

## COMBATING GENDER STEREOTYPE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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### **Abstract**

Gender stereotyping presents a major hindrance in the achievement of gender equality in India and worldwide. Such discriminations may pose a threat to the achievement and development of individuals in a specific profession. Gender stereotype can be observed in terms of physical appearance, personality traits and the choice of profession. Such prejudiced and discriminatory behaviors may block the progress of a nation towards equality. There are various interventional programs to moderate and combat gender stereotyping, but due to lack of education and awareness the receptiveness of individuals is considerably low. Gender stereotype treat both genders differently and thus discourage their participation in occupational fields based on their gender. Such unconscious biases that are learnt through family and friends should timely be corrected through awareness and education. Gender schema theory and social learning theory suggests that gender roles are learnt through conditioning and modelling. Media can facilitate the process through healthy content processing as audio-visuals circulated through various social media platforms are attended with consciousness and interest. Gender equality can only be achieved through collective conscious efforts.

**Keywords:** *Gender, Stereotype, Occupation, Equality, Culture, Education, Media*

### **Introduction**

Gender stereotype defines the roles with respect to the gender of the individual. Gender roles indicate that one needs to follow gender specific norms in choice of profession, dress, and expression of speech. This give rise to feminine ways of being cooperative, accommodating, and polite for females and being bold and aggressive relates to the masculinity or males. Individuals are born as biological beings and become social beings through the process of socialization as they grow. Gender holds the core of identity of individuals (Leaper & Bigler, 2011). Gender stereotype is learnt through the agents of

socialization where the children observe and imitate the behaviors of what they see and experience with age (Martin et al., 2002). The journey of gender discrimination begins with the choice and selection of toys like dolls for girls and toy cars for boys. The child rearing activities at homes is also gender specific where the choice of the color of dress matters for a parent. Ruble et al. (2006) have undertaken studies that indicate that children get oriented to gender discrimination at an early stage of life. Children observe the females of the house more in the kitchen and cooking activities and hence relate the same with females.

It has been observed and studied that individuals, males and females resist opting the roles that are not expected from them. Resultantly they tend to work in the fields that are positively correlated with their gender (Miller & Budd, 1999). It has also been observed that gender specific roles are absorbed in the psyche of individuals to the extent that there is clear demarcation of what to do and what not to do in accordance with their genders. Moreover, individuals perform gender specific roles to avoid the prejudiced behavior and gender related discriminations that may have an adverse impact on their performance and development at workplace.

The component model of stereotypes (Deaux & Lewis, 1984) and role congruity theory are related to gender stereotype. Role Congruity Theory supports the fact that performance of individuals is always better when they perform jobs in accordance with their genders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Component model talks about the four important components as “role behavior, occupation, traits, and physical appearance”, indicating that a male is expected to work as a carpenter and a female is expected to work as a nurse. Thus, individuals promote gender stereotype not only to satisfy the social expectation, but also to avoid psychological discomfort associated with doing something that is not expected from them. Wearing pink by men brings a kind of discomfort in men as they associate pink with females. This indicates that gender stereotype can be expected in what one wears, what job they do and what activities they perform by being a social animal.

### **Culture and Gender Stereotype**

Culture has a significant role in shaping the gender stereotype i.e. the traits that are perceived to belong to either males or females. In most of the cultures males are perceived as being independent as compared to females who are perceived as interdependent (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Such stereotypical attitudes have an impact on the

psychology, performance and life outcomes of individuals at all stages of life. Student's academic performance till their evaluation as a performer at a particular job is based on such perceptions (Gorman, 2005; Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000).

There are certain traits that are considered as universally accepted to belong to either of the males or females beyond cultural boundaries like men are perceived as more independent as compared to women. Research indicates that gender stereotypes are culturally varied in nature. Moreover, it has also been observed that the sufferings of females in rural areas due to gender discrimination are more severe as compared to the females of urban areas. This is strongly associated with the education status, awareness and role of media.

### **Impact of Gender Stereotyping**

Gender stereotype has the potential to impact the emotions, behavior and cognitive domains, which further influences the performance of an individual in a specific role. There are certain areas or fields of work that are supposed to be related to men only, and from selection to promotions men are favoured in those roles (Lewis, 2006). Such gender related perceptions related to work have a negative and adverse impact on the selection of women in those jobs and work activities. "Gender Identity Disorder" of DSM-III and DSM-IV is now called "Gender Dysphoria" in DSM-5 is also related to the gender related distress and gender identity during the development stages. Gender stereotype is against the development of a particular profession or career and give rise to inequality in society at large.

Gender differentiation may have a more debilitating impact on females with physical disability and those with low socio-economic status. This attitude of discrimination is not only morally inappropriate but is also considered as an insult of fundamental freedom to choose roles or jobs. It is due to gender stereotyping that there is more discrimination against women and increased gender related violence.

Gender stereotype limits the potential of both males and females towards the development of their capabilities in a specific profession or field. Such prejudiced perceptions reduce the aspirations and lower the motivation towards the choice of a career, especially in case of women who are perceived as not competent and appropriate based on their gender traits. The term sexism defines the unequal or unfair treatment based on the gender of an individual. Personality traits of being emotional is associated more with females, males are not appreciated and accepted when they cry because they

are perceived as masculine and aggressive. Household chores like cooking, cleaning and taking care of children is again associated with females rather than males who are expected to earn the livelihood and manage the finance related matters. Apart from the choice of occupation, the grooming and dressing up also gets negatively affected by gender specific roles. Such discriminations discourage the expression of emotions in both genders.

### **Role of Media in Gender Sensitization**

Studies have indicated that use of media, computer or internet has a significant impact on the socialization process of children (Wartella & Jennings, 2000). Various gender sensitization programs and activities are done at local, national and global level. Gender sensitization through media has a strong empirical support. Moreover, studies have documented the role of media in spreading awareness regarding gender discrimination. Gender discrimination can be observed in the content being watched by girls and boys from a very tender age, where girls focus on fairies and doll cartoons and the boys take more interest in video games, cars and aggressive cartoons.

Apart from this, the gender related awareness programs are displayed on the television, and other social media platforms. Internet was earlier limited to the urban areas only, where children could access the content and could stay informed about such programs. However, after COVID-19 spread, the internet facility became the need of the hour and socialization started through media platforms to contain the virus. Individuals belonging to rural areas also felt the need to access internet to stay connected with their educational institutions, peer groups and to perform professional activities.

Though COVID-19 has troubled the lives in various ways but bringing the world together through internet is one of the advantage or blessing. Now, females in any corner of the world can access the gender sensitization programs and get oriented and can educate themselves with quality expert lectures. Females can see the women working in diverse fields of army, navy, entrepreneurships, etc through such platforms and can easily overcome the roles they feel they are confined to. A recent news regarding 33 percent quota for females in the recruitment of fire-fighters in Haryana is a welcome step towards the moderation of gender stereotype. It is only due to the extensive use of media that such news can reach every corner of the state and can bring more female applicants in this field.

### **Education and Gender Stereotyping**

Education is the solution to many problems that are there in the society. Individuals learn through observation, classical conditioning and operant conditioning. Lack of knowledge or inappropriate knowledge may lead to disastrous consequences for the individuals and society at large. apart from parents, schools and educational institutions hold prime importance in inculcating value systems and gender-neutral norms in children. If gender inequality and discrimination can be learnt, it can also be desensitized or unlearnt through education in right direction. There is a need to be proactive towards gender equality and removal of gender specific roles in various professions should be considered for moderating gender stereotyping. Such role models can act as a source of inspiration in overcoming gender discrimination.

### **Methodology**

The present study was done to obtain data regarding the prevalence of gender stereotype influencing the growth and development of females. Gender stereotyping behaviors were reported on the basis of component model by females in the age range of 5-45 years from sample of 73 participants from Urban and Rural parts of Haryana.

### **Result and Discussion**

The examples of gender stereotyping and discriminations were reported at different age groups and it was evident that the root of the problem lies more with the families and homes.

**Table 1: Gender Stereotype examples on the basis of Component Model of Stereotypes**

| <b>Age Group<br/>(in years)</b> | <b>Gender Stereotyping<br/>(role/occupation/personality traits/physical appearance)</b>   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>5-15</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Feeling of inferiority in comparison to opportunities provided to brother</b></li><li>● <b>Parental advice: behave like girls</b></li><li>● <b>Asked to help in kitchen even on board exam day</b></li><li>● <b>Sit properly like a girl</b></li><li>● <b>Be soft, you are a girl</b></li><li>● <b>Video games are for brother</b></li><li>● <b>Not allowed to wear jeans and top</b></li><li>● <b>Do higher studies through distance education unlike brother</b></li></ul> |

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>16-25</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of educational opportunities</li> <li>● More pressure for marriage and adopt the role of a submissive girl</li> <li>● Pressure for Domestic and household work</li> <li>● Was not allowed to take Law as career choice</li> <li>● Lose weight, who would marry you</li> <li>● Behave like a girl</li> </ul>  |
| <b>26-36</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of support of Husband/partner in household chores</li> <li>● Child rearing and household work</li> <li>● Stay in marriage even if suffers from domestic violence</li> <li>● Women are not made to work, but manage home/kitchen</li> <li>● Apply for job after child birth</li> <li>● Not allowed to work in night shift</li> <li>● Get married and take care of family, job is not for girls</li> </ul> |

Discrimination is observed from an early age through parenting practices, whereby parents project their own thinking and biased behaviors on children at their tender age. The language used at homes is also of discriminatory nature that limits the growth of girls in society. It was also observed that the discrimination in young age or early childhood was related to comparisons with the brothers in the family. Gender discrimination learnt unconsciously through family and friends leads to the development of individuals who in turn would behave in the similar manner with their children and thus the vicious cycle of gender discrimination continues from one generation to the next.

### **Conclusion**

There is a need to minimize and moderate the inequalities in men and women as a result of gender stereotype. It is against humanity when a role or occupation is denied to an individual on the basis of their gender. Such actions are not perceived as healthy for the individual and may even decrease the competence of what he or she could do in that specific field.

There is a strong need to spread awareness regarding breaking of stereotypical behavior through interventional programmes. Certain behaviors cannot be changed at large scale without laws, rules and regulations. Inclusion of quota (33 percent) for female fire-fighters in Haryana is a welcoming step to overcome the gender stereotype in choice of occupation. Education and awareness is the key to overcome the issue of gender stereotyping. There should be strong role models to showcase their capabilities in diverse fields where gender based discrimination exists. Role models in army, navy, political parties, entrepreneurs, and astronauts may inspire many women to follow their dreams

and aspirations, rather than just limiting themselves to certain specific job profiles which are considered appropriate for females.

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