

Shaped by Stereotypes: The Lifelong Impact of Gender Roles on Human Development

Dr. Priya Mitra^{1*}, Ariti Nath², Archita Pal³

^{1*}Assistant Professor, Department of Education JIS University, Kolkata
²Assistant Professor, Department of Education JIS University, Kolkata
³Assistant Professor, Department of Education JIS University, Kolkata

Citation: Dr. Priya Mitra, et.al (2024). Shaped by Stereotypes: The Lifelong Impact of Gender Roles on Human Development, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(10) 863-869
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i10.10346

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	<p>This paper discusses about gender stereotypes and its impact on every individual. There are gender stereotypes from multiple aspect of a new life; before birth and after birth. This paper also studied about the role of parents in gender stereotyping and how gender stereotypes limit the potential of a student starting with pre-primary education, primary education, secondary education, beyond secondary education, in his or her career choices, in society and so on. This paper presents stereotypes from these all aspects and seeks to investigate a logical link between gender stereotypes and overall development of a child. This paper also helps in understanding the consequences of gender stereotyping on every aspect of life of an individual. Not only this, it also provides some strategies and intervention to overcome this obstacle named gender stereotype and lastly how media play a crucial role in achieving gender equality.</p> <p>Keywords: Gender, Gender stereotyping, Education, Child, Gender Equality</p>

Introduction

We often think or may be confused about ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, sometimes considering both as the same thing although both are completely different concept. According to World Health Organization, **Sex refers to** “the different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc.”. **Gender refers to** “the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed”.

In education, gender stereotyping is like an invisible force that shapes perceptions and limits opportunities based on outdated notions of masculinity and femininity. Picture a classroom where boys are nudged towards science and girls towards art, or a garden where seeds are sorted into rigid rows of pink and blue. These examples illustrate how gender stereotypes confine individuals to predetermined roles, stifling diversity and potential. In reality, education should be a stage where every student is free to explore, express, and excel without the constraints of gender norms, nurturing a garden of boundless possibility where every seed can bloom uniquely.

We all know gender stereotypes are present in society in different forms and often it starts influencing human lives from the very beginning of their lives. If we see the moment when a child comes in this world. Parents, society unconsciously developed some expectations and norms based on the gender of a child, like from which toy he or she play, what clothes she or he wear, how they behave in front of someone and unintentionally we encourage them to follow some societal norms based on his or her gender. For example, we often see in our home and nearby, parent or families choose a specific toy, specific colour to decorate room and other activities based on the gender of a child even parents also want to choose career of child according to his or her gender like teacher, nurse and a house maker for a girl and for boys’ business, engineer, electrician etc. This type of expectation can suppress the growth of a individuals by bounding the individuals in certain domain.

We often listen a “Boys shouldn’t cry” or “Girls can’t play sports”, this type of notion suppressed the emotions of a child in early age and further in overall development of an individual.

Objectives:

- To find the obstacles of gender stereotype before the birth of a child
- To study the gender stereotype after the birth of child
- To study the role of parents in gender stereotyping
- To study the gender stereotypes in education
- To find out the consequences of gender stereotyping

Methodology

This descriptive and qualitative study discusses the gender stereotyping and its impact on overall development of child. Previously released papers on this topic were read and extensive research was done while writing this article. Different sources like books, newspaper articles and the articles on internet about gender stereotyping were given due consideration in the compilation of this paper.

Gender stereotype before the birth of a child

Gender stereotyping can begin even before a child is born, it can start with some expectations and assumptions about the gender of a baby like if parent want a baby girl, they might think she will like pink colour, a doll or house set for playing, also she must be a caring person in future. Conversely if they want a baby boy, then might decorate the room in blue, buy toys related with sports like car, gun and they might expect strong and intelligent person in future.

When a baby is born, we always listen that doctor congratulates the parents and family member by telling 'baby girl' or 'baby boy' rather just telling baby onwards, this reinforces the gender stereotypes unintentionally.

"Imagine a boy playing with puzzle. He's engaging with different parts of the puzzle and by arranging the parts he tries to solve the puzzle. This helps him to understand how things fit together. Now suppose a girl playing with a cooking set is pretending to make delicious food. This helps in developing cooking skills. Both are important skills, but it might be that the boy only gets puzzles to solve and girls only get cooking set. This can limit the potential of children. May be boys also want to play with cooking set or vice versa girl also like to solve puzzle. Such early gender stereotyping can have long-lasting impact on overall development of a child.

Gender stereotype after the birth of child

Societal expectation regarding traditional gender role may come with a birth of a child. gender stereotypes start impacting the child in a very large domain and this also contribute in shaping the child's behaviours, characteristics, roles appropriate for an individuals based on their gender.

In many societies, traditional gender roles dictate specific expectations for mothers and fathers in the upbringing of their children. Mothers are often expected to be nurturing, empathetic, and focused on the emotional well-being of their children. They may feel pressure to prioritize their roles as caregivers over their own personal or professional aspirations. This can lead to feelings of guilt or inadequacy if they choose to pursue activities outside of caregiving or if they struggle to meet societal standards of motherhood.

On the other hand, fathers may feel pressure to be strong, stoic providers who prioritize financial stability for their families. They may face criticism or judgment if they express vulnerability or prioritize caregiving responsibilities over their careers. This can create a barrier for fathers who want to be more involved in their children's lives or who seek a more balanced approach to parenting.

Role of parents in gender stereotyping

Parents are role models for his or her children. Children do most things on the basis of their perspectives and his or her observation in their home and society, so parents can play a crucial role in shaping the perspectives, thought and believes of any children. Hence it is the parents' duties to develop a bias free thought in their children's mind. Parents should have to be aware about the challenges and consequences of believes and thought based on gender stereotypes. If a boy child gets hurt and start crying and parents continuously told him the notion, stop crying "Boys shouldn't cry". The child may stop crying but what he learns and how he behaves when again he gets hurt, might be he start suppressing his emotion and this can impact on his mental health and similarly if parents always told a girl child to being polite, behave nicely and not giggle in front of relatives this also can suppress the emotion of girl child. These early experiences can have long- lasting effects on the emotional development, belief system, self-esteem, career choices and relationships with family, peers, friends etc of the children.

However, parent can strengthen their role by giving freedom to express their children's emotion, to choose his or her own interest, providing children to play with diverse range of toys and activities. Parent also empower their role by generating inclusive and healthy environment for the growth and development of their children. Additionally, parent can show positive and healthy attitudes towards their child irrespective of traditional gender stereotypes.

Ultimately, by challenging traditional accepting gender roles, how they behave, which career they choose, in which activities they engage, parents can help children to develop into an individual who are confident, free from the constraints of gender norms.

Gender stereotypes in education

Gender stereotyping occurs when “ascribing certain attributes, characteristics and roles to people based on their gender”. More clearly, it involves attributing traditional gender expectations related with one’s assigned sex at birth. As an example, the expectation is that girls will choose arts subjects and choose occupation like nurses or teachers while boys will choose science subjects and follow career paths involved with engineering, science or business.

Pre-Primary Education

The first five years of children are very important for their cognitive and socio-emotional development for their well-being. Studies conclude that a child learns gender stereotype at the age of two and most children have already made a stable concept of their gender identity and develop knowledge about gender role behaviors at the age of four. At the age of five, girls are more interested in roles that have been traditionally male-dominated than the boys are in job traditionally female-dominated.

Primary Education

In primary education, the expectation of math teacher is that the girls are less-efficient in mathematics than the boys are. Gender stereotypes in primary education are also seen in career expectations. A study by Wibourn and Kee found that students of 8-9 year-old were keen of taking information that related female names with traditionally male occupations than male names with traditionally female occupations. Their study concludes that boys who have dreams of becoming nurses, librarians or childcare workers will face a more difficult phenomenon for achieving their goals than girls who have dreams of becoming dentists, doctors of police officers. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of primary school teachers are female indicates the gender-stereotypes in the teaching profession.

Secondary Education

In the aspect of personal and educational development, secondary education is very important period for student. In this time student pre adolescence and adolescence period which are key growth and developmental periods. Women prefer the career path of becoming nurses, teachers or other professions and men prefer to choose occupations of higher authority, prestige and status. Data from PISA 2018 shows that generally boys and girls have different point of view towards the fear or failure and competition. On average across OECD countries, girls of 15 years have higher levels of fear of failure than boys do, with lack of confidence and higher anxiety in their abilities specially in math and science.

Beyond secondary education:

The attention paid to girls with respect to gender equality arises because girls and women continue to be less represented in education, employment and training. They also have less access to technology for education, employment and services and do three times as much unpaid care and domestic work in comparison to their male counterparts, resulting in higher poverty rates for young women (UN Women, 2021). A gender-stereotypical representation of professions and subjects can hinder female students’ learning and prevent them from reaching their full potential by, among others, lowering students’ self-assessment, sense of competence and influencing their career choices (Ertl, Luttenberger and Paechter, 2017[50]). Gender differences in tertiary education are observed in terms of both graduation rates and fields of study.

Women are under-represented in STEM field (8% of apprentices are women) and over-represented in teacher training and education science, and in health and welfare fields (OECD, 2021; OECD, n.d.). The choice of study programmes of men and women are largely influenced from gender stereotyping and gender-biased career expectations (OECD, n.d.).

Globally, more than 75% of the total unpaid care work is carried out by women and three out of four women do housework with their daughters, which runs the risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes and gender roles across generations (OECD, 2017).

Influence of Teachers

Teachers take the position of parents away from homes in schools. After the parents, major influences of teachers are noticed on children. Students usually adhere to each and every command of teachers without a second thought. A common gender stereotype in education is that the men are better in mathematics than women. If math teachers also believe that, they become biased towards student ability. That is why, boys become more attentive in mathematics than girls. Teachers do not pay equal attention towards them, even though girls do equally well in mathematics. Teachers motivate female student in arts subjects. This motivation has an impact on the choice of the subjects the students make. Teachers play a prime role in making students’ decision about their higher education and career. Teachers are prone to be biased and may cause gender justice in education when teachers themselves are stereotyped.

Consequences of Gender Stereotyping

Indian culture has always been patriarchal in nature. The males are always the head of the household and favoured more than females. A baby boy is preferred more than girls and this is something that is innate in the minds of most people even when they do not show this consciously. This colours their attitudes, expectations and behaviours towards boys and girls.

Gender stereotyping groups boys and girls into two separate groups with distinct characteristics, aspirations, attributes and behaviours expected from each group. It does not take the individual into account. This affects almost all aspects of the lives of children from infancy to adulthood shaping their identities and personality and influencing their academic and career choices.

Gender Stereotyping During Infancy

During infancy it is assumed that since the gender of the child is different, they will have different preferences for clothes, toys, books and games. Girls are dressed in pink or light coloured clothes and given toys like dolls and cooking sets so that they can learn housekeeping and become a nurturing person. Boys on the other hand are dressed in blue or deep colours as it is considered suitable for boys. They are given cars and balls to play with and encouraged to be adventurous and do outdoor activities.

Whenever a child plays with toys that are considered suitable for their gender they are encouraged to do it so that these ideas are reinforced in their minds as correct behaviour and shape their preferences and choices. If a child shows divergent behaviour, for example, a boy likes to play with dolls or a girl is trying to be adventurous, then they are discouraged to do so and these types of behaviours are assumed by the child to be incorrect until eventually the child gives up these ideas altogether. This is called positive and negative reinforcement and sub consciously implants the seed of gender stereotyping even in the minds of infants.

Children are very perspective in nature. They pick up on emotions and body language of their elders and try to emulate them. When they see female members of the family doing all the household chores and the male members only doing outdoor work they naturally try to mimic them. They start playing games of role playing in which only the girls do the chores and take care of others whereas boys are sent off to work outside and treated as lords when they return.

Gender Stereotyping at Home

Boys are taught to be strong and manly and to not show emotions that are considered girly like crying. Boys who show their feelings or like or play with anything which is stereotyped for girls are considered weak and feminine. Dolls are for girls. They are discouraged by their parents to do so and made fun of by their friends. Such boys become introverts and stop sharing their innermost thoughts with anyone.

At home, girls are expected to be obedient and meek, tidy up after themselves and be neat and clean in appearance. Only then will she be called a good girl. Girls are told not to shout or be rowdy. They should always behave in a lady-like manner. Boys, on the other hand, can be rude, disobedient, and untidy and everyone brushes off their behaviour as natural and calls it their boyish nature. This type of gender stereotyping has a negative impact on the personality and development of children of both sex. The girls start to suppress their personality and change themselves so that they can be socially accepted whereas the lack of discipline in the early years of boys leads to increased aggressiveness and a sense of entitlement in their later lives.

Therefore, gender stereotyping affects the way children think, their emotions, their choices and preferences, their personality and their identity as unique individuals. It makes them follow the traditional roles of males and females that have been followed by their elders through generations, suppressing any divergent behaviour which is socially unacceptable.

Gender Stereotyping at School

Gender stereotyping at school adversely affects the academic and career prospects of the children. The school and its environment, the curriculum, the books that are being taught and the teachers who teach them are all consciously or sub consciously contributing in this gender stereotyping. In schools, children are grouped into boys and girls and all the academic programmes and events are arranged accordingly as what is suitable for the two genders respectively. The preferences of the children individually are not taken into account although each child should be considered unique. This hampers the development of their personality as unique individuals since they try to conform with the prevalent stereotype so that they are accepted by their teachers and not mocked or ridiculed by their friends and peers.

Likewise, teachers can also reinforce gender stereotyping when they praise or scold the students for their behaviours and actions. Girls are praised for being good in arts, being neat and clean in appearance, tidying up after themselves, being polite and respecting their elders. Boys however are praised for being good intellectually, excelling in sports and their outspoken behaviour.

Academic Gap

Girls are generally considered good in studies at school than boys but it is generally assumed that they are weaker in maths and science and can only excel in language and arts and vice versa for boys. This generalisation steers the children to make their academic and career choices in the fields in which they are more encouraged

and socially accepted regardless of their own personal choices or preferences. Most children feel the need to please their teachers and elders and be accepted by society even if they have to sacrifice their own dreams. Studies have shown that the percentage of girls who continue their higher studies taking science and mathematics and pursue their career in the STEM field is considerably lower than boys creating a huge gap in the ratio of men and women in the workforce. Similarly, boys are not encouraged to study arts or nursing and hence there are very few male nurses or caregivers.

INTERVENTIONS & STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME GENDER STEREOTYPING

At Home

Parents are the first and most important role models for children. Children observe and imitate everything that they see their parents doing. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the parents to break the gender stereotypes prevalent in society. The first thing that can be done is the sharing of household responsibilities and chores by both the parents equally so that children understand that both males and females can be nurturers, caregivers and providers and have an equal share and value in everything. This will make them respect both parents equally and become more responsible in the future.

Parents should also try to remove the stereotypes regarding the clothes, toys and books that should be given to boys and girls respectively. They can buy gender neutral clothes or tell their children that wearing a particular coloured dress will not make them girlish or boyish. Similarly, the toys and books that are selected should be according to the preference of the child and not what is suitable for boys or girls. The most important thing that should be considered is that each child is unique and what he or she likes should be given the most value.

At home both boys and girls should be given equal responsibilities and chores. It should not be only the girl's duty to tidy up and take care of the younger kids. Both should be encouraged in outdoor activities and games and to express their emotions freely. This can be done when both the parents share their emotions and feelings openly in front of their children so that even boys understand that it is normal to express their emotions.

At School

Teachers play a very important role in the lives of children specially in the formative stage of their lives. Therefore, it is necessary to have properly trained teachers who recognise gender stereotyping in a given situation whether it is being done consciously or subconsciously by themselves or their peers, is depicted in the academic books or included in any activity or is a part of the curriculum so that they can devise ways to remove this gradually from the education system. Hence, due importance should be given to the qualifications and suitability of teachers of the primary class and those without biases and prejudices should be selected for this job.

The teacher's own beliefs about the gender roles of their students greatly influence the minds of the children as the teachers are regarded as role models by them. Therefore, the teachers should try to understand themselves and their own biases, especially regarding gender, whether it be consciously or unconsciously. The teachers should try to pay equal attention to boys and girls and encourage them to take part in activities not just based on gender but on their abilities.

The teachers can make their students take equal interest in science, maths and arts irrespective of gender and choose the subjects in which they are interested. If a boy is more interested in arts, he should be encouraged to pursue his studies in this field. Generally, boys are reluctant to take up careers which are traditionally considered suitable for girls because they are afraid to be ridiculed. The teacher should help them get rid of these gender biased notions and pursue their own interests to achieve success and satisfaction in their lives.

While grouping students for any activity, it is quite common for teachers to divide the class into two teams, an all-boys and an all-girls teams. This grouping based on gender only helps in accentuating the differences between them and does not take individual choices and preferences into account. The teacher should address this issue and try to form mixed groups so that they can interact and understand each other's opinions and point of view and break the stereotypes surrounding gender.

The teachers can present as role models, men and women who followed the untraditional path and became successful in careers which were conventionally supposed to be for the opposite gender. This will help them to choose career paths according to their own interests and preferences and not those that are traditionally considered only masculine or feminine. The teachers can also organise activities that will raise the interest of students in different subjects.

Promoting Gender Equality through Textbooks - A methodological guide

Authors: Carole Bruguilles: demographer, University of Paris X – Nanterre – CERPOS. Sylvie Cromer: sociologist, University of Lille. **Coordination:** UNESCO – Division for the Promotion of Basic Education, in cooperation with the Division for Gender Equality, Bureau of Strategic Planning, and the Regional Office for Education in Africa (BREDA)

Printed textbooks – which are still of paramount importance today as the education system's basic framework of learning and as symbolic reflections of their societies – tend unwittingly and unintentionally to embody a substratum of patriarchal cultures that are discriminatory against girls and women despite all the efforts

made in the last few decades. This is because gender equality – like human rights – is a recent value for humanity as a whole and upsets cultures based on dominance. However, no one disputes the need to ensure that socialization aids are consistent with universal human rights principles in order to meet a collective ideal of sustainable development and peace. While revising textbooks to convey different gendered representations, and therefore different norms and values, is eminently desirable, textbooks cannot be changed overnight. Nor can there be any question of “getting rid of” humanity’s cultural heritage – tales, fables, works of literature and other creative works – from eras when the right to gender equality was not appreciated. However, inherited textbooks and cultural works may be interpreted from a gender perspective and be recast in a light to encourage and develop a critical mind.

The examples of projects carried out by the various countries show that it is possible to create awareness of inequality and a desire to take action on individual and collective levels, both personally and professionally. More generally, there are three grounds for optimism. A sharper look at gender sooner or later entails a change in representations and professional practices on the part of those who commission, produce, issue and use textbooks for children and adults. As individuals’ spheres of life are mutually dependent, professional practices, views and principles displayed in public life have an influence on private life, and vice versa. It may therefore be assumed that the act of changing representations in the public sphere will de facto lead to questions being raised in the private sphere. Professionals in the fields of education and culture who have been trained in gender awareness are also parents who feel strongly about bringing up children and working for tomorrow’s society.

Textbooks, taken as a whole, are therefore practical and powerful tools for introducing a process of social change which can help the individual find fulfilment according to his or her potentials and his or her desires rather than according to the attributes of his or her sex and its associated gender.

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY

The media includes all forms of communication like television, radio, newspapers and magazines, cinema, telephone and fax and the internet. Hence, they can be assessed by the majority of the population of the world in at least one form. Media plays a crucial role in shaping our sense of perception. Many people can see the world and the different traditions and cultures of its people only through the media and as such they take what is being shown at its face value without questioning its authenticity. Therefore, media can challenge the different stereotypes present in society and also address the issue of gender stereotyping that have traditionally been followed by the people.

Young minds are most affected by media. Everything that the media shows influences the minds of boys and girls and they try to follow them considering it the latest trends in society, shaping their preferences and beliefs and directing their behavior in their daily lives. Over-sexualizing women and always showing that women who are feminine with slim bodies only are considered beautiful makes girls believe that this is the standard and norm set for women and they try to alter themselves physically and mentally. Similarly, showing strong and handsome men as the ideal masculine type makes boys believe that all men should be like this and any deviation is considered unsuitable and unacceptable.

Portraying role models that break the normal gender stereotypes will give girls and boys the courage to take on unconventional roles and follow their dreams even when they are not accepted by society. Media can remove the gender biases present in the society relating to the role of men and women in a family and the duties and responsibilities that they are obligated to do and depict gender equality as the norm for everyone to follow. Similarly, media can address the gender stereotype present in schools and colleges and the career opportunities that can be taken up by boys and girls respectively promoting a gender inclusive and gender neutral society.

Conclusion

From their early years, children are influenced by gender stereotypes and norms passed down by parents, teachers, schools, media and other social institutions. These stereotypes, in turn, have a strong impact on the way children develop their identities and perceptions of the world. Encouraging children to explore a wide range of interests and emotions without imposing gender norms can help break down these.

To bring about any change in the gender stereotyping prevalent in society and to remove gender bias we have to take the initiative ourselves. Only when we have conquered our own biases and prejudices can we help others see their faults and change their ways of thinking. It is essential for society to recognize and challenge these stereotypes to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for everyone, regardless of gender.

References

1. A qualitative insight into researchers’ perceptions of gender inequality in medical and dental research institutions in Nigeria - PMC (nih.gov)
2. #HerEducationOurFuture #BreakTheBias: challenging gender bias and stereotypes in and through education; the latest facts on gender equality in education - UNESCO Digital Library
3. UNESCO -Promoting gender equality through textbooks: a methodological guide

4. Raley, Sara; Bianchi, Suzanne (August 2006). "Sons, Daughters, and Family Processes: Does Gender of Children Matter?". *Annual Review of Sociology*. 32 (1): 401–421. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.32.061604.12310
5. Witt, SD (1997). "Parental influence on children's socialization to gender roles". *Adolescence*. 32 (126): 253–159. PMID 9179321. ProQuest 195928943 INIST 2688850 Gale A19619406.
6. "What the Research Says: Gender-Typed Toys | NAEYC". www.naeyc.org. Retrieved 2018-12-13.
7. Jacobs, Janist E.; Vernon, Margaret K.; Eccles, Jacquelynne (January 7, 2005).
8. "Activity choices in middle childhood: The roles of gender, self-beliefs, and parents' influence." *Organized Activities as Contexts of Development: Extracurricular Activities, After-school, and Community Programs*. Lawrence Erlbaum. ISBN 978-0805844313.
9. Calvert, S. L. (2013, November 6). Gender Roles [PowerPoint presentation].
10. Gender stereotypes in education: Policies and practices to address gender stereotyping across OECD education systems;(Ottavia Brussino, Jody McBrien) EDU/WKP(2022)9
11. P.M.Arjun Sekhar, J Parameswari (November 2021) "Gender stereotype in Education" Issn No: 1006-7930
12. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en>.
13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9773-7>.
14. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-en>
15. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264179370-en>
16. www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/
17. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_roles_in_childhood
18. <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/education-and-social-work/research/cspace-blog/gender-stereotypes-in-childhood-whats-the-harm>
19. <https://enseignerlegalite.com/en/early-childhood/gender-stereotypes-in-infants-and-toddlers/>
20. www.unesco.org
21. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov
22. www.oecd.org/education/gender-stereotypes-in-education-a46ae056-en.htm
23. www.atlantis-press.com/article/125975792.pdf
24. www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters
25. www.unicef.org
26. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264179370-en>