



Gendered Environment at Home from Perspectives of Youth in Indian Households

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In the society we live in today there is a strong difference between what is considered “boy” and what is considered “girl”. This is because from the time we are born; to the time we die we are expected to conform to a gender role. A gender role is a set of behaviors, attitudes, and personality characteristics expected of a person based on their sex. This process of getting people to conform to their gender roles is called socialization, and it affects children very drastically. There are many different places that gender socialization comes from. It comes mainly from family, peers, and the media. Girls are made to believe that they are supposed to be gentle and nurturing, whereas boys are taught to be tough and even aggressive. (McKie, 2010)

Henslin contends that "an important part of socialization is the learning of culturally defined gender roles." Gender socialization refers to the learning of behavior and attitudes considered appropriate for a given sex. Boys learn to be boys and girls learn to be girls. This "learning" happens by way of many different agents of socialization. The behaviour that is seen to be appropriate for each gender is largely determined by societal, cultural and economic values in a given society. Gender socialization can therefore vary considerably among societies with different values. The family is certainly important in reinforcing gender roles, but so are groups including friends, peers, school, work and the mass media. Gender roles are reinforced through "countless subtle and not so subtle ways". In peer group activities, stereotypic gender roles may also be rejected, renegotiated or artfully exploited for a variety of purposes. (Cromdal, 2011).

As parents are present in a child's life from the beginning, their influence in a child's early socialization is very important, especially in regards to gender roles. Sociologists have



identified four ways in which parents socialize gender roles in their children: Shaping gender related attributes through toys and activities, differing their interaction with children based on the sex of the child, serving as primary gender models, and communicating gender ideals and expectations. (Epstein and Ward, 2011)

The present paper assesses the how the youth were raised and in what environment, with respect to how their family treated them or whom they saw the most doing work at home or handling family finances. The study was conducted in Udaipur city, Rajasthan. Sample for the study consisted of 300 college students (150 males and 150 females) aged 18-25 years from 10 colleges of the city. The respondents were inquired about the environment at home with respect to gender through a questionnaire.

It is clearly evident from Table 1 that although both the parents were more favourable towards their daughters (Mothers-11.3% & Fathers-26.7%) as compared to their sons (Mothers-7.3% & Fathers-3.7%) but fathers were comparatively more favourable towards daughters in comparison to mothers. A clear shift in favourable attitudes towards daughters can be seen from the results.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by perceived favourable behaviour of their parents towards the children

Favourable towards	Mother		Father	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Sons	22	7.3	11	3.7
Daughters	34	11.3	80	26.7
Both	215	71.7	184	61.3
NA	29	9.7	25	8.3
Total	300	100.0	300	100.0

Respondents were also asked whether they felt that they were treated differently from their siblings of the opposite gender. Results have been presented in Table 2.



Table 2: Cross-tabulation of respondents by different treatment from parents in comparison to opposite sex siblings

Do you feel you were treated differently in comparison to your siblings of opposite sex? * Gender Crosstabulation		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
YES	Frequency	8	19	27
	% within Do you feel you were treated differently in comparison to your siblings of opposite sex?	29.63	70.37	100
	% within Gender	5.34	12.67	-
	% of Total	2.67	6.33	9
NO	Frequency	137	124	261
	% within Do you feel you were treated differently in comparison to your siblings of opposite sex?	52.49	47.51	100
	% within Gender	91.33	82.67	-
	% of Total	45.67	41.33	87
NA	Frequency	5	7	12
	% within Do you feel you were treated differently in comparison to your siblings of opposite sex?	41.67	58.33	100
	% within Gender	3.33	4.67	-
	% of Total	1.67	2.33	4
TOTAL		150	150	300

It can be seen that 87% of the respondents did not feel any differential treatment of which 52.49% were males and 47.51% were females. On the basis of gender 91.33% of males did not feel any differential treatment while among females 82.67% felt the same. Overall 9% of the respondents felt that they were treated differently from their siblings.

Table 3 shows the work-distribution, decision-making finance management observed by the respondents at home. Majority of the respondents observed their mothers (55%) doing more work at home as compared to fathers (3%) although a major percentage (42%) of the



respondents also observed that both of their parents were equally involved in doing work at home. Gender inequalities in household work are a perpetual trait across societies, even as women have dramatically increased their participation in the employment sector. At the same time, there are cross-cultural differences, and over time men have become more involved in household work and childrearing (Hook, 2006)

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by family decision-making and finances

Most of the work at home was done by		Frequency	Percent
	Mother	165	55
	Father	9	3
	Both	126	42
	Total	300	100.0
Decisions at home were taken by		Frequency	Percent
	Grandfather	18	6.0
	Grandmother	10	3.3
	Father	95	31.7
	Mother	27	9.0
	Both grandparents	8	2.7
	Both parents	134	44.7
	Only males	6	2.0
	Only females	2	0.7
	Total	300	100.0
Family finances were handled by		Frequency	Percent
	Grandfather	10	3.3
	Grandmother	2	0.7
	Father	162	54.0
	Mother	21	7.0
	Both grandparents	6	2.0



	Both parents	94	31.3
	Only males	4	1.3
	Other	1	0.3
	Total	300	100.0

It was also interesting to note that 44.7% of the respondents had seen both of their parents equally taking decisions at home closely followed by 31.7% respondents saying that only their fathers took decisions at home. Also, more than half of the respondents (54%) said that family finances were mostly handled by their fathers and 31.3% said that both their parents handled family finances. It can be seen that since the society today mostly follows nuclear family structure, involvement of grandparents in decision-making and finances was also miniscule.

Parents' division of housework is potentially important because it is a visible indicator of how parents handle gender roles (Crouter *et al.*, 1995). Gender intensification patterns are stronger for adolescents growing up in households in which their parents maintained a "traditional" division of labor, with wives performing the great majority of the household tasks, and weak for youth growing up in families characterized by a more "egalitarian" parental division of labor. Parents with a traditional division of labor are more likely to assign household chores on the basis of sex and to model sex-typed patterns of involvement in housework than would parents with a more egalitarian division of labor in the marriage. (McHale *et al.* 1992).

Variability in parental division of labor and in-turn assignment of tasks to children is additionally related to socioeconomic status, cultural background and some other variables. Thus, gender division of parenting labor (in terms of the tasks measured) is not solely related to children's sex- typing but more significantly to family background. At least four aspects of family background are important. The first is social status. Higher status parents had both daughters and sons with more male- and female-typed skills. Of all the status variables, mothers' education tends to be the strongest predictor of children's skills, suggesting that it is maternal values that are salient and that higher education leads mothers to value the early acquisition of useful skills and to downplay sex differences. The second aspect is seen in



terms of culture. Patriarchal families practice a sharper division of parenting tasks than more egalitarian families, with mothers more involved in domestic tasks and fathers more involved in leisure/enrichment tasks. These differences are reflected in the below-average domestic and maturity competencies of the boys which results from a patriarchal cultural belief that these are not appropriate for boys. A third direction of influence comes from family needs. Maternal employment provides a clear example. When mothers are in the workforce, both sons and daughters master the more domestic tasks, but other skills were not affected. Another “needs” example is that of babysitting, where family size and child’s ordinal position are the major predictors. Finally, there is the interesting case of girls high on skills in “masculine” tasks as they were the “only” children. It seems that these girls owed their skills not so much to family values or family needs, but to the fact that they were treated to some extent as surrogate sons. Girls acquire a body of these competencies before age 9, while age 9-11 is a learning period for boys. (Burns and Homel, 1989).

Results indicate a few patterns pertinent to gender socialisation. First, mothers and fathers typically model a traditional division of labor in their own household work. Some studies indicate that children’s own attitudes about gender-typed household chores may be influenced by the role models that parents present to them. For example, adolescents of employed mothers are less likely to hold traditional views about the division of household labor than were adolescents of homemaker mothers. Also, parents tend to assign children gender-typed chores. Most notably, parents typically allocate child care and cleaning to daughters, and consign maintenance work to sons. The types of chores assigned to children may affect their development. Children’s involvement in family-care work is positively related to their prosocial development. However, girls are more likely than boys to be assigned household tasks during childhood and adolescence. In this way, women’s relegation to household work begins in childhood. Finally, the gender-typed assignment of household chores imparts lessons to children about women’s and men’s rights and responsibilities. Children’s experiences may contribute to their later notions of entitlement and obligation with regard to household work. To the extent that daughters are assigned more housework than sons, traditional expectations about the division of labor are fostered. Thus, girls’ and



boys' participation in different household chores in childhood can be viewed as training for later role and status differences in adulthood (Leaper and Friedman, 2007).

Sociologists often believe that the family decision-making process is the outcome of conscious choices of each spouse, and the decision-making power of each spouse is determined by economic as well as non-economic factors. The gender status is a vital aspect that influences the decisions of men and women in any family, and the factors that influences the power that husbands or wives wield in a family determines the decision-making process of the unit. Determinants of family decision making power depend on economic and financial choices by considering individual characteristics of each spouse, household characteristics, and family background factors (Deb, 2015).

In traditional patriarchal family, the eldest male member was the head of the family and he used to take all the decisions on family matters. Women in family had a very inferior position compared to their male counterparts. They were appreciated only for their role as mothers of male children. They were economically dependent on their husbands, which did not allow them to gain a position of authority in the family structure as well as in the social structure (Dutta, 2014). Although couples view their marriages as equal and their family roles as egalitarian, husbands are more likely to maintain an upper hand in decision-making processes, processes congruent with gender inequality. Husbands have been found to use their power in subtle ways to determine the direction of conversations and the discussion of problems in marriages, thereby indirectly influencing decision-making processes by refusing to acknowledge areas of potential conflict to their own benefit, such as conflicts over the division of household labor. But in the present scenario, husbands and wives in dual-earner couples have reported a lessening of husbands' influence and an increase of wives' influence in decision-making. This changing pattern of decision-making supports the view that the majority of contemporary dual-earner families are couples who share the economic and household management of the family somewhat more collaboratively than husbands and wives of the recent past (Bartley *et al.*2005). The probability that the wife is in charge of economic and financial decisions increases with the difference between her years of age, level of education, income, husband's characteristics, as well as household characteristics such as family size and wealth (Deb, 2015).



The perpetuation of gender biases and stereotypes often is begun in the home and then further reinforced by the peer group (Witt, 2000). Children are confronted with numerous messages about gender-appropriate roles in the home, the school and the society at large. Traditional gender roles in the home have not seen the same type of revolution for children although gender roles in the workplace and in the school setting; have changed dramatically in just a few decades (Schuette and Killen, 2009). Thus, to acquire moral concepts such as justice, fairness, and equality, these principles must be applied in the home and family context as well as in the general societal arena.

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