Original Article:
Determinants of Adolescents Attitude Towards Gender Equality in Urban, Rural, and Tribal Areas of the Southern Part of India

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Citation

Submitted: May 13, 2020; Accepted: Sep 1, 2020; Published: Sep 20, 2020

Abstract: Background: Gender stereotyping and assumptions about men and women shape everyday personal interactions and attitudes on gender norms. Adolescents forming the future society would be playing an essential role in practising gender equality norms and inculcating it in future generations. Hence the study was undertaken to know the adolescents' attitude towards gender equality norms and to explore its determinants. Objectives: To assess the attitude of adolescents towards gender equality in Urban, Rural, and Tribal areas of Mysuru district. To determine the association of socio-demographic variables, interpersonal influence of family and friends, and experiences of gender bias with adolescent's attitude towards gender equality. Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted in the urban, rural, and tribal areas of Mysuru district using multistage sampling. Data was collected from 500 adolescents by a pre-structured and pre-tested, validated questionnaire and analysis was done using SPSS V.24. Results: 50.5% of adolescents had negative attitude scores towards gender equality, and 79.3 % of adolescent girls had reported the personal experience of gender bias. Age, Sex, Residence, interpersonal influence of family and friends and personal experience of gender bias among adolescent girls showed significant association with their attitude towards gender equality. Conclusion: Nearly, half of the adolescents have a negative attitude towards gender equality, and more than three fourth of adolescent girls had personally experienced gender bias. There is an increasing recognition of gender equality as a goal fundamental to improve any country's overall health and development. If gender discrimination is rooted out, then women will deliver her knowledge, skills, and potential to develop a family, nation, and ultimately to the whole world. Despite the efforts from the government and private organizations and improvement in the overall quality of life and literacy rates, the persistence of gender inequality suggests that there must be on-going social processes that continually recreate gender inequality. As gender socialization of both boys and girls begin early in India, to promote gender equality, awareness must start in childhood and adolescent age for both girls and boys. It is essential to initiate change processes at a young age to shape attitudes and transform their behaviours. With improving school enrolment and retention rates in India, schools can serve as crucial space to inculcate and promote progressive attitudes among young people to challenge discrimination and violation related to gender and sexuality. Hence the study attempted to determine the attitude of adolescents towards gender equality and its association with various determinants.

Introduction:
Gender Equality not necessarily mean that women and men will become the same but that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender differences are created by society. Based on sexual differences, the roles and behaviours are assigned to women and men. As soon as a child is born, families and society begin the process of gender stereotyping and this has an adverse impact on development goals and consequently impact economic growth as well. There is an increasing recognition of gender equality as a goal fundamental to improve any country's overall health and development. If gender discrimination is rooted out, then women will deliver her knowledge, skills, and potential to develop a family, nation, and ultimately to the whole world. Despite the efforts from the government and private organizations and improvement in the overall quality of life and literacy rates, the persistence of gender inequality suggests that there must be on-going social processes that continually recreate gender inequality. As gender socialization of both boys and girls begin early in India, to promote gender equality, awareness must start in childhood and adolescent age for both girls and boys. It is essential to initiate change processes at a young age to shape attitudes and transform their behaviours. With improving school enrolment and retention rates in India, schools can serve as crucial space to inculcate and promote progressive attitudes among young people to challenge discrimination and violation related to gender and sexuality. Hence the study attempted to determine the attitude of adolescents towards gender equality and its association with various determinants.
Objectives
- To determine the attitude of adolescents towards gender equality in urban, rural and tribal areas of Southern part of India.
- To determine the influence of socio-demographic variables, interpersonal influences of family, friends and experiences of gender bias with adolescent’s attitude towards gender equality.

Methodology
A cross-sectional study was conducted for a duration of six months among late adolescents between the ages of 16-19 years in Urban, Rural and Tribal areas of Mysuru district, Karnataka. This age group is particularly selected as
- They represent a more vulnerable age group who encounter problems due to issues related to gender inequality
- This age group in the near future is going to define the gender equality in the society, hence would be important knowing their attitude in this direction and
- They would also be better respondents to the questionnaire-based study.

The sample size was determined to be 394 with p=19.6 (which is the proportion of adolescents in India according to 2011 Census), and absolute precision of four. Assuming 20 percent of missing data sample size was rounded off to 500. Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted [Figure 1]. Data was collected using a pre-structured, pretested and culturally acceptable, validated questionnaire in local language. The questionnaire extracted information on socio-demographic variables (age, sex, residence, subject that they perused, type of family, religion, family size, presence of female sibling, birth order, socioeconomic status and education of parents), interpersonal influences of family (sharing of household chores, decision making), attitude towards gender equality (scores <57 was considered as negative attitude and ≥57 was considered as positive attitude towards gender equality) and personal experience of gender bias (administered only for girls).

Results
Out of 500 adolescents, 35 had missing data, and hence the data of the remaining 465 were used for analysis. Among the 243 adolescent girls from whom data was collected, the median score of gender inequality experienced was 29 (24 -34). On applying spearman’s correlation between scores of gender bias experience among adolescent girls and attitude towards gender equality, data analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation (r=0.34), which infers that adolescents with better personal experiences of gender equality have a better attitude towards gender equality norms. [Fig 2]

Figure 2: Scatter diagram shows the relationship between gender bias experience among adolescent girls and attitude towards gender equality (n=243)

*The higher scores in gender bias experience questionnaire points towards better personal experiences of gender equality. Spearman correlation, r =0.34

On Chi-square analysis, a significant association was found between attitude towards gender equality norms with residence (tribal adolescents having a better attitude), age ( Adolescents of 16 and 17 years having better attitude) and gender (girls had a better attitude) [Table 1].

With respect to interpersonal influence of family and friends to gender equality, a significant association was seen between attitude scores and family norms like; father getting involved in doing household activities and involvement of mother in taking major decisions related to the family. It was also seen that those with friends displaying gender discrimination attitude also had significantly negative attitude scores [Table 2]. However, there was no significant association seen between education, type of family, religion, family size, presence of female sibling, birth order, socioeconomic status and education of parents with gender equality attitude scores.

Table 1: Association of socio-demographic variables with the attitude of adolescents towards gender equality norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Negative attitude (Score&lt;57)</th>
<th>Positive attitude (Score≥57)</th>
<th>Total (N=465)</th>
<th>X² value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>141(54.2)</td>
<td>119(45.8)</td>
<td>260</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>65(56)</td>
<td>51(44)</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal</td>
<td>29(32.5)</td>
<td>60(67.5)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19.772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1(12.5)</td>
<td>7(87.5)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>58(42.9)</td>
<td>72(57.1)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>65(45.1)</td>
<td>79(54.9)</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>49(59.7)</td>
<td>33(40.3)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>62(64.5)</td>
<td>34(35.5)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>167(75.3)</td>
<td>55(24.7)</td>
<td>222</td>
<td></td>
<td>104.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68(27.9)</td>
<td>175(72.1)</td>
<td>243</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The numbers in the parenthesis indicate the row-wise percentages

Ethics statement
Confidentiality and voluntariness were the guiding principles of the study. Informed consent was obtained from each of the study participant and Institution Ethics Committee was obtained before the start of the study.

Statistical analysis
Data obtained was entered in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS V. 24 (Licensed to the institution). Descriptive statistics like proportions, Mean and Median were used. Spearman correlation was used to know the correlation between gender bias experience score and attitude scores among girls. Chi-square analysis was used to know the association of various variables with gender equality attitude scores, p-value was considered significant at < 0.05.
The findings of the present study portrayed that gender equality attitude is positive amongst 49.5 percent, while in 50.5 percent of adolescents, attitude is negative. Lower gender equality scores are seen in 75.3 percent boys and 27.6 percent of girls. A similar study conducted in Mumbai, India revealed gender equality scores to be high among only 10 percent of the boys. Although the gender equality scores among girls were similar, a unique pattern of high scores was seen in 24 percent. Another study conducted on urban adolescent boys in India, projects equitable gender attitudes to be moderate on 71 percent of the boys and 13 percent reported significantly inequitable gender attitudes.(10) It is also coherent with a qualitative review, which shows that adolescent boys are seen to be favourable in perpetrating gender inequalities than girls and in contrary girls have shown equitable gender attitudes. This could be due to differential gender socialization processes and pressures.(7) These findings validate the significance of inculcating positive gender equality attitude in adolescents to address gender stereotyping both in the families and the surrounding society. It was also seen that as age increases, the positive attitude towards gender equality declined. Increased reinforcement of social expectations and pressures from family, peers and society on gender-specific roles and identities would probably explain this. Qualitative studies from Europe, North America and sub-Saharan Africa suggested that puberty onset intensifies social expectations related to gender and would reduce the positive attitude towards gender equality. (11, 12) In the present study, it was observed that patriarchal norms (Father/other men not involving in the household division of labour, only father deciding on issues related to children, money expenditure and other significant decisions) in the family significantly influenced the adolescent's attitude towards gender equality. Those grown up in a family where females were treated equally to the males and all the family members shared responsibilities, including household chores, had a positive attitude. A study done in Uganda also showed similar findings.(13)

Adolescent residents in the tribal area had a relatively better attitude to gender equality compared to rural and urban residents. This difference may be due to the differences in the cultural norms. Also, systematic review findings show that young adolescents, across cultural settings, commonly express stereotypical or inequitable gender attitudes, and such attitudes appear to vary by individual socio-demographic characteristics.(7) Adolescents having friends showcasing negative gender equality norms also had lower gender equality attitude scores. This uplifts the importance of the role of peer in deciding one's gender equality norms. A similar study done to understand the gender socialization process in early adolescence demonstrated the influential roles of parents, siblings, peers can reduce, increase or eliminate gender equality.(14) Another study conducted in Mumbai also found that gender attitude scale was highly associated with attitudes related to condoning violence against girls. It was seen that 35 percent of the boys with the most equitable gender attitudes were least likely to condone violence against girls.(10)

Despite many efforts being done to overcome gender discrimination, 79.3 percent of adolescent girls in the present study reported personal experiences of gender bias from family, friends or society. It was also seen that adolescents with better personal experiences of gender equality also have a better attitude towards gender equality norms. The proportion of girls experiencing gender bias being so high, it is important that sensitization of gender equality norms needs to percolate deep in the society to bring a change where access to rights and opportunities are not dependent on the gender of an individual.

**Strengths and limitations**

The strength of this study would be that it explores the sensitive issue of attitude towards gender equality among large sample of adolescents of both the sexes belonging to urban, rural and tribal areas. An important limitation would be that an additional qualitative study would provide better insight into the issue.

**Funding:** This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

**Conflict of Interest:** None

**References**


Kadiyala P, Smitha MC, Narayana Murthy MR. Determinants of Adolescents Attitude Towards Gender Equality in Urban, Rural, and Tribal Areas of the Southern Part of India.