

# Development of Gender Role Attitude among Rural and Urban Children: A Gender Study

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At two years old, kids start to become aware of sex-role stereotypes, and there is a favourable correlation between this information and kids' comprehension of gender identity. When a youngster is three years old, gender differences begin to show. These distinctions get more noticeable as they age. Today's parenting and education place a growing emphasis on helping kids develop gender-neutral attitudes. By allowing kids to pursue a wide range of hobbies and activities without being constrained by social expectations, this method seeks to disrupt established gender stereotypes. The present study, titled "Development of Gender Role Attitude among Rural and Urban Children: A gender study" investigated the locale differences in gender role attitudes among 240 children (120 boys & 120 girls) in both rural and urban primary and senior secondary schools of Punjab state. Data on the socio-personal information of the children were collected using a self-structured general information sheet. The study utilized a self-structured gender role attitude scale to assess the levels of gender role attitudes among the children. The results depicted that a significant proportion of the children fell within the transitional category of gender role attitudes, followed by the egalitarian category. Data revealed that the likelihood of transitional and egalitarian gender role attitudes in children living in urban areas was higher.

*Keywords:* gender role attitude, children, gender stereotypes, gender-neutral attitude

Gender refers to a social creation phenomenon because it is something that humans construct (Blackstone, 2003). Gender roles are the result of interactions between individuals and their environment; they tell people what kind of behaviour is considered appropriate for each sex. Appropriate gender roles are determined by beliefs about gender differences (Blackstone, 2003). Gender role attitude refers to a person's beliefs on what influences and should influence how men and women behave (Harris & Firestone, 1998). Gender roles are therefore socially and cognitively constructed rather than biological. Gender role attitudes shape how men and women are distributed across social roles in society. These attitudes affect people's career decisions, the kinds of responsibilities they take on as employees, spouses and parents, among many other aspects of life. (Somech & Zahavy, 2016). Those who have traditional views consider a man to be the breadwinner and a woman to be the homemaker. More egalitarian people think that males should help with childcare and other household duties, while women should contribute financially to the family parts of domestic work

that are traditionally feminine (Corrigan & Konrad, 2007).

Halim et al. (2010) have described that Gender stereotypes are preconceived notions about the traits or qualities that set men and women apart from one another. Knowledge of gender stereotypes develops early on, just like gender identity. The stereotypes that they are exposed to at home are sustained throughout childhood because other factors in their surroundings reinforce them (Martin et al., 1990). The variety of concepts, attitude, behaviour, and beliefs to which the kid is exposed contributes to his or her developing sense of self or self-concept.

Gender socialization process starts from birth when individuals ask the single, straightforward question "Is it a girl or a boy? Like gender, the establishment of gender roles is mostly learned through the common socialization institutions, such as family, peers and schools, which were viewed as the models of society. One can learn what is right and wrong behaviour for both genders through socialization (Crespi, 2003).

Collins et al. (1984) reported that the adoption of a sex role identity that is congruent with the acceptable sex role standards of their culture is one of the primary developmental tasks for young children during the preschool years. According to Hartley (1959), children understand by the age of 4 that the primary feminine duty is housekeeping and the primary masculine one is income earning. Children are socialized to comprehend the relative importance of each sex in society as well as the personality behaviour that are of members of each sex, in addition to learning sex-role identity and sex-role expectations. Eight-year-old boys characterise girls as tidy, reserved, timid and quiet, whereas adult women are portrayed as dull, ineffective, unadventurous, filthy and exploitative. In fact, Maccoby discovers that although girls start off as more academically gifted than boys, they gradually lag behind as they develop their social skills (Maccoby, 1966). A study on children's perceptions of gender-appropriateness in physical activities was carried out by Pellett et al. in 1992. According to the results, boys may be more

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likely than girls to stereotype in labelling tasks overall, but girls may be more negatively impacted by their own ideas about gender roles. Carter et al. (2016) discovered that early socialization may have a greater influence on gender-role beliefs, especially for lifelong urban dwellers. The study examined the effects of urban and regional living on gender-role attitudes. The place-based paradigm seems more relevant in terms of geography. Results indicate that within the past 30 years, geography has become less significant in shaping opinions toward gender roles.

### Objective of the Study

- To assess the socio-personal characteristics of children belonging to rural and urban families.
- To assess the development of gender role attitudes among rural and urban children.

## Method

### Study Design

A cross-sectional study in Ludhiana, Punjab, involved 240 children from government primary and government senior secondary schools. The sample, equally divided between boys and girls, comprised 60 children from rural and urban areas each. The research, approved by the ethical committee at Punjab Agricultural University's Department of Human Development and Family Studies focused on examining various factors.

### Measures

*General Information Sheet:* A general information sheet was used to collect data for the demographic information of the respondents. The sheet contained some statements such as the name of the

respondents, date of birth, gender, class, birth order, number of siblings, number of male and female siblings, family type, family size, parents' education and occupation. The respondents were asked to fill the information correctly.

*Self-structured Gender Role Attitude Scale (Pratibha Sharma, 2022):* A self-structured gender role attitude scale was prepared to assess the gender role attitude among children and whether the gender role attitude of children was neutral or gender specific. The test consists of 32 statements that are ranked on a 3 - rating scale, representing three different types of gender role attitudes among children. The scale was translated into Punjabi vernacular for the easy understanding of children. This scale consisted of thirty - two statements, each of which is assessed on a 3- rating scale. The rating scale ranges from 1 indicating traditional gender role attitudes, to 3 modern gender role attitudes. The statements were framed in such a way which reflected that the higher scores indicated a more modern attitude and lower scores indicated a more traditional attitude. The total score for gender role attitude is determined by adding together the individual ratings assigned to each of the 32 items.

*Pre-testing of Research Instruments:* All the instruments used in the study were pre tested on a sample of 20 children who were not included in the final sample group. This was done to have an overview of the nature of the responses of the children on the two scales. The responses were found consistent. It was found that the children performed the tests in a reliable manner. Statistical Analysis The data was organized and analysed using IBM SPSS version 23 statistical package, focusing on frequencies and proportions. Statistical significance was attributed to results with p values less than 0.05.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**

*Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Children as Per their Socio-personal Characteristics (n=240)*

Variables	Rural			Urban		
	Boys n <sub>1</sub> =60	Girls n <sub>2</sub> =60	Total n <sub>q</sub> = 120	Boys n <sub>3</sub> =60	Girls n <sub>4</sub> =60	Total n <sub>r</sub> =120
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
<b>Birth Order</b>						
1st	12 (20.0)	20 (33.33)	32 (26.66)	17 (28.33)	11 (18.33)	28 (23.33)
2nd	31 (51.67)	19 (31.67)	50 (41.66)	34 (56.67)	23 (38.33)	57 (47.5)
3rd	12 (20.0)	10 (16.67)	22 (18.33)	6 (10.00)	17 (28.33)	23 (19.16)
4th	4 (6.67)	11 (18.33)	15 (12.5)	3 (5.00)	9 (15.00)	12 (10)
5th	1 (1.66)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.83)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
<b>No. of Siblings</b>						
0	1 (1.67)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.83)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
1 - 3	54 (90)	53 (88.33)	107 (89.16)	53 (88.33)	54 (90)	107 (89.16)
4 and above	5 (8.30)	7 (11.66)	12 (10.00)	7 (11.66)	6 (10.00)	13 (10.83)
<b>No. of female siblings</b>						
0	16 (26.67)	12 (20)	28 (23.33)	21 (35.00)	17 (28.33)	38 (31.66)
1	32 (53.33)	28 (46.66)	60 (50)	24 (40.00)	32 (53.33)	56 (46.66)
2	9 (15.00)	20 (33.33)	29 (24.16)	15 (25.00)	7 (11.66)	22 (18.33)
3 and above	3 (5.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (2.05)	0 (0.00)	4 (6.06)	4 (3.33)
<b>No. of male siblings</b>						
0	9 (15.00)	13 (21.31)	22 (18.33)	15 (25.00)	8 (13.33)	23 (19.16)
1	34 (56.67)	36 (59.02)	70 (58.33)	26 (43.33)	34 (56.66)	60 (50)
2	16 (26.67)	9 (14.75)	25 (20.83)	19 (31.67)	15 (25.42)	34 (28.33)
3 and above	1 (1.67)	2 (3.33)	3 (2.05)	0 (0.00)	3 (5.00)	3 (2.50)

Family size						
Small ( $\leq 4$ )	23 (38.33)	15 (25.00)	38 (31.66)	8 (13.33)	24 (40.00)	32 (25.83)
Medium (5-8)	36 (60.00)	44 (73.33)	80 (66.66)	52 (86.67)	36 (60.00)	88 (73.33)
Large ( $\geq 9$ )	1 (1.67)	1 (1.67)	2 (1.66)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Education of Mother						
Illiterate	10 (16.67)	14 (23.33)	24 (20.0)	10 (16.66)	6 (10)	16 (13.33)
Primary (5th class)	17 (28.33)	16 (26.67)	33 (27.5)	14 (23.33)	14 (23.33)	28 (23.33)
Middle (8th class)	14 (23.33)	11 (18.33)	25 (20.83)	13 (21.66)	16 (26.66)	29 (24.16)
High (10th class)	6 (10.00)	13 (21.67)	19 (15.83)	8 (13.33)	12 (20)	20 (16.66)
Intermediate (+2)	8 (13.33)	5 (8.33)	13 (10.83)	9 (15)	5 (8.33)	14 (11.66)
Graduate	5 (8.33)	1 (1.67)	6 (5.00)	2 (3.33)	5 (8.33)	7 (5.83)
Post Graduate	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (6.66)	2 (3.33)	6 (5.00)
Education of Father						
Illiterate	10 (16.67)	8 (13.33)	18 (15.0)	6 (10.00)	4 (6.67)	10 (8.33)
Primary (5th class)	17 (28.33)	15 (25.00)	32 (26.66)	15 (25.00)	9 (15.00)	24 (20.0)
Middle (8th class)	14 (23.33)	14 (23.33)	28 (23.33)	11 (18.33)	20 (33.33)	31 (25.83)
High (10th class)	11 (18.33)	18 (30.00)	29 (24.16)	11 (18.33)	12 (20.00)	23 (19.16)
Intermediate level	6 (10.00)	3 (5.00)	9 (7.50)	11 (18.33)	8 (13.33)	19 (15.83)
Graduate	2 (3.33)	1 (1.67)	3 (2.50)	0 (0.00)	2 (3.33)	2 (1.66)
Post Graduate	0 (0.00)	1 (1.67)	1 (0.83)	6 (10.00)	5 (8.33)	11 (9.16)
Mother's working status						
Service (govt./private)	3 (5.00)	2 (3.33)	5 (4.16)	2 (3.33)	5 (8.33)	7 (5.83)
Business	2 (3.33)	1 (1.67)	3 (2.5)	2 (3.33)	3 (5.00)	5 (4.16)
Labourer	13 (21.67)	17 (28.33)	30 (25)	15 (25.00)	19 (31.67)	34 (28.33)
Any other	42 (70.00)	40 (66.67)	82 (68.33)	41 (68.33)	33 (55.00)	74 (61.66)
Father's occupation						
Service (govt./ private)	4 (6.67)	4 (6.67)	8 (6.66)	2 (3.33)	5 (8.33)	7 (5.83)
Business	1 (1.67)	1 (1.67)	2 (1.66)	9 (15.0)	5 (8.33)	14 (3.33)
Labourer	1 (1.67)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.83)	3 (5.00)	6 (10.00)	9 (7.5)
Farming	9 (15.0)	10 (16.67)	19 (15.83)	24 (40.00)	19 (31.67)	43 (34.16)
Any other	45 (75.00)	45 (75.00)	90 (75)	22 (36.67)	25 (41.67)	46 (39.16)

The data about socio-personal characteristics of the children shown in Table 1 has been discussed below the following heads:

### *Birth Order*

The profile of birth order in the rural sample elucidated that more number (41.66%) of children were second born however, a very smaller number (0.83%) of children were fifth born in the family. Similarly in urban sample, the greater number (47.5%) of children were second born.

### *Number of Siblings*

A probe into the number of siblings from the rural sample revealed that 89.16 per cent children were having one or more than one sibling. While 0.83 per cent children had no siblings. In urban areas, data showed that majority (89.16%) of children were having one or more than one sibling.

### *Number of Female Siblings*

Data showed that in the rural sample, only 2.5 per cent children were having more than three female siblings and more number (50%) of children were having only one female sibling. Data indicated that in urban samples, a major proportion (46.66%) of children were having only one female sibling.

### *Number of Male Siblings*

It was observed in the rural area, that 58.33 per cent of children were

having only one male sibling, while only, 2.5 per cent children were having more than three siblings. The data indicated that in urban areas, 50 per cent of children were having only one male sibling while a very smaller number (2.5%) of children were having more than three male siblings.

### *Family Size*

In the rural sample, it was observed the majority (66.66%) of children were having five to eight family members in their family. Data collected from urban samples indicated that the majority (73.33%) of children were having five or more than five family members in their family.

### *Mother's Education*

It was observed that in the rural sample, 27.5 per cent mothers were primary passed, 20.83 per cent mothers were educated up to middle school level while no mothers were found to be educated up to the postgraduate level. In the urban sample, data displayed that 24.16 per cent of children's mothers were found to be educated up to the middle school level, only 5 per cent mothers of children were found to be educated up to the post - graduation level.

### *Education of Father*

From the rural area, data on fathers' education showed that 26.66 per cent fathers of children were primary passed and 23.33 per cent fathers were educated up to the middle school level, only 0.83 per

cent fathers of children were post - graduates. In the urban sample, the overall sample specified 25.83 per cent fathers of children were educated up to middle school level, whereas 8.33 per cent fathers were illiterate and only 1.66 per cent fathers of children were found to be educated up to graduation level.

### Mothers Working Status

The figures on maternal employment from rural areas revealed that a high percentage (68.33%) mothers of children were engaged in any other occupation (housekeeping at others home, working as a helper at others shop etc.) 25 per cent were labourers, 4.16 per cent were engaged in service and only 2.5 per cent mothers were self

employed. In the urban sample, the majority of mothers were engaged in any other occupation as same as in rural areas, it was 68.33 per cent in case of boys and 55 per cent in case of girls.

### Fathers' Occupation

Data on paternal employment in the rural areas revealed that 75 per cent fathers were engaged in any other occupation, 1.66 per cent fathers were self-employed while, 0.83 per cent fathers were labourers. In urban samples, father's occupation showed that 36.67 per cent fathers of boys and 41.67 per cent fathers of girls were engaged in any other occupation. However, 5 per cent fathers of boys and 10 per cent fathers of girls were labourer.

**Table 2**

*Locale Differences in Percentage Distribution of Children across Various Gender Role Attitudes (n=240)*

Gender Role Attitudes	Rural (n <sub>1</sub> =120)	Urban (n <sub>2</sub> =120)	Total (n=240)	Z
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	
Traditional	37 (31.09)	20 (16.53)	57 (23.75)	2.648*
Transitional	53 (44.54)	56 (46.28)	109 (45.41)	0.271
Egalitarian	29 (24.37)	45 (37.19)	74 (30.83)	2.151*

Note. Significant at 0.05% level

It is evident from the Table 2 that a significant ( $Z= 2.648, p<0.05$ ) difference was found in traditional and egalitarian ( $Z=2.151, p<0.05$ ) categories of gender role attitudes. Data depicts that urban children had more transitional (46.28%) and egalitarian (37.19%) attitudes while, rural children had traditional gender role attitudes. This showed that most rural children were stick to previous stereotypes while urban children were more transitional and modern

because they lived in gender neutral attitude environment thus their belief systems were improved and they were more inclined towards transitional or modern attitude. Some of the results are found to be similar with study conducted by Carter et al. (2005) found that people living in more urban areas are more likely to hold more contemporary gender-role attitudes compared to those living in less urban areas.

**Table 3**

*Locale Differences in Mean Scores ( $\pm$  S.D) of Children across Various Gender Role Attitudes*

Gender Role Attitudes	Rural (n <sub>1</sub> =120)	Urban (n <sub>2</sub> =120)	t
	Mean $\pm$ S.D	Mean $\pm$ S.D	
Traditional	46.1 $\pm$ 04.7	43.2 $\pm$ 06.7	4.015*
Transitional	64.1 $\pm$ 04.7	65.5 $\pm$ 05.1	2.211*
Egalitarian	80.5 $\pm$ 06.0	81.3 $\pm$ 05.0	1.122
Overall	61.6 $\pm$ 14.9	68.2 $\pm$ 13.3	5.101*

Note. Significant at 0.05% level

The data presented in the Table 3 depicted that a significant difference ( $t=4.015, p<0.05$ ) was observed at the traditional gender role attitude level and transitional attitude ( $t=2.211, p<0.05$ ) level. Data showed that urban children (65.5 $\pm$ 5.1) had more transitional gender role attitude as compared to rural children (64.1 $\pm$ 4.7). Results represents that children in urban settings may have greater exposure to different lifestyles and belief systems, which can lead to more open-minded attitudes towards gender roles. Urban areas tend to

have greater access to media and technology, which can expose children to a wider range of gender representations and ideas, potentially influencing their attitudes. Some of the findings were found to be comparable to those of Little's (1987) study, which discovered that gender roles and gender relations are uniquely influenced by the features of rural areas, including their size, remoteness, and lack of resources, as well as the strength and orientation of the rural ideology.

**Table 4***Locale Wise Gender Differences in Percentage Distribution of Children across Various Gender Role Attitudes*

Gender Role Attitudes	Rural (n1=120)				Z	Urban (n2=120)				Z
	Boys (n1=60)		Girls (n2=60)			Boys (n3=60)		Girls (n4=60)		
	f	%	f	%		f	%	f	%	
Traditional	16	26.67	16	26.66	0.421	10	16.39	10	16.67	0.041
Transitional	30	50.00	23	38.98	1.215	27	44.26	26	43.33	0.103
Egalitarian	14	23.33	21	35.59	1.055	23	38.33	24	40.00	0.187

Table 4 depicts that rural girls were found to be more egalitarian (35.59%) than rural boys (23.33%). Data demonstrated that similarly, urban girls (40.00%) had more egalitarian gender role attitudes than their counterparts (38.33%). Urban areas, typically characterized by greater access to education and exposure to diverse cultures and ideas, may have more progressive gender role attitudes. There is often a greater acceptance of gender equality, where both girls and boys are seen as capable of pursuing various roles and careers. According to Mensch et al. (2003), girls are substantially less inclined than boys to support educational differences between spouses.

Children's exposure to gender roles can significantly impact their attitudes and behaviour. Early socialization, influenced by family, media, and society plays a crucial role in shaping these attitudes. It can affect their beliefs about what is expected or appropriate for their gender, potentially impacting their future choices and interactions. It's important to foster an environment that encourages gender equality and allows children's to explore a wide range of interests and activities, free from restrictive stereotypes. To prevent children from adopting gender stereotyping belief systems parents should requires conscious efforts to challenge stereotypes and also for the roles and behaviours adopted by adults themselves to become de-gendered. When any child decides to express themselves in a manner that is not traditionally consistent with their gender, don't immediately limit their freedom or overrule their choice. Children love to explore the world and playing "dress-up" or "pretend" are important to their intellectual and emotional development. Parents can encourage them to try out some creative ways of engaging in the world, whether it's in their hairstyle, clothing choice, or preferred toys for playing.

### Conclusion

The findings of the study indicated that a significant proportion of the children fell within the transitional category of gender role attitudes, followed by the egalitarian category. Urban girls and rural girls were more likely to exhibit egalitarian gender role attitudes While, urban boys and rural boys were found to be under traditional

category of gender role attitudes.

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