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Exploring attitudes on gender roles and gender disparity among college students in Bikaner district, Rajasthan

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Abstract

Gender roles, which are socially constructed norms that prescribe specific behaviours and responsibilities for men and women, have a significant impact on social relations, identity, and resource accessibility. Institutions like the family, the media, education, and religion all serve to reinforce these roles. The sociocultural, educational, and economic elements that contribute to gender inequality are investigated in this study along with students' views of gender roles. With an emphasis on identifying significant obstacles to attaining gender equity, it also looks at how demographic factors affect these perceptions. The research design implemented was descriptive. The study was carried out at the Veterinary College and the Swami Keshwanand Rajasthan Agricultural University (SKRAU), two higher education establishments in Bikaner, Rajasthan. Purposively, 120 students-60 male and 60 females were chosen. A structured questionnaire was used to gather the data, and inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation) and descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean score, and rank) were used for analysis. Key Findings: 100% of girls and 96.67% of boys agreed that child marriage limits education and increases vulnerability, making it the most important issue (Mean Score: Girls = 2.0, Boys = 1.61; Rank I). 90% of girls and 83.33% of boys agreed that domestic violence is a significant cause of gender inequality (M.S.: Girls = 1.5, Boys = 1.39; Rank III & VI). While only 48.33% of boys agreed that poverty restricts women's economic opportunities, 90% of boys and 85% of girls believed it to be a significant barrier to women's health and education. There was a perception gap, with boys (90%, M.S = 1.5, Rank II) placing a higher value on education than girls (76.67%, M.S = 1.28, Rank VIII). Only 45% of girls and 63.33% of boys saw sons as necessary financial support, indicating a decline in the influence of son preference and traditional gender norms. The vast majority-88.33% of boys and 91.67% of girls supported questioning damaging gender norms (Rank II & III), indicating that young people's views are changing. The study finds that although young people are aware of the main causes of gender inequality, including poverty, violence, and child marriage, their prioritisation of these issues is influenced by differences in gendered experiences. Although cultural and structural barriers still exist, traditional norms are gradually losing their sway. In order to address these disparities and advance gender equity in both the public and private domains, integrated strategies involving community engagement, policy reform, and education are needed.

Keywords: College student attitudes, gender disparity, gender perceptions, gender roles

Introduction

Socially constructed norms known as gender roles dictate proper conduct, characteristics, and duties for both men and women. These norms have a significant impact on social interactions and personal identity. The allocation of roles and positions that sustain gender inequality is critically examined by gender theories. For example, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory emphasises that human behaviour involves subconscious influences where gender norms are internalised and cannot be fully explained by cognitive processes alone [1].

The family educational systems the government and religious organizations are some of the important social institutions that legitimise and uphold these gender roles. Cultural values conventions and symbols are mediate by these institutions for instance the church serves as a moral authority that not only controls religious behaviour but also

saves civic behaviour [9]. Gender stereotypes which specify psychological characteristics and roles that are deemed acceptable by society for men and women, arise within this framework. The two main categories of gender stereotypes are gender role stereotypes, which delineate societal obligations and responsibilities, and gender traits, which characterise psychological traits [2].

Family ties career prospectus and general social interactions are all significantly impacted by societies acceptance of traditional gender roles. Societies that maintain traditional views on gender roles are more likely to continue discriminating against women in the workplace, in politics and in school [6]. Gender roles have important health consequences as well. Health risk for men and women differ frequently due to cultural norms rather than biological distinctions. In the workplace gender segregation result in unequal exposure to stress illness, and injuries. Furthermore,

women are disproportionately responsible for household duties, which adds to already existing health issues. Disparities in mental and physical health are further exacerbated by gender-related behaviour, such as substance abuse, exposure to violence, and body image issue [4]. Gender inequality is especially noticeable in fields like engineering and construction (EC), which are dominated by men. Woman’s participation in educational and professional EC spaces is greatly influenced by a number of factors, including discrimination, industry familiarity, carrier choices, and growth potential all of which percent difficulties for female students [9]. India’s economy has grown significantly over the last 20 years with an average annual GDP growth rate of 5.8%, however social development has lagged behind. Men continue to dominate leadership, decision-making, and property ownerships in Indian Society, which is still patriarchal [7]. The nation’s continued gender disparities are demonstrated by its ranking of 131th in the Gender Inequality Index (GII-2024) and 130th in the Human Development Index (HDI-2024). The World Health organisation (WHO) states that sex and gender interact in intricate ways, affecting people differently in terms of their health, well-being, and social aspects (WHO-2021) [3]. According to research women are more likely to suffer psychological effects like stress, anxiety, depression, and social stigma when it comes to reproductive health, especially infertility. This is a reflection of the increased emotional stain that gendered expectations about motherhood and fertility have placed on women [5]. Gender dynamics in education are changing on a global scale. In recent years, the number of women enrolled in higher education has increased sixfold in nations such as the United Kingdom. This significant shift has sparked discussions about male under-representation policy, indicating a need to reconsider gender role in academic settings and reversal of historical gender gap in education [11]. Nonetheless, patriarchal ideologies are still very much in palace in India. Laws, family structures, and social norms are all examples of how these ideologies are expressed. For example, women only lead 17% of Indian households. Furthermore, new research indicates that more men are using traditional sexual scripts to defend domestic abuse,

such as punishing a wife for refusing to have sex, underscoring opposition to change in gender roles [8]. According to the latest National Family Health Survey (NHFS-5) data, gender-based inequalities still exist. Despite improvements in financial inclusion women still have much less access to digital technology and control over their resources than men. Women’s autonomy decision making power and their participations in national development initiatives are still limited by discriminatory practises and systematic barriers. These studies highlights the need for a more in-depth understanding of gender roles and their social, political, and economic impacts and provide guidance for educational initiatives and policies that support gender equality and combat discriminatory behaviour.

Methodology

The current study’s descriptive research design was used to investigate students’ views on gender role and pinpoint the causes of gender inequality. This method was chosen because it enables in organised explanation of the respondents’ current viewpoints and experiences without changing the study setting. Two significant educational establishments Veterinary College and Swami Keshwanand Rajasthan Agriculture University (SKRAU) were the focus on the study, which was conducted in the Rajasthan Bikaner District. The study included 120 students in total, 30 of whom were male and 30 of whom were female, evenly split between their two institutions. The purposeful selection of the respondents guaranteed a pair representation and significance to the study’s goals.

A structured questionnaire with two sections was used to gather data. General demographic data including age, caste, and family history were collected in the first section. Students’ views on gender roles and the causes of gender inequality were among the particular topics covered in the second section. To guarantee clarity and dependability, the tools were created and improved with expert consultation. Both descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency, percentage, means scores, standard deviation and ranking were used to analyse their gathered data.

Results

Table 1: Depicts the demographic and socio-economic status of study participants

Parameter	Category	Boys		Girls		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Age	Below 24yrsage	8	13.33	5	8.33	13	10.83
	25-26yrs age	46	76.67	45	75.00	91	75.83
	Above 27yrs age	6	10.00	10	16.67	16	13.33
Caste	Schedule caste/Schedule Tribal Caste (SC/ST)	13	21.67	22	36.67	35	29.16
	Other Backward Caste	25	41.67	25	41.67	50	41.66
	General Caste	22	36.67	13	21.67	35	29.16
Family Type	Nuclear family	47	78.33	46	76.67	93	77.50
	Joint family	13	21.67	14	23.33	27	22.50

The study’s data were categorised by gender and included participants from a range of demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. In terms of age distribution, the majority of girls (75.00%) and boys (76.67%) were in 25-26 age range. A smaller percentage 13.3% of boys and 8.33% of girls were under the age of 24. Boys made up 10.00% of the participants who were over 27, while girls

made up 16.67%. Incredibly, more than half of the sample (75.83%) was composed of people Aged 25 to 26. In terms of caste, OBC participants made up the largest group, accounting for 41.67% of the sample as a whole and 41.67% of both boys and girls. The percentage of participants who were Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) was 29.16%, with 21.67% of the participants being

boys and 36.67% being girls. 36.67% of boys and 21.67% of girls, or 29.16% of the total, were participants in the General category. With OBC being somewhat more prevalent, these numbers show a fairly balanced representation across caste categories.

The nuclear family was the most common family structure among the participants. Of the sample as a whole, 77.50% of the boys and 76.67% of the girls were from nuclear families. In contrast, 21.67% of boys and 23.33% of girls, or 20.83% of the total, came from joint families.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to factors that lead to gender disparity

Parameter	Statements	Boys				Girls				Total			
		F	%	M.S	Rank	F	%	M.S	Rank	F	%	M.S	Rank
Education	Investing in girls' education promotes gender equality and benefits health, poverty reduction, and community development.	54	90.00	1.5	II	46	76.67	1.28	VIII	100	83.33	0.69	VIII
	Cultural norms and societal expectations restrict girls' education	48	80.00	1.33	VII	44	73.33	1.33	VII	92	76.67	0.63	XII
	Limited education access for girls causes long-term economic disadvantages	47	78.33	1.31	VIII	45	75.00	1.25	IX	92	76.67	0.63	XII
Domestic violence	Gender-based violence reinforces power imbalances, impacting women and girls disproportionately	50	83.33	1.39	VI	54	90.00	1.5	III	104	86.67	0.72	V
	Gender-based violence limits women's social, economic, and political participation	50	83.33	1.39	VI	50	83.33	1.39	VI	50	83.33	1.39	VI
	Violence against women often arises from beliefs in male superiority	44	73.33	1.22	X	51	85.00	1.42	V	95	79.17	0.65	X
Poverty	Poverty worsens disparities in healthcare, education, and nutrition for women and girls	54	90.00	1.5	II	51	85.00	1.42	V	105	87.5	0.72	V
	Poverty limits women's agency and reinforces traditional gender roles	46	76.67	1.28	IX	52	86.67	1.44	IV	98	81.66	0.68	IX
	Poverty restricts women's economic opportunities and access to resources	29	48.33	0.81	XIII	45	75.00	1.25	IX	74	61.66	0.51	XIII
Child marriage	Early girl marriage often lacks access to education	58	96.67	1.61	I	60	100.00	2	I	118	98.33	0.81	I
	Child marriage denies girls the chance to pursue their ambitions	51	85.00	1.42	V	55	91.67	1.53	II	51	42.50	0.35	XV
	Early marriage increases risks of domestic violence and sexual abuse	58	96.67	1.67	I	54	90	1.5	III	112	93.33	0.77	II
Son preference	Boys are a financial and social support	38	63.33	1.06	XI	27	45.00	0.75	XI	65	54.17	0.45	XIV
	Son being responsible to carry forward family name and occupation	33	55.00	0.92	XII	18	30.00	0.50	XII	51	42.50	0.35	XV
	Patriarchal systems lead to a preference for sons over daughters	12	20.00	0.33	XIV	18	30.00	0.50	XII	30	25.00	0.20	XVI
Workplace dynamics	Male-dominated leadership and lack of representation perpetuate gender inequalities	52	86.67	1.44	IV	55	91.67	1.53	II	107	89.16	0.74	IV
	Gender biases in evaluations and salary negotiations lead to unequal pay and recognition	50	83.33	1.39	VI	52	86.67	1.44	IV	102	85.00	0.70	VII
	Long hours and rigid schedules disadvantage women with caregiving duties	52	86.67	1.44	IV	41	68.67	1.44	X	93	77.5	0.64	XI
Cultural Norms	Cultural norms define specific gender roles and responsibilities	52	86.67	1.44	IV	41	68.67	1.44	X	93	77.5	0.64	XI
	Challenging harmful norms and promoting gender equity are crucial for justice	53	88.33	1.47	III	55	91.67	1.53	II	108	90.00	0.75	III
	Gender biases in evaluations and salary negotiations lead to unequal pay and recognition	50	83.33	1.39	VI	50	83.33	1.39	VI	103	85.83	0.71	VI

Responses were gathered from both boys and girls on a number of important themes, such as education, domestic violence, poverty, child marriage, son preference, workplace dynamics, and cultural norms. The study examined a number of factors that contribute to gender disparity. Frequency (F), percentage (%), mean score (M.S.), and assigned rank were used to measure the responses.

A significant proportion of those surveyed agreed that education plays a part in advancing gender equality. With a high mean score (M.S = 1.5), 90.00% of boys agreed that funding girls' education advances gender equality and advances the development of society as a whole, placing it in Rank II. Girls, however, ranked it VIII and gave it a lower importance (76.67%, M.S = 1.28). Although ranked lower (Ranks VII to IX), indicating moderate concern, both genders acknowledged the cultural norms that restrict girls' education and the long-term economic disadvantages of limited access to education.

Many people agreed that one of the main causes of gender inequality was domestic violence. According to Rank III and VI, respectively, a significant majority of girls (90.00%, M.S = 1.5) and boys (83.33%, M.S = 1.39) agreed that

gender-based violence perpetuates power disparities. The fact that violence limits women's participation in a variety of fields was also equally recognised by both sexes (M.S = 1.39, Rank VI). While girls gave it a slightly higher rating than boys, the belief that violence results from views of male superiority had lower overall rankings (Rank X).

Another crucial theme was poverty. Both boys (90.00%) and girls (85.00%) gave poverty a high priority and strongly agreed that it worsens inequalities in women's access to healthcare, education, and nutrition (Rank II and V, respectively). Girls gave greater weight to the idea that poverty restricts women's economic agency than did boys (M.S = 1.44, Rank IV). It's interesting to note that while girls agreed with the statement "Poverty restricts women's economic opportunities and access to resources" more (75.00%, M.S = 1.25), boys agreed with it the least (48.33%, M.S = 0.81).

The issue that both genders ranked highest was child marriage. Early marriage deprives girls of an education and makes them more susceptible to sexual and domestic abuse, as almost all participants acknowledged. The belief that early marriage limits aspirations was unanimous among

girls (100%, M.S = 2.0), and it was closely followed by boys (96.67%, M.S = 1.61-1.67, Rank I). In addition to ranking first overall in the combined scores, this factor is crucial when talking about gender disparity. There was less agreement between the sexes in this area. The comparatively low mean scores (M.S = 1.06 and 0.75), which place it at Rank XI, showed that only 63.33% of boys and 45.00% of girls agreed that boys are seen as financial and social support. Patriarchal son preference scored the lowest (Rank XIV to XVI), indicating a diminishing influence of traditional gendered expectations among the respondents. The idea that sons are responsible for carrying on the family name was even less supported (55.00% boys, 30.00% girls). Both genders expressed strong agreement on issues pertaining to workplace inequality. Boys (86.67%) and girls (91.67%) ranked male-dominated leadership as a contributing factor to gender inequality, placing it at number two and number four, respectively. Additionally, gender bias in evaluations and salaries received high marks. The difficulty of juggling strict schedules with caregiving responsibilities, however, was rated lower overall (Rank X and XI), especially among girls (68.67%). Gender inequality was also significantly shaped by cultural norms. In order to achieve equity and justice, the majority of girls (91.67%) and boys (88.33%) agreed that it is essential to challenge harmful gender norms (Ranks III and II). Although both sexes agreed that gender roles are imposed by cultural norms, this was not as highly ranked by either gender (M.S = 1.44, Rank IV by boys, X by girls), suggesting that perceptions differed.

Discussion

The study involved participants from diverse backgrounds, with a majority in the 25-26 age group (76.67% boys, 75.00% girls). Caste-wise, OBC participants were the largest group (41.67% overall), followed by SC/ST and General categories (29.16% each). Most respondents came from nuclear families (77.50%), indicating a shift toward more modern household structures, which may influence views on gender roles.

Both men and women ranked child marriage as the most important issue. According to M.S. = 2.0 and 1.61-1.67, respectively, 100% of girls and 96.67% of boys agreed that early marriage restricts education and makes one more susceptible to abuse. High rankings were also given to domestic violence, with 83.33% of boys and 90.00% of girls acknowledging its contribution to gender inequality (M.S = 1.39 and 1.5).

Boys placed a high value on education (90%, M.S = 1.5, Rank II), while girls ranked it lower (76.67%, M.S = 1.28, Rank VIII), which may indicate a disconnect between access and outcomes in the real world. Ninety percent of boys and eighty-five percent of girls agreed that poverty restricts access to nutrition, healthcare, and education, making it a significant problem. There was a perception gap, though, as only 48.33% of boys felt it limited women's economic opportunities, compared to 75% of girls.

Overall, son preference and conventional cultural norms scored poorly. Just 45.00% of girls and 63.33% of boys thought that sons are seen as a source of income. However, 88.33% of boys and 91.67% of girls concurred that it is critical to question damaging gender norms. These results

demonstrate both the progress made in changing attitudes and the ongoing necessity of focused education, public awareness campaigns, and legislative changes to address enduring gender inequalities.

Conclusion

Research conducted on boys and girls, child marriage, domestic abuse, and poverty are the three most urgent issues that contribute to gender inequality. Though there is broad agreement that damaging cultural norms must be challenged in order to advance gender equality, the disparities between boys' and girls' perspectives on topics such as economic opportunity and education highlight continued difficulties in bridging knowledge and lived experiences. Positive social change may be indicated by the diminishing significance of traditional norms like son preference; however, sustained inequalities in caregiving responsibilities and workplace dynamics call for concentrated attention. These results highlight the significance of multifaceted interventions that address both structural barriers and cultural mindsets, such as community education, policy reforms, and empowerment initiatives. In order to guarantee that both boys and girls can reach their full potential in a just society, promoting gender equality will ultimately require ongoing discussion, inclusive involvement, and cooperative efforts.

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