Exploring Gender Role Attitudes and Career Aspirations among Pakistani Adolescents

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Internationally, gender roles have undergone significant changes, shifting toward greater egalitarianism due to widespread movements advocating for gender equality in developed nations. This study delved into understanding gender role attitudes and career aspirations among Pakistani adolescents, leveraging a sample of 150 students aged 18 to 20 (average age 19 years) recruited from educational institutions in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Employing measures like the Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale (SRES), General Health Questionnaire, Occupational Aspirations Scale (OAS), and Sex Role Attitude Scale (SRAS), data was collected through online questionnaires via Qualtrics. Analysis encompassed descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and moderation analysis, aiming to explore gender differences in occupational preferences and attitudes toward gender roles. Results unveiled distinct preferences with girls inclined towards traditionally female-associated careers and boys leaning towards male-associated occupations. Findings challenged initial assumptions about gender role attitudes, revealing more progressive views among girls compared to boys. The study underscores the importance of guiding adolescents in career planning, noting the influence of societal norms and evolving perceptions on vocational aspirations. The study's limitations highlight the necessity for further research to refine existing frameworks and promote gender equality in career development.

Keywords: Egalitarianism, Female-Associated Careers, Career Planning, Societal Norms, Vocational Aspirations.

Introduction:

Numerous theories attempt to explain how gender role beliefs originate and persist, influencing individuals' lives. Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn these roles by observing and imitating others, especially within their immediate circles like parents and peers. It proposes that gender roles aren't biologically predetermined but acquired through socialization. Another prominent theory is Gender Schema Theory, which proposes that individuals develop a cognitive framework for organizing gender information, shaping their perceptions and interactions [1]. It suggests that cognitive categorization based on gender influences how people acquire and maintain gender role beliefs. These theories resonate with Butler's idea that gender is performative rather than innate [2][3][4].

Gender role beliefs typically fall into two categories: traditional and egalitarian. Traditional beliefs prescribe specific roles, behaviors, and traits based on assigned gender, often rooted in cultural, religious, and historical contexts. They emphasize women as caretakers and men as providers. Research indicates that men tend to endorse traditional gender roles more strongly than women. In contrast, egalitarian beliefs advocate for equal treatment and opportunities irrespective of gender, acknowledging diverse identities and granting freedom to pursue goals regardless of societal norms [5][6][7].

Gender significantly influences health, with differences observed in life expectancy, mental health, and overall well-being. Women tend to experience internalizing disorders more

frequently, like psychological distress and depression, while men face higher rates of externalizing disorders like social dysfunction and substance use. The prevalence of somatic symptoms is also associated with an increased risk of depression, anxiety, and poorer quality of life in young adults. Anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression significantly impact overall quality of life and mental health, particularly among young adults, and are global concerns affecting well-being and survival [8].

However, there's a lack of research on how gender role beliefs impact well-being in developing countries like Pakistan. Pakistan, a patriarchal society with rigid gender roles, often imposes strict gender-based expectations and limitations. Such roles can negatively affect well-being, leading to decreased life satisfaction, increased stress and anxiety, and poorer mental and physical health among young adults. Stereotypical gender role differences in Pakistan encourage men to establish financial independence while restricting women's choices and autonomy. In contrast, the United Kingdom offers relatively more gender-equitable opportunities for women. Comparing these cultures could provide insights into the impact of gender role beliefs on well-being [9][10].

The sociocultural context significantly shapes well-being, with gender beliefs contributing differently in societies with varying degrees of gender equality. Patriarchal societies like Pakistan emphasize collective social norms and family loyalty, while individualistic cultures prioritize individual freedom and self-interest. Understanding these differences is crucial in comprehending how gender beliefs influence well-being in diverse cultural contexts. Comparing masculinity-health connections in countries with distinct cultural backgrounds may unveil both universal and culture-specific influences [11].

Gender roles represent the prevailing cultural norms in a specific location during a given time frame. However, these norms aren't universally applicable and might not necessarily foster good health. They're individually tailored and vary based on circumstances, reflecting personal experiences. Customs governing social interactions and cultural differences in gender roles form the foundation for most of these distinctions. Strong empirical evidence indicates that cultural and historical factors significantly shape teenagers' perceptions of their identity, adherence to gender norms, and development over time. Children first grasp gender roles through parental influence [12][13]. Parents differentiate between their sons and daughters early on by dressing them in gender-associated colors, providing gender-specific toys, and imposing specific behavioral expectations. Parental transmission of gender-related ideas impacts the formation of gender roles. Children raised by parents promoting equal divisions of labor tend to imagine careers less bound by gender stereotypes, while those with parents endorsing traditional gender roles tend to choose careers aligned with gender norms. Boys often envision careers conforming to male stereotypes, while girls lean toward traditionally female-associated occupations. Minimal gender differences were noticed in career choices among children of egalitarian parents [14].

Occupational aspirations explore how individuals are drawn to specific careers. When contemplating career choices, individuals generally consider four primary criteria: a biological criterion influenced by gender, a social criterion influenced by status, a feasibility criterion related to training and job prospects, and a psychological criterion influenced by personal interests [15]. This theory provides a comprehensive understanding of career development from developmental and social perspectives, uncovering the trade-offs individuals make while determining their professional goals. Career decisions are typically made during childhood or adolescence and tend to become more focused and refined over time [16]. Occupational aspiration denotes an individual's preferred career choice at a specific moment. This study examined the career growth of young children using the Researcher's stage theory of occupational ambitions as a framework. Children exhibited gender-specific preferences in their aspirations, with most favoring practical career possibilities as their goals for adulthood rather than imaginative ones [17]. Researchers discovered disparities between men and women in

recognizing and achieving their chosen professional objectives [18]. The vocational training system exhibited a gender bias, significantly influencing and limiting women's employment options. However, this segregation into different occupations wasn't the primary factor contributing to the income gap between genders. Significant differences were observed between male and female students across various age groups for multiple parameters [19].

Careers aligned with traditional gender roles received higher evaluations. Australian adolescent pupils across three age cohorts showed higher professional ambitions than their expectations. Male students displayed a stronger inclination toward professional careers compared to their female counterparts. Despite advancements in challenging gender stereotypes, young girls still gravitate toward historically female-dominated professions. Females prefer careers involving interpersonal interactions, creative self-expression, and philanthropy [20]. They also tend to be more open to new ideas and engaging in conversations compared to boys. Few girls lean toward occupations involving inanimate entities, like science or engineering. Girls often endorse feminine traits and prefer collaborative pursuits over boys. Balancing professional and personal lives is a concern for females, potentially hindering their career choices. Gender differences in internet usage were evident, with boys favoring exploration and girls leaning toward communication. Morinaga noted that women from the United States, Japan, and Slovenia held less conventional beliefs about gender roles compared to males, with Japanese women displaying the most traditional attitudes. Moreover, women with unconventional beliefs about gender roles emphasized their professional pursuits more [21].

Studies on women's career advancement identify internal and external barriers like personality traits, gender role socialization, financial resources, and conflicting life roles that limit career development. Career self-efficacy influences career decision-making but differs between female and male high school students. Women prioritize parenthood over their professional roles, while men lean toward their careers [22]. Many young individuals prefer occupations aligning with gender and social status, restricting female teenagers to a narrow range of roles like administrative clerks, teachers, nurses, and sales clerks. They are underrepresented in high-status occupational domains. There's also a gender disparity in salary expectations. Anti-egalitarian beliefs and 'mother's guilt,' the conflict between family values and egalitarian ideals, act as obstacles to achieving gender equality in the labor market [23].

Numerous obstacles hinder women from pursuing their desired careers, including educational limitations, work experience, motivation, parental involvement, socioeconomic status, family obligations, and the challenge of balancing home and work responsibilities. Pakistan's industrial landscape lacks diversification, restricting job options for women and reducing their access to lucrative professions. Moreover, prevalent discriminatory practices within patriarchal communities lead to minimal employment opportunities for women due to lower wages and biased hiring practices favoring male workers [24].

Pakistan's complex legal system, governed by Islamic law, secular law, and customary norms, creates duality in public and private life. Cultural norms, reinforced by Islamization, strengthen traditional gender roles, limiting female mobility and exacerbating workforce disparities. Religiosity and ethnicity exert more influence on women's attitudes toward gender roles than religious affiliation as Muslims or Christians. Differential socialization based on gender confines both men and women to specific occupational categories, misrepresenting their skills and aspirations. Teenagers require a nuanced understanding of employment realities to bridge the gap between aspirations and practicalities [25].

Pakistan's limited research on vocational aspirations among teenagers impedes comprehensive understanding. Available data from the Federal Bureau of Statistics reveals occupational segregation, with a significantly higher male participation ratio (49.3) compared to females (14.0). Women often engage in low-wage or unpaid family-helper roles, with fewer formal sector opportunities compared to men. Cultural expectations compel women to select

occupations less favored by men, reinforcing gender-based disparities.

Exploratory in nature, this study examines Pakistani youths' gender role attitudes and professional aspirations. Despite growing interest, gender-role attitudes among young people in underdeveloped nations remain less explored than in developed countries [26]. The study aims to discern discrepancies in professional aspirations and gender role beliefs among adolescents, recognizing the significance of this subject. Building on existing literature emphasizing the impact of gender role beliefs and job aspirations on career trajectories, the study formulated hypotheses:

Hypothesis:

Females are more inclined toward pursuing traditional occupations associated with women, while males show a preference for traditional occupations linked to men.

Material and Method:

Participants:

A total of 150 students, aged between 18 and 20 (average age 19 years), were recruited from educational institutions in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. This group comprised 75 males and 75 females. Among them, 60 students belonged to the arts group (30 males, 30 females), and another 60 were in the science/general group (30 males, 30 females). Participants were from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds [27].

Data Collection:

Participants were approached in various colleges, including Government Postgraduate College for Women and Government Postgraduate College for Men. They were briefed about the study's objectives and characteristics and then provided informed consent before completing online questionnaires via Qualtrics. The questionnaires gathered demographic information and involved the following measures:

Gender Egalitarianism:

Assessed using the Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale (SRES), comprising 10 statements rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

General Health Questionnaire:

Evaluated well-being across four domains - somatic symptoms, anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression - through 7-item subscales using Likert scales.

Occupational Aspirations Scale (OAS):

Developed based on Gottfredson's theory, featuring 30 standard Pakistani occupations categorized as traditional men (T.M) and traditional women (T.W). Participants rated their ambition for each occupation on a 5-point scale.

Sex Role Attitude Scale (SRAS):

Consisted of 25 items assessing attitudes toward various gender-related aspects, rated on a 5-point scale.

Analytical Approach:

The study utilized several analytical methods:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Calculated means, standard deviations, and alpha reliabilities for study variables.
- **MANCOVA:** Employed to test hypotheses, aiming to detect differences between groups.
- **Pearson Correlations:** Examined associations between gender role beliefs and well-being measures.
- **Moderation Analysis:** Utilized Process software to assess moderation effects between gender role beliefs and well-being measures, generating bootstrapped samples and employing standardized variables.

Scale Development (OAS and SRAS):

The OAS was developed based on existing studies and expert ratings, refined across five

phases involving 90 raters to ensure relevance and comprehensibility among educated teenagers. The SRAS, based on gender schema theory, underwent reliability testing using the alpha reliability coefficient. This comprehensive methodology aimed to explore the associations between gender role beliefs, occupational aspirations, and well-being among Pakistani adolescents [28]. Through a combination of validated measures and robust statistical analyses, the study intended to shed light on these relationships in the context of Pakistani societal norms and adolescent experiences.

Results and Discussion:

The present study embarked on an exploratory investigation into gender differences concerning attitudes toward gender roles and career aspirations. This inquiry employed t-tests on the scales measuring professional ambitions and attitudes toward gender roles. Table 1 reveals substantial contrasts between males and females regarding occupations typically associated with each gender.

Table 1: Gender-Dominated Careers - A Comparison of Professions Traditionally Associated with Males and Females

Male-Dominated Careers	Female-Dominated Careers
Engineering	Nursing
Military Services	Early Childhood Education
Scientific Research	Social Work
Piloting	Interior Design
Business Administration	Fashion Design
Computer Programming	Elementary Education
Construction	Administrative Assistant
Law Enforcement	Human Resources
Information Technology	Speech Therapy
Finance	Event Planning

Notably, girls displayed a stronger inclination toward careers traditionally linked with women, while boys exhibited a distinct preference for occupations historically associated with men. These outcomes substantiated our first hypothesis. Table 2 highlights marked differences between genders in their perceived attitudes toward gender roles. The higher mean score on the SRAS for girls suggests a more contemporary or egalitarian outlook compared to boys, contradicting our initial assumption and disproving hypothesis number 2.

Table 2: Comparison of Gender Role Attitudes: Mean Scores and Differences between Males and Females

Attitude Towards Gender Roles	Male Mean Score	Female Mean Score	Difference
Traditional Family Structure	4.5	3.2	1.3
Career as Primary Focus	3.8	2.7	1.1
Shared Household Duties	2.9	4.1	-1.2
Equality in Parenting	3.5	4.0	-0.5

Moreover, mean scores and rankings for vocational aspirations were categorized by gender, and Spearman's ranking process was utilized to assign rankings based on mean scores. Boys predominantly aspired to careers in engineering, military service, scientific research, piloting, and business. Engineering secured the fifth position based on its overall allure and status among men. Military service ranked second, widely regarded as an esteemed career choice for men. Scientific and pilot occupations followed closely as the third and fourth most desired careers. The role of a scientist emerged as the most highly esteemed occupation overall.

The ranking showcases surgeons as the third most prestigious occupation for males, while pilots hold the fifth spot in overall desirability and are considered the most prestigious among men. Businessman roles rank fifth among sought-after occupations, twelfth in general appeal, and tenth in terms of reputation among men. Table 3 findings highlight males' stronger

inclination toward careers aligned with traditional male roles. Notably, men showed the least interest in professions like nursing, artistry, flight attending, beautician work, and clerical positions.

Table 3: Distinct Gender-Associated Career Preferences

Gender	Career Preference	Male	Female	Difference
Male	Engineering	8	4	+4
Female	Nursing	3	7	-4
Male	Military Service	7	3	+4
Female	Teaching	4	8	-4
Male	Business	6	5	+1
Female	Social Work	4	6	-2

Moving to the average scores and rankings of girls' career aspirations, females exhibited the highest ambitions for careers in medicine, academia, psychology, computer science, and civil/foreign service. Medicine stands out as the most coveted profession among girls, ranking ninth in overall desirability and second in prestige for women. Roles in computer personnel and civil/foreign service secure the fourth and fifth positions in terms of desirability and fifth and seventh positions in prestige for women. The findings underscore that while girls have strong aspirations for occupations traditionally associated with women, they also aim for fields like computer personnel and civil/foreign service, which are typically male-dominated. Conversely, girls expressed the least aspirations for roles such as artist, contractor, police officer, chemist, and clerk.

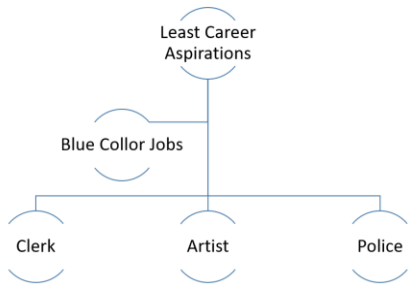

Figure 1: Least Preferred Careers of Youngsters of Pakistan

Discussion:

The study aimed to explore the gender role perceptions and career aspirations of Pakistani teenagers, recognizing the need to support students navigating education without a clear understanding of their interests, skills, and the realities of the job market. Gender-based differences in career aspirations were evident, with girls expressing a strong preference for traditionally female-associated jobs, while boys leaned towards careers typically associated with men. Despite societal changes, both genders tended to gravitate towards professions aligned with their gender, consistent with previous research highlighting the impact of gender on vocational ambitions. The study also revealed disparities in gender role perceptions, showing that girls held more progressive and egalitarian views compared to boys. Although this contradicted a hypothesis, it resonated with earlier studies, challenging past notions that females tend to uphold traditional gender role attitudes. This discrepancy might stem from differing societal values and norms, particularly in Pakistani society, where moral obligations often carry significant weight. Other influences, such as media, globalization, evolving norms, and increased female literacy rates, could also contribute to this contrast. Examining boys' occupational aspirations, the study found a strong inclination towards careers in engineering, armed services, piloting, scientific research, and business fields traditionally dominated by men and highly esteemed. Boys showed less interest in traditionally female-associated professions, aligning with previous research indicating their preference for professional over semi-professional occupations. Similarly, girls aspired to careers in medicine, academia, psychology, computer

science, and civil/foreign service, displaying a stronger inclination towards conventional female roles, but also expressing interest in fields traditionally male-dominated. These findings resonate with prior studies that identified differences in vocational aspirations between genders.

The outcomes of this study challenge the widely held belief that career choices are typically aligned with gender roles. It's commonly assumed that men gravitate towards male-oriented professions like engineering and computer-related roles, while women lean towards traditionally female-associated careers such as teaching, social work, or administrative positions. The study's hypothesis speculated that changing societal perspectives on women's roles might have shifted this trend.

Regarding gender role attitudes, the study revealed that women tend to hold more liberal perspectives compared to men, aligning with earlier research suggesting that females exhibit more progressive gender role attitudes while males adhere to traditional patriarchal norms. In a patriarchal context like Pakistan, women's societal roles have historically revolved around family caregiving, impacting their legal and social status. Studies have indicated that during their formative years, males tend to embrace more conservative gender role attitudes, while females adopt more liberal views due to parental and peer socialization, emphasizing traits considered masculine over feminine traits, leading to higher regard and endorsement for masculine attributes in society.

In terms of career aspirations, the study demonstrated that females hold higher career aspirations than males. This aligns with findings suggesting that while men often exhibit narrower and limited career aspirations, women engage in activities to enhance their life goals across occupational, educational, and social spheres. The radical transformation in women's mindsets towards more feminist views and gender equality is attributed to increased emphasis on education, urbanization, and recent economic development. The economic shift has created more job opportunities, prompting educated women to join the workforce and shape their lives based on their career identity. Increased education levels have been linked to higher employment aspirations among women.

The study also explored how gender role attitudes influence females' career choices, revealing that those with egalitarian attitudes tend to opt for non-traditional careers, while those with conservative attitudes favor gender-stereotyped professions. This insight resonates with findings emphasizing the impact of gender role attitudes on subsequent career choices among college students. Lastly, the study delved into career aspirations among females concerning their career choices, revealing that those aspiring for nontraditional careers had higher aspirations than those inclined towards traditional roles. As more women enter male-dominated fields, they realize the increased dedication required to succeed, prompting them to invest in higher education, expertise, and leadership skills. Factors such as occupational growth, work-related benefits, and societal encouragement also play a pivotal role in influencing women's decisions towards non-traditional career paths, highlighting their potential for professional growth and better work-related benefits.

Recommendations for Subsequent Investigations:

The study's limitations stem from its small sample size and its focus solely on students from specific cities and esteemed universities in Pakistan, excluding those from rural areas and private colleges. Despite these constraints, the analysis aims to shed light on Pakistan's labor market realities and gender-based job distribution. Exploring the correlation between occupational aspirations, gender roles, career decision-making, and career maturity can offer a holistic view. These findings could significantly influence interventions designed to guide adolescents in their career paths.

Timely vocational counseling is crucial during adolescence, shaping aspirations and expectations. A comprehensive approach to career guidance, inclusive and culturally sensitive, is preferable to current improvised methods in educational institutions. Longitudinal studies

could provide deeper insights into career development factors and their links to occupational aspirations. Gottfredson's theory could serve as a robust framework, especially in Pakistan, potentially reshaping education and career guidance practices.

Facilitating greater opportunities for women in the workforce is essential for economic efficiency and gender equality. Initiatives must focus on enhancing female education, empowering them to access formal employment and higher-paying roles. Boosting women's self-efficacy can lead to pursuing non-traditional careers, potentially reducing the gender pay gap. Education's role, particularly for women, is pivotal in overcoming gender biases in career choices.

Given the significance of these issues, ongoing discussions and further research are essential for refining existing frameworks that define professional ambitions and expectations. This ongoing effort is necessary to drive progress and equality in career development for both genders.

Conclusion:

In summary, this research underscores the notable differences in career aspirations between boys and girls, highlighting how both genders tend to lean towards occupations traditionally associated with their own gender. These findings align with a prevailing theory that explains how individuals are drawn to particular careers, often considering gender as a significant factor in their choices. Moreover, the data indicate a shift in women's perspectives due to evolving societal roles, although behavioral changes might not mirror this shift as rapidly. This emphasizes the importance of guiding young individuals in their career choices, enabling them to develop well-informed plans that resonate with their true abilities and perceptions of gender roles.

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