

Role of Religiosity in Gender Role Beliefs of Keralite Youngsters

Anjana P^{1*}, Renya C V²

ABSTRACT

With the 21st century, society is changing significantly from the age-old stereotypical beliefs and practices. Traditional gender role beliefs have always dominated the Indian culture which provided strength to the patriarchal ideals of the country. With the rise of feminism and equality movements, there has been an outburst of discourses on sexuality, sexual orientation, gender, and gender roles. Socialization and social interactionism played the major supportive roles in carrying forward the stereotypical gender role beliefs across generations. The religiosity of people is also expected to play a major role in this and thereby the present study tried to analyse the relationship between religiosity and gender role beliefs of male and female youngsters of Kerala. The quantitative study was conducted on 140 youngsters which included a total of 69 females and 71 males. The study used Religious and Spirituality Scale for Youth questionnaire and Gender Role Belief Scale questionnaire in order to measure the variables of the study. The collected data was coded and scored before analysing them statistically using SPSS version 25. From the results of the study it was concluded that higher the religiosity of the individual, higher the possibility that they abide traditional gender role beliefs irrespective of gender differences. The limitations and future recommendations of the study have also been discussed in the article.

Keywords: *Gender role beliefs, Religiosity, Youngsters*

Discussions around gender, sexuality and sexual orientation has become quite common in the present times, but still the acceptance of anything beyond the lines of normalcy marked by the society remains a significant question to ponder upon. It is apparently common in any society that there exists certain sets of opinions and beliefs about alleged attributes of femininity and masculinity which can be defined as the gender role belief system (Deaux & Kite, 1987). The very common part of the gender role belief system is the stereotypical view that men and women have separate distinct roles to play in their life irrespective of age, socioeconomic status, religion or nationality. The widespread assumption related to such belief is that what is not masculine is definitely feminine and anyone who is feminine or masculine in any one behavioural aspect is similarly feminine or masculine in all other aspects of their behaviour (Mencarini, L., 2014). The traditional patriarchal beliefs of Indian culture have its very base embedded grossly into the gender role belief system (Rawat, 2014). While the gender roles are defined around the prominent

¹MSc Clinical Psychology, Christ College Autonomous, Irinjalakuda, Kerala

²Assistant Professor, Christ College Autonomous, Irinjalakuda, Kerala

*Corresponding Author

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gender dichotomy of male and female, an unbreakable pattern is developed which makes it difficult for other genders to express themselves and lead a living as they wish in the society (Stark, 1991). Gender role beliefs do not have any biological basis, but have strong social and psychological elements in its development which makes it a socially constructed idea within the society (Somech, A. et. al., 2016).

Gender role attitudes determine how men and women are assigned to social roles in society, which has an effect on people's career decisions, the kind of role they play as employees, spouses, or parents, as well as many other aspects of their lives. On a macro level, they have an impact on work-family relationships and labour force patterns (Somech, A. et. al., 2016). It is necessary to understand the factors that enhance and maintain the gender role beliefs within the society and it is said that experience-based and interest-based ideologies provide the closest explanation (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004). The experience-based ideology suggests that generation over generations people experience and remain exposed to particular strong gender role beliefs which they either consciously or unconsciously carry forward throughout their life and remain agentic in passing on these beliefs to the upcoming generations. The inability of people to realize their agentic capacity and remaining passive carriers of such stereotypical and prejudiced attitudes have made the present society. On the other hand, interest-based ideology of gender role beliefs is based on the fact that people are likely to hold more traditional gender beliefs when gender inequality benefits their interests, and equally hold more egalitarian gender beliefs when gender equality advances their objectives (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004). Based on this ideology, the general understanding is reached that men support more traditional gender beliefs while women struggle for the acceptance of an egalitarian perspective in gender role beliefs (Somech, A. et. al., 2016). To be precise, there are three different ideologies of gender role beliefs such as traditional, transitional, and egalitarian ideologies which are followed by people all around the world (Somech, A. et. al., 2016). The most prominent belief pattern is the traditional gender role beliefs which relates to the concrete idea of gender specific roles for men and women, where women are assigned with family responsibilities while men are to take up the work responsibilities and be the breadwinner, making the foundation of a patriarchal society. On the other pole, egalitarian ideology of gender belief provides no such segregation of roles between men and women, and accepts equal responsibility of work and home among everyone. Egalitarian perspective is slowly gaining strength all around the world but still a complete transition from the traditional ideology has been difficult and cumbersome. The transitional ideology of gender role belief exists in this dynamic situation where neither of the extreme ideologies remains strong in the society and a midway is accepted by the people (Somech, A. et. al., 2016).

The formation of gender role ideologies is said to be strongly influenced by socialization within the family (Cerbara et. al., 2022). Intergenerational transfer of attitudes occurs through direct interaction, or based on the design of the child's home environment or through role modelling. Children of gender-traditional/egalitarian parents are typically more likely to carry forward the same ideology. However, when the influence of friends and their own life experiences grows stronger during adolescence, these family benefits appear to diminish (Cerbara et. al., 2022). As the home environment and the social environment of people play a major role, it becomes important to have a keen check on the different environmental factors that influence the development of the different ideologies of gender role beliefs. Religious orientation and religious beliefs are one such major social and individual factor that can have a major role in the development of such stereotypical attitudes. Number of studies have tried working in this area in different parts of the world (Felte & Poloma et. al.,

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1991), while the Keralite population has been left mostly untapped. Even within the culturally diverse India, Kerala remains a state which develops morally, emotionally and technologically better than other places with the increased health and education rate (Saradmoni, 1999). The present study thereby tries to understand the role of religiosity in the gender role beliefs of the youngsters of Kerala with a note on the existence of any gender disparity.

Need and Significance of the Study

Even though change is a slow process within the society, it cannot be left unseen that changes are being strongly evident in the upcoming generations. Traditional gender role beliefs have been common in Kerala culture over long periods of time but a change can be expected among the youngsters of the period. The present study could be an addition to the research literature which could give clear evidence on the gender differences in the gender role beliefs of the youngsters of Kerala and also understand the role of religiosity in the development and maintenance of such prejudiced beliefs. This understanding would add significantly into the promotion of equality and proliferation of feministic ideology in the society which would make the life of people much easier with equal respect for the lives of every human being. It would also help in tapping on the impact of religiosity among the youngsters in accepting changes to the age-old stereotypical beliefs of the society.

Objective

- The major objective of the study is to understand if religiosity influences the gender role beliefs of youngsters with a tap on the existence of any gender difference.

Hypotheses

- There is a significant difference in the gender role beliefs of male and female youths
- There is a significant difference in the religiosity of male and female youths
- There is a significant relationship between gender role beliefs and religiosity among youngsters
- Religiosity predicts gender role beliefs among male and female youngsters.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The present study was conducted on a sample of 140 participants belonging to the age group of 15-24 as the population considered for the study was the youths of India. The sample consisted of a nearly equal proportion of males and females with the sample size of males being 71 and females being 69. Non-random sampling techniques were used for data collection which included convenience and snowball sampling techniques based on feasibility during the pandemic times.

Tools

The study being a quantitative one, a few questionnaires were employed to arithmetically understand about each variable and thereby the tools used are mentioned below briefly.

- **The Religious and Spirituality Scale for Youth:** RaSSY or the Religious and Spirituality Scale for Youth was developed by Hemadez (2011). The scale consisted of 37 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale with the range of scores being 0-111. The scoring pattern of the scale is such that a higher score shows higher and lower score shows lower religiosity among people. It has a good reliability score with the Cronbach's alpha varying between .90 to .95 among the sub-dimensions of the scale

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and the test-retest reliability score varying between .71 to .85. The scale is also having a construct validity as the correlation value between the scores obtained in through RaSSY and other similar scales like Youth coping Response Inventory and Behaviour Assessment System for Children, Second Edition – Self-Report of Personality is found to vary between .36 to .62.

- **Gender Role Belief Scale - short version:** The short version scale was developed by Brown and Gladstone in 2012 by updating the GRBS scale developed by Kerr and Holde (1996) which was a 20 item 7-point Likert scale. The presently used short scale consists only of 10 items with the same pattern of answering making the total score vary between 10-70. The interpretation of the scores clarify that lower the score stronger the gender role belief in people and higher the score more feministic gender role belief people possess. The test-retest reliability score of the scale was .86 and Cronbach's alpha score is .81 showing that the test is highly reliable. The validity scores were around .5 when compared with other similar scales.

Procedure

Google forms were used for collecting the data from the participants of the study. The choice of google forms were based on the feasibility during the pandemic period. The google forms were created with a form of consent which declared in detail about all the ethical principles that were being followed during the process of data collection. Anonymity, confidentiality and free will to withdraw from the data collection process was clearly mentioned. A demographic sheet was attached to get the necessary details of each participant which was followed by the two questionnaires. Instructions were provided in detail and the contact address was provided along with the form in the case of any doubts or clarifications. The collected data was systematically coded and scored based on the manual of the tools used and the scored data was analysed statistically using the software SPSS version 25. Correlations, t-tests and Regressions were conducted to reach the conclusion of the study.

RESULTS

The normality of the data was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test and Kolmogorov Smirnov test for normality along with a check on the kurtosis and skewness of the data. The data was found to be normal which led to the choice of parametric tests for statistical analysis which includes Pearson's correlation, independent sample t-tests, and simple linear regressions. The reports of the statistical tests have been mentioned below in the tables and the hypothesis testing is thereby done.

Table 1. t-test on Gender Role Belief and Religiosity among male and female youngsters

Grouping variables	Females			Males			t-value	p
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		
Dependent variables								
Gender	69	60.13	10.19	71	56.83	11.57	1.00	.31
Role Belief								
Religiosity	69	30.85	25.77	71	26.39	26.49	1.82	.07

The independent sample t-tests were conducted to know if there is a significant difference in the Religiosity and Gender Role Belief among male and female youngsters. The results show that the differences are insignificant and thereby there is no significant difference in

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the Religiosity ($t = 1.82, p = .07$) and Gender Role Belief ($t = 1.00, p = .31$) among male and female youngsters. The mean scores show a slight variation between the male and female population where males have a lower Religiosity ($N = 71, M = 26.39$) and Gender Role Belief scores ($N = 71, M = 56.83$) when compared with the Religiosity ($N = 69, M = 30.85$) and Gender Role Belief scores ($N = 69, M = 60.13$) of females.

Table 2. Table representing correlation between Gender Role Belief and Religiosity among female youngsters

Variables	1	2
1. Gender Role Belief	-	
2. Religiosity	-.542**	-

$N = 69, ** p < 0.01$

Table 3. Linear regression predicting Gender Role Belief among female youngsters

	B	SE B	β
Constant	66.75	1.62	
Religiosity	-.215	.041	-.542**

Note: $R^2 = .294, ** p < .01, N = 69$

Table 2 shows the relationship between Religiosity and Gender Role Belief among female youngsters which has been analysed using the Pearson's coefficient of correlation. It clearly depicts that there is a highly significant negative correlation of medium strength between the variables of concern among female youngsters ($r = -.542, p < 0.01$). It should be taken into account that a lower score in Gender Role Belief scale refers to more prejudiced gender role belief people have. On that basis, the negative correlation means that an increase in religiosity is accompanied by a prejudiced and stereotypical gender role belief among female youngsters. As the relationship between the variables are strong, the predictability of Gender Role Belief is checked using simple linear regression and the results are depicted in Table 3. The table shows that 29.4 % of Gender Role Belief is significantly predicted by Religiosity and a unit increase in religiosity decreases the Gender Role Belief score by .54 units among female youngsters.

Table 4. Table representing correlation between Gender Role Belief and Religiosity among male youngsters

Variables	1	2
1. Gender Role Belief	-	
2. Religiosity	-.485**	-

$N = 71, ** p < 0.01$

Table 5. Linear regression predicting Gender Role Belief among male youngsters

	B	SE B	β
Constant	62.22	1.65	
Religiosity	-.204	.044	-.485

Note: $R^2 = .235, ** p < .01, N = 71$

The relationship between Gender Role Belief and Religiosity among male youngsters was revealed through the Pearson's correlation results given in table 4. It is clearly evident that there is a significant negative correlation between these variables of moderate strength clarifying that an increase in the religiosity brings about a decrease in the Gender Role Belief scale among male youngsters ($r = -.485, p < 0.01$). It is noteworthy in this case that

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the correlation strengths between these variables among males and females are not varying by a great amount but still the strength of correlation is higher among females. It calls for regression analysis to understand the level of predictability of Gender Role Belief by Religiosity among male youngsters. Table 5 shows the results of the simple linear regression done to understand the said predictability and it proves that 23.5% of Gender Role Belief is being predicted by the Religiosity of male youngsters with a unit change in Religiosity predicting .48 units of decrease in the Gender Role Belief score.

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DISCUSSION

Gender role beliefs and religiosity are well discussed topics in academia and the results of all the studies commonly point fingers at a significant relationship between these variables (Felte & Poloma et. al., 1991). The present study wanted to understand the dynamics of the relationship within the Kerala culture, that too by focussing on the youngsters. The results of the present study were in line with the earlier understandings but still opened a few significant ideas which must be discussed further. It is clearly evident from the results that there exists a linear relationship between religiosity and gender role beliefs which points that people who are more religious fall into the traditional gender role beliefs while those who are least religious carry the egalitarian ideology of gender role belief. This result has been in line with the results of a number of studies (Eliason et. al., 2017; Bhageri, 2012; Peterson & Donnenworth, 1998) but what is interesting to note from the present study is the absence of gender difference in both the gender role belief and religiosity of youngsters. The male and female youngsters of Kerala have secured nearly equal scores in the gender role belief and religiosity scales which shows the beginning of change in the society. Different studies from all over the world underscores that females have a more egalitarian ideology, while males carry traditional gender role beliefs (Larsen & Long, 1988), with the factor of religiosity being stronger among women (Miller & Hoffman, 1995). Even though the difference in religiosity among males and females are found to be insignificant, it is worthy to understand that the strength of the relationship between religiosity and gender beliefs are higher among women when compared to men, with the mean religiosity score being higher among women.

Differences in gender role ideologies by race, religion, and ethnicity might be embedded in historical differences in labour force participation and education. (Somech et. al., 2016). College education or going out to work apparently exposes men and women alike to more egalitarian views and people, thus offsetting approval of gender stereotypes. In an early research work of the 1990s, an important concept has been explained by Felte & Poloma (1991) that gender ideology is the most statistically significant predictor of five out of the

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six indicators of religious experience when taken into consideration, or that those with more feminist gender beliefs are less likely to hold to biblical orthodoxy, pray, go to church, have an encounter with God when praying, and feel that religious matters in their lives. Even though the researchers have a negative tone towards feminism in that particular period of time, this conclusion makes sense through the results of the present study. In the 1980s, male dominance and religious belief were counted similarly by the feminist and considered both of them to be equally challenging for the growth of women (Christ & Plaskow, 1979). The feminist movements and reformers have been trying to restructure different traditional religious beliefs and patterns to include an equal role for both men and women from an early period, which also included assigning women into certain leadership positions within religious activities in order to initiate changes from the very base of the religious doctrine (Lindsey, 2020). While these conclusions were made early, it can be expected in the present day that beliefs regarding appropriate gender role behaviour will continue to move in the direction of a more egalitarian future as women continue to enter the labour sector, obtain more education, and postpone marriage and childbirth (Giele, 1988). As a result, religion will continue to become more liberal and through social interaction it would bring about changes in the ideals of the society (Thornton, 1985). The youngsters of Kerala can be considered to be in the transitional ideology of gender role beliefs with a slightly stronger relationship with religiosity being among women than men. The change from traditional ideology to transitional ideology in itself calls appreciation and provides tremendous hope that changes will not be much delayed. A control over the religious pressure and teachings would be effective in the development of an egalitarian ideology, but it sounds difficult as religion has an emotional groundedness within the public. The development of introspective understanding and making people potent to use a critical lens in understanding the realities of religion and its teachings would be effective strategies in developing a better society with no traces of traditional gender role beliefs.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

To pinpoint onto the major limitations of the study, it must be noted that the scales used for analysing the variables of concern in the study were not culturally grounded and thereby would have affected the results of the study. The use of native language instead of English would also have enhanced the data which could be taken into consideration in the future. The sample size is also a major concern as a concrete conclusion cannot be made from the results of the present study as the size of the sample taken is considerably low. The method of data collection has also been a non-random sampling based on the convenience which would have affected the results of the study. An in-depth qualitative study has to be conducted in the future to understand the manner in which religiosity is being defined and followed among male and female youngsters along with the reason for their religious orientation. Understanding the reason behind the gender role belief among the youngsters is important and thereby more factors have to be included to reach a better conclusion about the factors that predict gender role belief. Similarly, the role of different religions in the development of gender role beliefs should also be examined closely.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that religiosity plays a predictive role in the development of gender role beliefs where an egalitarian gender role belief ideology is predicted by weaker religiosity among youngsters of Kerala irrespective of gender. The study also showed that male and female youngsters do not differ in the religiosity or gender role beliefs which is a worthy understanding of change in the society.

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Conflict of Interest

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