gender role attitudes (Pérez et al., 2021). It measures the gender role attitudes into three sub areas: family, social interrelations and employment. The scale is highly reliable with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.99 (García-Cueto et al., 2015).

General Health Questionnaire – 12 (GHQ-12): It was developed by Goldberg D and Williams P in the 1970s to screen psychological distress for general practice. It was later adapted to other epidemiological survey research (Elovanio et al., 2020). It has 12 questions which are measured on a 4-point Likert scale. There are 6 positive questions and 6 negative questions. The total score ranges from 0-36, where positive items were marked from 0(always) to 3(never) and negative items were marked from 3(always) to 0(never). A higher score indicates poor health. Its reliability and validity are tested in a variety of populations like China, Malaysia and India. All these studies have shown the scale to be having high reliability and validity (Elovanio et al., 2020; Kashyap & Singh, 2017; Quek et al., 2001). The Indian study conducted in Kanpur showed a Cronbach alpha of 0.784, indicating high reliability (Kashyap & Singh, 2017).

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS): Satisfaction It is a short questionnaire having five statements which is rated on a 7-point scale. The responses range from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. The scores of this scale lie between 5 and 35 where 30-35 indicates highly satisfied, 25-29 shows a high score in satisfaction, 20-24 shows average score, 15 – 19 indicates slightly below average in life satisfaction, 10 – 14 indicates dissatisfaction with life and 5 – 9 shows extreme dissatisfaction with life (Pavot, 2014). SWLS is one of the most highly reliable and valid scales to measure this construct. This scale was also administered on the Indian population (Mumbai) and the

coefficient alpha for the scale ranged from 0.79 to 0.89, indicating high internal consistency. The scale was also found to have good test-retest correlations (Patel & Shetty, 2020).

Procedure

The data reported was collected between May 2023 to July 2023. Snowball sampling was used to collect majority of the data using RedCap online survey forms, and also by sharing it through multiple social media platforms like LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Instagram. The first page of the form consisted of the informed consent form and inclusion criteria for the study, stating that completion of this survey constituted their voluntary participation in the study and that they can withdraw anytime by closing the

browser. The forms were programmed so that those who reported having any physical or mental disability/ disorder were automatically excluded from filling the questionnaires. Participants filled 37 questions in total. It took approximately 8 – 10 minutes to complete the survey.

Data analyses was performed using Jamovi software. Reliability analysis was first done to determine the Cronbach alpha value for the data collected. Descriptive statistics were performed, followed by Independent sample t-tests to compare participants' gender role attitudes based on gender, age and being a parent / not being a parent. Correlation analysis was then conducted to study the relationship between gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction.

Results

Table 1. Descriptives of gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Shapiro-Wilk	
					W	P
Gender role attitudes	154	82.5	85.5	13.12	0.933	<.001
Psychological distress	154	10.8	11.0	5.95	0.979	0.019
Life satisfaction	154	24.7	25.5	6.51	0.973	0.004

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis of the participants in the study. The majority of the participants were female (63%). The mean age of the sample was 32 years. 47% of the participants had children 65% of them lived in a nuclear family. More than 80% of the participants identified from the Southern parts of India. They belonged to diverse working sectors like IT, medicine, banking, working PhD scholars and Chartered Accountants. Participants' scores reflected their greater egalitarian attitude towards gender roles. Overall, they had lower levels of psychological distress and higher levels of life satisfaction. All the three scales showed high reliability with a Cronbach's value of 0.86 for gender role attitudes and

psychological distress, and 0.85 for life satisfaction.

Table 2 represents the independent sample t-test conducted to compare the difference in gender role attitudes based on gender, age, and being a parent/ not being a parent. As mentioned in the alternate hypothesis, Millennials, aged between 31 – 40 in the sample (Mdn = 81.0) held a significantly more traditional gender role attitudes than Generation Z who were between 25 - 30 (Mdn = 89.0), $U = 1761$, $p < .001$, $r_{pb} = 0.40$. Similarly, women comparatively held more egalitarian attitudes (Mdn = 89) than men (Mdn = 78), even though the overall scores of both the groups

were high, $U = 1421$, $p < .001$, $r_{pb} = 0.48$. Scores of participants who were parents (Mdn = 83) showed less egalitarian attitudes than those who did not have children (Mdn = 88), $U = 2782$, $p = 0.015$, $r_{pb} = 0.22$. Because

there were significant difference in the attitude based on gender and being a parent, another t-test was conducted to measure any differences in gender role attitudes between men and women who were parents.

Table 2. Descriptives and Independent sample t-test measuring difference in gender role attitudes based on age, gender and being a parent/ not being a parent

Demographics	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE	Statistic	p	Effect size
Age	25-30	73	86.2	89	14.6	1.709	1761	<0.001***	0.41
	31-40	81	75.59	81	19.87	2.208			
Gender	Male	57	74.4	78	16.06	2.128	1421	<0.001***	0.48
	Female	97	84.3	89	18.61	1.89			
Parent	Yes	73	77.7	83	18.94	2.2162	782	0.015*	0.22
	No	81	83.3	88	17.43	1.936			

Note. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Variables measure difference in gender role attitudes based on the participants' demographics.

Table 3. Descriptives and Independent sample t-test for gender role attitude differences among men and women who have children

Demographics	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE	Statistic	p	Effect size
Gender role attitudes	Men	29	70.62	76	18.69	3.47	343	<0.001***	0.46
	Women	44	82.4	86.5	17.79	2.682			

Note. *** $p < .001$. Variables measure difference in gender role attitudes in men and women who are parents

Table 3 shows the difference in gender role attitudes among those who had children. Here, women held less traditional attitudes than men, $U = 343$, $p < .001$, $r_{pb} = 0.46$.

Table 4. Correlation analysis of gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction

		Gender role attitudes	Psychological distress	Life satisfaction
Gender role attitudes	Spearman's rho	—		
	p-value	—		
Psychological distress	Spearman's rho	0.050	—	
	p-value	0.538	—	
Life satisfaction	Spearman's rho	0.024	-0.526	—
	p-value	0.768	<.001***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Variables measure the correlation between gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction

Table 4 shows the correlational analysis between gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction. Results showed that gender role attitudes were not significantly related to psychological distress ($r = 0.53$, $p > 0.05$) and life satisfaction ($r = 0.76$, $p > 0.05$). Hence, the proposed null hypothesis is not rejected. However, psychological distress was found to have a moderately significant negative relationship with life satisfaction ($r = -0.52$, $p < 0.001$), showing that increase in psychological distress decreased life satisfaction. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion

The study aimed to understand gender role attitudes among married, working men and women in India. Alongside, the correlation between gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction was also determined. Majority of the participants showed an egalitarian attitude towards gender roles. However, significant differences were noted in the same based on one's gender, age and whether they had children.

Overall, both men and women reported greater egalitarian gender role attitudes. This can be explained using exposure-based theory. Individuals adopt such attitudes after being exposed to them through socialization in their network and other people who have progressive ideas about gender roles (Vandecasteele et al., 2022). However, women comparatively showed greater egalitarian attitude than men. It is seen that in societies that are more traditionalist and patriarchal, women's attitude towards gender equality are much more stronger than men (McDaniel, 2008). This can also be explained using cognitive dissonance theory. It states

that people take efforts to avoid discomfort by reducing any discrepancies between their attitude or behaviour by changing one of them in line with the other (Festinger, 1962). Working women are prone to experience increased dissonance when they hold a very traditionalistic view of gender roles which is not necessarily seen in working men (Vandecasteele et al., 2022).

The second important finding was that the gender role attitudes significantly differed between the age groups 25-30 and 30-40. Those in their 20s were seen to have more egalitarian gender role attitudes than those in their 30s. This can be understood through the lens of having a working mother during their growing years. According to a study conducted in East Asia, having a working mother during one's growing years was highly influential in developing an egalitarian attitude towards gender roles (Boehnke, 2011). From the article written using the Periodic Labour Force Survey (Mehta & Pandey, 2020), it can be seen that women's employment rate from 1983 to 1996 showed a slight decrease, which formed the main formative years for people in their 30s currently. But female employment rate can be tracked to be gradually getting higher after the 2000s, which correspond to the main growing years of people in their 20s now. Even though it is just a slight increase in the number of women, the social change and witnessing a model of a working women in one's own family could have played a significant role in their attitude development towards gender roles.

Lastly, it was also noted that people with children have more traditional gender role attitudes when compared to participants without children. Due to increased responsibility in child care and the need to manage work simultaneously, people may choose to resort to traditional gender role attitudes after having a child (Van der Velde, 2022). However, an interesting finding here

was that women in the study held more egalitarian attitudes than men. This was in contrast to the previous studies which identified women to be adapting a traditionalist view than men after child birth (Boehnke, 2011). Traditional arrangements that were applied after having a child due to the institutional patriarchal setting were considered to be the trigger for women to become supportive of such a setup (Grinza et al., 2017). However, the differing result in this study could be due to the strength of egalitarian attitude of women participants in this study. In fact, it seen that in societies that are more traditionalist and patriarchal, women's attitude towards gender equality are much more stronger than men (McDaniel, 2008).

Finally, gender role attitudes was not significantly related to psychological distress or life satisfaction. This can be attributed to the nature of the participants and their gender role attitudes. Most of them held an egalitarian attitude in this aspect and all of their scores were above average. This might also be due to social desirability bias (Edwards, 1957). Hence, presence of a focused attitude towards the main variable measured could be a reason for not having a significant correlation.

Practical implications

Findings from the present study has significant implications from both psychological and social lens. Psychologically, studies show that holding an egalitarian gender role attitude contributes to better mental health in both men and women (King et al., 2022). While majority of the participants are less traditional, significant differences can be seen based on their age, gender and being/ not being a parent. This can affect their mental health negatively. Previous studies state that in masculine societies, inequality of gender dominates where women hold a weaker position

(Hofstede, 2001). Feminine societies manifest higher levels of wellbeing where it would provide both sexes, especially women, greater opportunities to fulfill their various social roles that is associated with wellbeing and relationship satisfaction (Berardo et al., 1987). Hence, reaching out to the population who are more traditional by conducting awareness programs in their workplaces can be beneficial. These attitudes can also be taken into consideration in therapy sessions as an individual and as a systemic issue to understand how it is impacting the client's life.

From a social lens, this study points out the gap in egalitarian attitudes held by men and women, where men seem to be more traditional. This can be unsupportive in bringing a change at the societal level. It doesn't just take women's effort to combat this gender gap but also the men's effort to overcome the stereotypes along with the society's willingness to accommodate the change. This view can be seen in a study which was conducted among Sweden men and women to understand spouses' gender ideology and division of housework and childcare. It showed that men who believed in an egalitarian gender policy spent more time in house work compared to men who didn't believe in gender egalitarianism. But women's attitude towards gender equality affected the time that only they spent in house work and not their spouses'. This shows that gender consciousness was a prerequisite for gender-equal division of unpaid work (Evertsson, 2014). Hence, reaching out to the Indian male population through programmes and workshops is a necessary step in creating the first step in change.

Limitations and future directions

This study holds some limitations which can be accommodated in future studies. First, there is not equal representation of male and female participants. Because one of the objectives of the study is to compare gender

role attitudes among these two genders, equal number of people between the groups would have been more representative of the population. Similar concern can also be seen among other demographic aspects along which the participants were compared for the gender role attitudes. Secondly, the study measured only the attitude towards gender roles but not the behaviour. Although attitude is a determinant of the latter, there are multiple other forces that influence a person's action, which can be incongruent with their attitudes. There were also not many people from the rural parts of India who participated. Hence, the study could be generalized only to the urban population. Additionally, those who are illiterate or are not fluent with the English language could not have filled the survey. Lastly, majority of the participants in the study can be seen holding an egalitarian attitude. This could also be due to social desirability bias to portray a more ideal attitude.

Drawing from the limitations of the current study, future research can focus on understanding gender role attitudes in the rural population due to the differences it poses in culture and everyday demands. It can also focus more on behavioural measurements along with attitude to see the actual prevalence of gender roles in the Indian society. Other demographic factors like educational qualification and socioeconomic status can also be studied to spot its role in holding specific gender role attitudes, and developing appropriate interventions if required. One of the main reasons for not finding a correlation between gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction could be due to the accumulation of gender role attitude scores on one side of the spectrum. Future research could focus on conducting a large-scale study with a greater number of participants to get a varied perspective on the construct, which would also be helpful in recognizing if there is / isn't

a relationship between the mentioned variables.

Conclusion

This study mainly focused on understanding the differences in gender role attitudes among Indian, married, working men and women based on age, gender and having children /not having children. It also intended to understand the relationship between gender role attitudes, psychological distress and life satisfaction. The results pointed out significant differences in attitudes based on one's demographics. In general, women were more egalitarian than men, even after becoming a parent, which was contradictory to the previous research findings. The generation – Z were noted to be less traditional than the millennials. Those with children had a more egalitarian attitude than those who didn't have children. Although the overall scores of gender role attitudes of the majority of the participants were democratic, significant attitude differences especially in gender, was noted as important to bring about a change so that men also adopt an egalitarian gender role attitude. Although no significant correlation was found between the attitudes held and the distress and life satisfaction, this could be contributed to the data dominated by one-sided attitude (egalitarian) towards gender roles.

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