



Gender Role Stereotyping & Masculinity Notions among School Going Adolescent in Western India - A Cross Sectional Study

Mohua Moitra¹, Shailee Vyas², Varsha Gupta³, Rutu Buch⁴

Financial Support: None declared

Conflict of Interest: None declared

Copy Right: The Journal retains the copyrights of this article. However, reproduction is permissible with due acknowledgement of the source.

How to cite this article:

Moitra M, Vyas S, Gupta V, Buch R. Gender Role Stereotyping & Masculinity Notions among School Going Adolescent in Western India - A Cross Sectional Study. Natl J Community Med 2019;10(10):550-555

Author's Affiliation:

¹Associate Professor; ²Assistant Professor; ³Resident Doctor; ⁴Tutor, Dept. of Community & Medicine, Government Medical College, Surat

Correspondence

Varsha Gupta
varsha.garg4@gmail.com

Date of Submission: 17-03-19

Date of Acceptance: 30-10-19

Date of Publication: 31-10-19

ABSTRACT

Background: The notions of gender role and masculinity are carried on traditionally and thus get stereotyped. They have been documented to affect the health of adolescents in a complex way. Nearly 35% of the global burden of disease has its roots in adolescence and research shows that some of the major contributors to adolescent morbidity and mortality are somehow connected to gender role, masculinity and their stereotyping.

Aim & Objectives: To document the prevalence of gender role stereotyping and masculinity among adolescents and explore the various factors responsible for the same.

Methodology: A cross-sectional study was conducted on adolescents of a purposively selected school in western India using a predesigned semi-structured questionnaire and appropriate scales.

Result: Majority of the respondents had scores higher than mean score, 68% for gender stereotyping and 66.1% for masculinity. Age, sex and caste have shown significant association in the masculinity score, especially among the older adolescents. Age, sex and Facebook account have shown significant association in the gender stereotyping score.

Conclusion: Majority of the participants had stereotypical attitudes for both gender and masculinity. They were particularly higher in the late adolescents and significantly lower in those having a Facebook account.

Key Words: Adolescent, gender stereotyping, masculinity, School.

INTRODUCTION

Gender role is a set of societal norms dictating the types of behaviors which are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on their actual or perceived sex or sexuality.¹ WHO says that, gender roles are "socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women".² Gender roles are culturally specific.³

Similarly, 'Masculinity' is a set of attributes, behaviors and roles generally associated with boys and men.⁴ Masculinity is socially constructed, but made up of both socially-defined and biologically-created factors,⁵⁻⁷ distinct from the definition of the male biological sex.^{8,9} Raewyn Connell has labeled

traditional male roles and privileges in hegemonic masculinity, encouraged in men and discouraged in women.¹⁰

These notions of gender role and masculinity are carried on traditionally and thus they get stereotyped. In social psychology, a **stereotype** is a thought that can be adopted about specific types of individuals or certain ways of doing things.¹¹ These thoughts or beliefs may or may not accurately reflect reality.^{12,13}

These all can affect health of adolescents in a very complex way. Nearly 35% of the global burden of disease has its roots in adolescence. Research shows that some of the major contributors to adolescent morbidity and mortality like, eating disorders, sub-

stance abuse and violence have their roots in how they perceive gender role and masculinity and their stereotyping.¹⁴

Thus, considering this scenario and the paucity of such evidence in the Indian scenario, this study is an effort to look into the domain of gender role and masculinity among the adolescents staying in a western region in India

Objectives

The study was conducted to document the prevalence of gender role stereotyping and masculinity among selected adolescents of Surat city and to explore the various factors responsible for stereotyping the concept of gender role and of masculinity.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This was a cross sectional study conducted in total of 387 students from secondary and higher secondary schools of Surat city.

Study tool: A self-administered, pre tested, semi-structured questionnaire in local language was used for the study.

Standard scales for gender stereotyping and masculinity were used, which were translated in local language and validated.

For gender stereotyping - a scale from a CDC manual ("Measuring Violence- Related Attitudes, Behaviours and Influences among Youth" A compendium of Assessment tools, Second Edition) was used.¹⁵ For masculinity - Chu masculinity scale was used.¹⁶

Data Collection technique: Two schools from Surat city were selected purposively. Prior to conducting this study permission from the school authorities was taken. The students were briefed about the significance of the study and were assured for confidentiality of their responses, considering the sensitive nature of the study. Seating arrangement of the students was organized in such a way that it would ensure privacy and take care of any kind of bias in their responses.

Data was entered in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and analyzed with the help of SPSS software.

Inclusion criteria:

The students present on the day of study and adolescents willing to participate in the study were included.

Maintaining confidentiality: All the forms were given unique ID number thereby nullifying the mention of any item, which can reveal the identity of participant. All the data were kept in strict confidentiality with access to only the researchers.

RESULTS

Among the 387 adolescents included in the study, the mean age was 14.69±1.8 years. Majority of the respondents were males (60.4%), aged between 13-16 years of age; Hindus (80.4%) and belonged to the general category (40.8%), SEBC/OBC (25.3%); Educational background showed 86 % fathers and 82% mothers were educated up to secondary level or higher; Fathers were either in service (40.8%) or doing business (43.1%) and mothers were mainly homemakers (76.7%); 38.8 % belonged to the upper middle class and above and 48 % did not respond.

Table 1: Distribution of study participants according to gender stereotyping score:

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Did not answer
Swearing is worse for a girl than a boy.	18.8	14.0	15.8	38.7	12.7
On a date, the boy should be expected to pay all expenses.	30.2	22.7	10.9	23.3	12.9
On an average, girls are as smart as boys.	37.0	27.8	7.5	14.5	13.2
More encouragement in a family should be given to sons than daughters to go to college.	46.0	19.4	10.0	11.4	13.2
It is all right for a girl to want to play rough sports like football.	47.0	23.3	7.0	9.5	13.2
In general, the father should have greater authority than the mother in making family decisions.	18.9	33.1	19.4	15.2	13.4
It is all right for a girl to ask a boy out on a date.	37.2	28.6	9.6	11.4	13.2
It is more important for boys than girls to do well in school.	25.6	31.8	18.1	11.1	13.4
If both husband and wife have jobs, the husband should do a share of the housework such as washing Dishes and doing the laundry.	26.4	21.7	14.0	24.5	13.4
Boys are better leaders than girls.	29.5	20.9	13.2	23.0	13.4
Girls should be more concerned with becoming good wives and mothers rather than desiring a Professional or business career.	28.9	18.9	18.3	19.4	14.5
Girls should have the same freedom as boys.	56.4	13.4	8.5	8.5	13.2

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of masculinity score among study participants

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Did not answer
It's important for a guy to act like nothing is wrong, even when something is bothering him.	16.8	17.1	22.7	30.7	12.7
In a good dating relationship, the guy gets his way most of the time.	28.2	31.8	14.7	12.1	13.2
I can respect a guy who backs down from a fight.	22.0	26.4	13.7	24.3	13.6
Its ok for a guy to say no to sex.	32.0	25.0	12.7	15.8	14.5
Guys should not let it show when their feelings are hurt.	31.8	24.2	17.6	13.2	13.2
A guy never needs to hit another guy to get respect.	41.1	21.4	12.4	11.4	13.7
If a guy tells people his worries, he will look weak.	52.5	25.0	4.4	4.9	13.2
I think it's important for a guy to go after what he wants, even if it means hurting other people's feelings.	54.3	26.3	3.1	3.1	13.2
I think it is important for a guy to act like he is sexually active even if he is not.	37.2	30.2	10.6	7.5	14.5
I would be friends with a guy who is gay.	8.5	16.8	17.6	42.6	14.5
It's embarrassing for a guy when he needs to ask for help.	53.0	22.5	7.0	3.5	14.0
I think it's important for a guy to talk about his feelings, even if people might laugh at him.	28.2	24.3	15.0	17.5	15.0

Mean score was 22.52 ± 10.10 and majority (68%) of the participants scored more than the mean with only 32% below that. This reflects that the notion of gender stereotyping was quite prevalent among the adolescents.

Detailed analysis further supports this. Although we find that 65.4% participants agreed that it is not only the sons who should be given more encouragement in a family, but also the daughters. However, on detailed probing, the gender divide was apparent. Approximately 55% adolescents agreed and strongly agreed that swearing is worse for a girl than a boy. According to one-third adolescents, on a date all bill should be paid by the boy not the girl. A total of 70% participants felt that rough sports like football are not for girls. Approximately 65% adolescents believe it should be the boy who should ask for a date first. When we asked for their opinion in a situation where both husband and wife are working, should the husband help the wife in household work, approximately 50% participant disagreed. One third of the participants agreed that boys are better leaders than girls. Approximately 40% participants said that girls should become a good wife rather than a professional and business career. Almost 70% of the participants said that girls should not have the same freedom as boys, which is quite alarming in today's scenario.

The mean score was found to be 21.89 ± 9.50 . Majority (66.1%) of participants had score more than the mean score, meaning these people had a strong masculinity notions.

On detailed analysis of each item of the scale, we found some interesting findings, some on the positive side and some on the negative side of the spectrum.

More than half (66.1%) of the participants were of the opinion that 'it is important for boys to act like nothing is wrong even when something is bothering him'. More than half (57%) of the respondents said that it was not okay for a boy to say no to sex. Contrary to this, even more respondents (67.4%) opined that it is not needed for a boy to act like he has sexual experience even if he is not sexually active.

One of the more worrisome observations was that 62.5% of the respondents approved of physical fights as a strong sign of masculinity and that it is needed for a boy to gain respect. This is supported by another observation in which 48% respondents said that they would not respect a guy who backs up from a fight. Almost half (52.5%) of the respondents opined that it is not okay for a boy to talk about his feelings.

However, there were some positive observations like, 75.5% of the respondent disagreed to the statement that 'if a guy tells people his worries, he will look weak', equal proportion of respondents being comfortable with boys asking for help and 60% of the respondents were comfortable in making friends with other boys who were gay.

On multivariate analysis with ANOVA we found significant association of mean gender score with age, sex and caste of the respondents.

In age, it was observed that the mean score was least (10.44) in the age group of 10 - 12 years of respondents and it gradually increased with age with maximum for the age group of 16 - 19 years (25.11).

On multivariate analysis for the masculinity scale, we found significant association of the mean score with age, sex and having a Facebook account.

Table 3: ANOVA test results of gender stereotyping scale:

Variable	N	Mean	SD	p-value
Age				
10-12yr	36	10.44	13.591	0.000
13-16yr	295	23.51	9.154	
16-19yr	56	25.11	6.602	
Total	387	22.52	10.104	
Sex				
Male	302	22.65	11.224	0.000
Female	84	22.15	4.129	
Total	386	22.54	10.110	
Caste				
SC	28	23.25	8.118	0.000
ST	32	25.84	7.362	
OPEN	158	21.51	10.233	
SEBC/OBC	98	25.82	7.355	
OTHERS	24	25.50	6.789	
Don't know	35	34.33	20.633	
Total	375	22.17	10.221	

Table: 4 ANOVA test result of masculinity score

Variable	N	Mean	SD	p-value
Age				
10-12yr	36	9.78	12.984	.000
13-16yr	295	22.96	8.468	
16-19yr	56	24.09	6.061	
Total	387	21.89	9.507	
Sex				
Male	302	21.55	10.431	0.001
Female	84	23.19	4.823	
Total	386	21.91	9.515	
FB account				
Yes	103	17.05	12.455	0.006
No	137	22.66	9.064	
Total	240	20.25	10.987	

Similar to the gender score, the mean score was the least for the younger age group of 10 - 12 years (9.78), increasing with age.

One interesting finding was that the mean score was higher (22.66) for those who did not have Facebook account and lower (17.05) for the ones with Facebook account indicating that having a Facebook account was associated with having a more liberal outlook towards the notion of masculinity.

DISCUSSION

Gender Stereotyping: In this study it was observed that majority (68%) of the respondents scored more than the mean score in gender stereotyping scale, which means they had more stringent ideas regarding gender role and gender stereotyping. Similar finding were observed by Uwe peter et al. They found unusually high stereotyping among the children and adolescents in Pakistan and relatively high in New Zealand and England.¹⁷

Mitra et al reported that preference for son and the devaluation of girls might occur in countries that

experience low economic growth, high poverty rates, low literacy rates for both men and women, lack of opportunities for women in economic and social settings, and low gender status with additional influence of religion, patriarchy, traditions, and culture also affect fertility trends and son preferences. This study got a positive finding in this context. It was observed during the study that 65.4% of the participants were of the opinion that daughters should be given equal importance as boys. This finding aligns with the findings of a study conducted in Oman in which 80 % of the Omani adolescents reported that their parents treated them equally.¹⁸

As is well known, in India gender discrimination means having more preference for son compared to daughter. This is documented to be more in northern state than southern state, which can be observe by difference in sex ratio in these state.¹⁹

It has been observed that there is a positive correlation between the attitudes of parents and children, with mothers having greater influence than father towards child attitude.²⁰ This leads us to assume that in our study, the parents might be holding a liberal outlook towards gender discrimination, which has been reflected in the attitude of their adolescents.

According to Hannah Bryant et al., no significant differences between girls and boys has been found when it comes to their performance on mathematical test (Irena et al. 2015).²¹ While in the current study 29.2% participants were found to believe that boys performed well in school as compared to girls. This shows their conventional way of looking at things.

In this study 70.3% participants said that in sports boys are better than girls. Similar findings were observed in a couple of studies in which it was found that boys perform well in sports than girls (Hannah brynat et al 2013).²¹ In contrast to this, Klomsten et al observed that girls equally participate in sports as boys but differ in gender based sports like girls are more involved in horse riding, gymnastic, aerobics etc.²²

On more detailed analysis, it was observed that a statistically significant relation of gender stereotyping with age, sex and caste. Similar findings were observed by Farkas and Leaper (2016), that boys are more likely than girls to endorse traditional gender attitudes.²³

NOTION OF MASCULINITY

According to literature, male gender is shaped into a masculine role in part by suppressing the more

feminine aspects of character (Philaretou & Allen et al, 2001).

While investigating the notion of masculinity, it was observed in the current study that, just like the gender stereotyping, most respondents (66%) scored more than the mean score of masculinity, which echoes the established way of thinking carried onto them.

On detailed analysis, we found significant association of age, sex and having a Facebook account with that of masculinity score. Having a Facebook account has been found to be significantly associated with having lower masculinity score.

The significant association of social media with masculinity notions is also documented by the report of a California based organization. This report mentioned that mainstream media representations also play a role in reinforcing ideas about what it means to be a "real" man in our society. In most media portrayals, male characters are rewarded for self-control and the control of others, aggression and violence, financial independence, and physical desirability.²⁴ (Report- *Boys to Men: Media Messages About Masculinity*).

However, our finding contradicts with this. We did find that those who had Facebook account, which was considered a proxy indicator of their exposure to media, had more liberal outlook towards masculinity. This showcases a positive aspect of social media, which perhaps makes one's perspective more broader.

It was found that 62.5% of the respondents approved of physical fights as a strong sign of masculinity. Similar observations were made by Emmanuel Rudatsikira, who noted that men (54.3%) were more involved in physical fights than females (26.6%). The male predominance in prevalence of physical fighting may be explained by the normative belief of masculinity among males.²⁵

It was also observed in this study that majority (60%) of the respondents were comfortable in making friends with other boys who were gay, which showcases their more liberal attitude. However, Levy et al found that many straight men hesitated to be friend gay men but if a straight guy and gay guy are less rigid about their masculinity and sexuality, they will be friend because they discuss details about their sexual behavior. Straight women were comfortable in making gay friend because they trust gay male as compared to straight male.²⁶

CONCLUSION

In this study it was found that for both, gender and masculinity, the majority of the adolescents had

scores more than the mean scores, which reflects their traditional perspectives. This was reiterated in their overall viewpoints which show majority of them disagreeing that a husband should help his wife in the household task when both are working; boys are better leaders than girls (in a nation where the defense minister is a lady); girls should become a good wife rather than a professional and business career. Some were rather worrisome where majority opined that 'it is important for boys to act like nothing is wrong even when something is bothering him'. This might prevent them from opening up to someone in their hour of need and thus affect their mental health status adversely. Moreover, many stated that it was not okay for a boy to say no to sex. Such belief, if carried by majority of the adolescents, is likely to lead to indulging in high risk behaviour and hence adversely affect their health. One of the most alarming observations was that approval by majority of the respondents of physical fights as a strong sign of masculinity and needed for a boy to gain respect. This is backed up by another observation where they straight way showed disrespect for those boys who backs up from a fight. Such deeply engraved feelings are very likely to direct them towards violence and high risk behaviours and resultant adverse outcomes. It was also found that such stereotyping and notions are significantly associated with age, the younger ones having a more flexible outlook as compared to the older adolescents. This shows that if intervened at a younger age, such beliefs can be molded. Having exposure to the social media has shown a positive outcome in this study with lesser stringent notions of masculinity. Looking to this, in today's time of social networking, if it is used constructively, good social reform can be done.

REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization: *Adolescents Health risk and solutions*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescents-health-risks-and-solutions>. (Accessed 13 December 2018)
2. World health Organization: *Gender, Women, Health "What do we mean by "sex" and "gender"?"*. Available at: <http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/> (Accessed 22 December 2018).
3. Eleanor Emmons, Maccoby. "Sex differences in intellectual functioning", *The Development of Sex Differences*. Stanford University Press; 1966. p 25-55.
4. World Health organization: *Maternal, Child and Adolescent Epidemiology*. Available at: http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/epidemiology/adolescence. (Accessed 22 December 2018)
5. Marianne van den Wijngaard. *Reinventing the sexes: the bio-medical construction of femininity and masculinity. Race, gender, and science*. Indiana University Press; 1997. p 171.

6. Hale Martin, Stephen Edward Finn (2010). *Masculinity and Femininity in the MMPI-2 and MMPI-A*. U of Minnesota Press; 2010. p 310. Retrieved June 3, 2011.
7. Richard Dunphy. *Sexual politics: an introduction*. Edinburgh University Press; 2000. p 240.
8. Ferrante, Joan. *Sociology: A Global Perspective*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth. p 269-272.
9. *Gender, Women and Health: What do we mean by "sex" and "gender"?* The World Health Organization.
10. Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 2005. p 77.
11. McGarty, Craig; Yzerbyt, Vincent Y.; Spears, Russel. "Social, cultural and cognitive factors in stereotype formation" (PDF). *Stereotypes as explanations: The formation of meaningful beliefs about social groups*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2002. p 1-15.
12. Judd, Charles M, Park, Bernadette (1993). "Definition and assessment of accuracy in social stereotypes". *Psychological Review*. **100** (1): 109-128.
13. Cox, William T. L., Abramson, Lyn Y, Devine, Patricia G, Hollon, Steven D. "Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Depression: The Integrated Perspective". *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2012; **7** (5): 427-449.
14. Civelek M, Lusic AJ, Genetics M, Angeles L. System genetics approaches to understand complex traits. *Nature Review Genetics*. 2014; **15**(1):34-48.
15. Dahlberg LL, Toal SB, Swahn M, Behrens CB. *Measuring Violence-Related Attitudes, Behaviors, and Influences among Youths: A Compendium of Assessment Tools*, 2nd ed., Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2005.
16. Porche M V. The Adolescent Masculinity Ideology. *Men and Masculinities*. 2005; **8**(1):93-115.
17. Uwe Peter Gielen, Jaipaul L. Roopnarine. *Childhood and adolescence: cross cultural perspective and applications*. Greenwood publishing; 2004. p 23.
18. Mitra A. Son Preference in India: Implications for Gender Development. *J Econ Issues*. 2014; **48**(4):1021-37.
19. Sekher T, Hatti N. Discrimination of female children in modern India: from conception through childhood. *Int Union Science Study Population*. 2005. p 1-44.
20. Dhar D, Jain T, Jayachandran S. Intergenerational Transmission of Gender Attitudes: Evidence from India. *Nber*. 2015; **(1)**:1-29.
21. Bryant H. On the topic of gender. *Jouranal Trainee Teach Education Research*. 2015; **6**.
22. Klomsten AT, Marsh HW, Skaalvik EM. Adolescents' perceptions of masculine and feminine values in sport and physical education: A study of gender differences. *Sex Roles*. 2005; **52**.
23. Farkas T, Leaper C. Chivalry's double-edged sword: How girls' and boys' paternalistic attitudes relate to their possible family and work selves. *Sex Role: American Journal of research* 2016; **74**(6): 220-230.
24. Lapp, Joan. Educational resources information center. Educational Research and Improvement, Information ER, Center. Boys to Men: Media Messages About Masculinity: Annual Children & the Media Conference. California: 1999.
25. Rudatsikira E, Muula AS, Siziya S. Prevalence and correlates of physical fighting among school-going adolescents in Santiago, Chile. *Rev Bras Psiquiatr*. 2008; **30**(3):197-202.
26. A. E., Bigler, R. S., Liben, L. S., Gelman, S. A., & Ruble, D. N. Gender stereotyping and prejudice in young children: A developmental intergroup perspective. *Intergroup attitude and relations in childhood through adulthood*. Oxford university press; 2008. p 173-88.