Research Paper

Attitude Towards Gender Roles in Relation to Coping among Mizo Adults

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ABSTRACT

Gender based roles is assumed to have association with one's way of dealing with different situations that they encounter in daily life. So, the present study aimed to explore gender roles and coping styles, focusing on accepting responsibility coping style and escape avoidance coping style. It examined the relationship between the psychological variables as well as gender differences on these variables. The sample of the study comprised of 100 (50 male and 50 female) participants studying in Mizoram University which are selected using purposive sampling procedure with age ranging between 18 to 30 years. Demographic profiles and data were collected using Attitudes Towards Women Scale (Spence, Helmrich & Stapp, 1978) and Ways of Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Psychometric adequacy and parametric statistic assumptions were checked. Pearson correlation and One-Way ANOVA were applied. The result showed significant group difference on gender role, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance. Significant relationship was also found between gender role and accepting responsibility among the sample.

***Keywords:** Gender, Gender Roles, Coping, Accepting Responsibility, Escape Avoidance*

Family is one of the most important institutions that humans have managed, and this remains universal fact in cultures across the world. However, there are variations in how the family is managed and understood (Amah & Ogah, 2021). The decisions people make in the family are many times driven by their dominant attitude towards gender roles (Davis and Greenstein 2009). Hence, the various roles played in the family differ depending on whether acceptance is made to the traditional or egalitarian gender role attitude. The consequence of this is that when analysing the behaviours of individuals, their dominant gender role attitude must be recognized and factored in (Amah & Ogah, 2021). For instance, when an individual who subscribe to the traditional gender role will react differently to suggestions to play an active part in family responsibilities than the one who subscribe to the egalitarian role. Several countries have evident in the turn towards egalitarian gender role attitudes, the changes towards more egalitarian attitudes have proceeded more quickly for women than for men (Baxter and Kane, 1995; Bryant, 2003). However, empirical research has shown that an increase in women's resources, such as

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better education and full-time employment, does not necessarily lead to a more egalitarian division of tasks and responsibilities in the family. Thus, gender behavior and roles seem to be influenced not only by individual factors but also by other aspects as well (Diehl, 2009).

Gender Role Attitude

Gender-role attitudes are defined as perceptions and beliefs regarding the unique roles of men and women, and ranges on a continuum where traditional perceptions regarding gender roles are found at one end, and liberal perceptions are found at the other end (Korabik, McElwain, & Chappell, 2008). Gender role may be described as socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (WHO, 2015). In the ideology of separate gender roles, females are mainly responsible for the household chores, child-rearing, and maintaining good relationships while men are primarily responsible for the economic support of the family. Gender roles can be associated with expectations of females and males in realms outside of the family as well, such as work (Williams, 1995).

Gender role theory suggests that individuals internalize cultural expectations about their gender because of social pressures external to the individual favour behaviour consistent with their prescribed gender role (Kidder, 2002). People use such expectations to categorize themselves and others, and these categorizations have important impacts on individuals' lives (William et. al., 2009).

Traditional gender-role attitudes reflect perceptions regarding distinctive roles for women and men (Krais, 2006). According to traditional gender-role attitudes, men achieve their role through instrumental, breadwinning activities and women achieves their roles through nurturing, homemaking, and parenting activities. In contradistinction, according to liberal gender-role attitudes, men and women may successfully achieve the same social roles (Lindsey, 2015). Egalitarian gender-role attitudes can be seen as a more advanced stage towards the liberal gender attitudes, because they endorse and value equal sharing of breadwinning and nurturing family roles (Lorber, 1994). Furthermore, egalitarian gender roles mainly point to the idea that individuals should have access to the same rights and opportunities irrespective of their sex, and should be treated according to the same principles, norms, and standards (Walby, 2005).

Coping

Coping is defined as constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Protective factors and processes are coalesced to enhance an individual's ability to cope with adversity (King et al., 2003). The present study has referred to eight ways of coping identified by Folkman and Lazarus's (1980) namely: confrontive coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal. Planful problem-solving and accepting responsibility are ways of coping categorized as problem-focused while the rest are emotion focused types. Confrontive coping describes aggressive efforts to alter the situation and suggests some degree of hostility and risk-taking. Distancing describes cognitive efforts to detach oneself and to minimize the significance of the situation. Self-controlling describes efforts to regulate one's feelings and actions. Seeking social support describes efforts to seek informational support, tangible support, and emotional support. Accepting responsibility means acknowledging one's role in the problem with a concomitant theme of trying to put things right. Escape-avoidance describes wishful

thinking and behavioural efforts to escape or avoid problem. Planful problem solving describes deliberate problem-focused efforts to alter the situation, coupled with an analytic approach to solving the problem. Positive reappraisal describes efforts to create positive meaning by focusing on personal growth and it has a religious dimension (Rodriguez, 2011). Problem-focused coping includes cognitive and behavioural attempts to modify or eliminate the stressful situation. In contrast, emotion-focused coping involves attempts to regulate emotional responses elicited by the situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). The present study has focused on accepting responsibility coping style and escape-avoidance coping style.

Accepting Responsibility

There is a difference between accepting responsibility in a stressful situation and blaming oneself. The latter point toward taking responsibility for things that are even outside of our control. Accepting responsibility in order to cope with stress actually entails understanding and accepting our roles insofar as we are involved with contributing to the stress and seeking to improve (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). In doing this, we are not taking responsibility for the actions of others, only our own, which we have control over. Individuals who use this coping mechanism do so in order to lessen the stress of a given situation by being mindful of the influence of their own actions and words.

Escape-Avoidance

Those who practice escape or avoidance as a means of coping with a stressful situation are avoiding dealing with the problem. It is a maladaptive form of coping in which a person changes their behaviour to avoid thinking about, feeling, or doing difficult things (Scott, 2022). This coping mechanism can be problematic because it means that the individual is essentially avoiding in addressing the problem which is causing them stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). This means that the main stressor remains and can continue to cause them discomfort because nothing has been done to actually remedy this. However, the individual escape the stressful event by going out, sleeping, etc.

Study found that traits of gender roles have significant relationship with coping mechanisms (Lengua & Stormshak, 2000). Other findings also observe that femininity gender role have significant relationship with greater avoidance coping and greater support-seeking coping (LaCroix & Haynes, 1987). Several studies showed significant gender differences on traditional and egalitarian gender role attitudes (Larsen and Long, 1988; Ndobo et al., 2013). Gender differences have also been observed in the use of coping strategies, women reported that emotional support like escape avoidance was used significantly more frequently than men. However, no gender differences were evident for the use of positive reframing, accepting responsibility, or venting (Kelly et. al., 2008). Sanders and Sander (2009) found that males coped better than females. The influence of gender roles on coping with workplace stressors was examined among undergraduate adult which shows gender role scores were significant predictors for the traits of coping (Gianakos, 2000).

Mizo society is a patriarchal and patrilineal society where women are reported to have less authoritative power in the family (Lalhmingpuii and Namchoom, 2014). Women were said to perform more work than men, from cleaning the *jhum* (slash and burn cultivation), sowing seeds, cleaning weeds, harvesting, and transporting the harvest from *jhum* to the house. Not only that, she also undertook the household chores (Paul, 2019). The earlier women need to fulfill their duties and beside need to cope with the daily hassles they encounter. However, with modernization, where women also earn a living for the family, shift towards sharing of tasks have been observed. Attitude towards gender role however is

presumed to play an important factor in shaping an individual's behaviour such as coping (Mayor, 2015). Accepting responsibility (problem focused) and escape avoidance (emotion focused) are the main variable of focus. For the study population, the interest was on finding gender difference on university students' attitude towards gender roles and how they deal with stressful events that they encounter. So, the present study is interested in exploring the relationships between gender role attitudes, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance and if males and females differ in these psychological variables.

Objectives
Given the theoretical and methodological foundation provided, the following objectives were framed for the present study:
1. To determine the pattern of relationship between gender role attitude, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance among the sample.
2. To examine the independent effects of gender (male and female) on gender role attitude, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance among the sample.
3. To determine the predictability of accepting responsibility and escape avoidance from gender role attitude.

Hypotheses:
The following hypotheses were made based on the objective:
- Significant relationship is expected between the psychological variables (gender role attitude, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance).
- It is expected that there will be significant independent effects of gender (males and females) on the psychological variables (gender role attitude, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance).
- It is expected that there will be significant prediction of accepting responsibility and escape avoidance from gender role attitude.

METHODOLOGY
Sample
The present study comprised of 100 (50 male and 50 female) participants studying in Mizoram University with age ranging between 18 to 30 years who were selected using purposive sampling procedure.

Design of the Study
The study incorporates between-groups design – 50 males and 50 females on the psychological measures.

Instruments
- **Attitudes Towards Women Scale (AWS; Spence, Helmrich and Stapp, 1978):** Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS) is the most widely used scale for measuring gender role attitudes. The short version consisted of 25 items each to be rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0-Agree Strongly to 3-Disagree Strongly. Of the 25 items 12 are reverse scored. A high score indicates a egalitarian attitude while a low score indicates a traditional, conservative attitude.
- **Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985):** The Ways of Coping Questionnaire is used to measure the coping processes. As the definitive coping measure, it assesses and identify thoughts and actions that individuals use to cope with the stressful encounters of everyday living. The scale is excellent for

research on coping and scales include: Confrontation Coping, Distancing, Self-Controlling, Seeking Social Support, Accepting Responsibility, Escape-Avoidance, Planful Problem Solving, and Positive Reappraisal. The subject responds on a 4-point Likert scale 0 = not used to 3 = used a great deal. High score indicates high coping processes.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean, SD, α, Skewness and Kurtosis

Table1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	n	M	SD	α	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Gender Role Attitude								
Male	50	35.20	4.490	.708	-.137	.337	-.362	.662
Female	50	41.68	5.691		.030	.337	-.634	.662
Accepting Responsibility								
Male	50	7.16	1.963	.501	.020	.337	-.617	.662
Female	50	8.08	1.883		-.617	.337	.093	.662
Escape Avoidance								
Male	50	11.74	3.016	.507	.465	.337	-.247	.662
Female	50	13.32	3.178		.339	.337	-.436	.662

Descriptive statistics showed the mean, standard deviation, kurtosis and skewness scores on gender role attitude, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance of male and female participants (Table: 1). Females were found to have higher scores on gender role attitude, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance. This implies that with respect to gender role attitudes, females are more egalitarian and males are more traditional. In the present study, traditional gender-role attitudes refer to men achieving their role through instrumental, breadwinning activities and women achieve their roles through nurturing, homemaking, and parenting activities. Egalitarian gender roles mainly point to the idea that individuals should have access to the same rights and opportunities irrespective of their sex, and should be treated according to the same principles, norms, and standards (Walby, 2005).

Furthermore, females were comparatively higher that males on accepting responsibility and escape avoidance coping style. Femininity gender role was found to have significant relationship with greater avoidance coping and greater support-seeking coping (LaCroix & Haynes, 1987). Skewness and Kurtosis results highlighted the normal distribution of the sample. The reliability statistics was computed with Cronbach's Alpha which showed the applicability of the scales in the present population.

Table 2: The interrelationship between the psychological measures

Measure	1	2	3
1. **Gender Role Attitude**	-		
2. **Accepting Responsibility**	.269**	-	
3. **Escape /Avoidance**	.183	.379**	-

Note: *p < .05. **p <.01

The Pearson Correlation table (Table: 2) revealed significant positive relationship between gender role attitude and accepting responsibility and between accepting responsibility and

escape avoidance. It depicts that with higher the score on gender role attitude higher will also be the score on accepting responsibility and vice versa. Similarly, with higher the score on accepting responsibility higher will also be the score on escape avoidance and vice versa. This indicates that an individual's ways of acknowledging and taking measures when problem encounter associate with wishful thinking and behavioural efforts to escape or avoid the problem.

Table: 3 Homogeneity of variance

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Gender Role Attitude	3.058	1	98	.083
Accepting Responsibility	.779	1	98	.380
Escape /Avoidance	.672	1	98	.415

Levene's test for homogeneity of variance (Table: 3) showed an insignificant result satisfying the assumptions for parametric test.

Table: 4 One Way ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender Role Attitude	1049.760	1	1049.760	39.954	.000
Accepting Responsibility	21.160	1	21.160	5.722	.019
Escape Avoidance	62.410	1	62.410	6.503	.012

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$

One-way ANOVA (Table: 4) table showed significant mean differences of the group (males and females) on all of the psychological variables, this indicates that male and female university students differ significantly on their gender role attitude, accepting responsibility coping and escape avoidance coping.

Table 5: Regression Analysis showing the prediction of Gender role attitude on Accepting Responsibility and Escape Avoidance

Predictor	Criterion Variables	β	R^2	F	95% CI		t	P
					LL	UL		
Gender Role Attitude	Accepting Responsibility	-.867	.047	4.833	-1.649	-.084	-2.198	.030
	Escape Avoidance	-1.34	.043	4.412	-2.609	-.074	-2.100	.038

Table: 5 shows that gender role attitude significantly predicted accepting responsibility (F=4.833, p<.005) and escape avoidance (F=4.412, p<.005). The coefficient of Determination, R^2, shows that the variation in the dependent variable accepting responsibility can be predicted from gender role attitude by 4.7%. and escape avoidance can be predicted from gender role attitude by 4.3%. In other words, 4.7% of accepting responsibility is explained by gender role attitude. Likewise, 4.3% of escape avoidance is explained by gender role attitude.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to find the relationship between gender role attitude, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance. It aims to explore if males and females differ in the psychological variables. Furthermore, it further explores the relationship of the

variables by analyzing if gender role attitude predicted accepting responsibility and escape avoidance.

The findings of the present study revealed positive relationship between gender role attitude and accepting responsibility and between accepting responsibility and escape avoidance which confirms the first hypothesis. This indicates that those having an egalitarian gender role attitude will be more likely to accept responsibility and those having traditional gender role attitude will be less likely to accept responsibility. Here, accepting responsibility mainly points to understanding and accepting the stressful events and then getting involved with it and seeking to improve. Positive relationship was also observed between accepting responsibility and escape avoidance which indicates that one's way of dealing with problems by accepting and taking measures when stressful moments encounter somewhat relates to avoid and escape the events as well. Significant relationship between gender role and coping have been observed in other studies done among undergraduate students (LaCroix and Haynes, 1987; Lengua and Stormshak, 2000). So, we may say that gender role has association with one's way of dealing with stressful situation that a person encounters.

Significant gender differences have been observed on all of the psychological variables studied confirming the second hypothesis. This indicates that being male or female have effects on gender role attitude, accepting responsibility and escape avoidance. Other findings also observed gender differences in gender role attitude (Larsen and Long, 1988; Ndobo et al., 2013) and in coping mechanisms (Ptacek et al., 1994). Thus, whether a person is male or female can contribute on how they view about gender role i.e., egalitarian or traditional. It also showed that males and females differ in the way they accept responsibility and escape or avoidance situations.

The study also confirms that accepting responsibility and escape avoidance is significantly predicted by gender role attitude hence, the third hypothesis was also accepted. Study conducted among under graduate students also depicted similar findings where gender roles was predicted by traits of coping (Gianakos, 2000). Therefore, we may say that when a person is encountering a stressful situation his/her way of accepting responsibility, acknowledging the problem and making it better or trying to avoid dealing with the problem are explained by an individual's attitude towards gender role.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Factors in the present study are considered important because every family has their own structure which include gender role attitude, responsibilities and management of the home is highly influenced by this attitude. A family with a traditional attitude may have a completely different family environment than a family with egalitarian attitude. Moreover, families encounter different type of stresses daily in life and each member in the family have their own responsibility and duties that he/she need to achieve. In the process of trying to fulfill their respective roles in the family, a person may apply certain types of coping style. Males and females are found to have applied different ways of coping. Coping methods like accepting responsibility and escape avoidance are considered as an important factor when considering gender role attitude. An individual may understand the stressful situation, accept the responsibility and take measures to solve it or run away from the situation and avoid it. These two coping factors are somehow influenced by one's attitude towards gender role attitude as found in the present study. So, this study has given us a broader perspective of how the educated youth viewed the stereotypic roles that society give and how they associated with coping especially in areas of accepting responsibility and escape avoidance.

This study focuses on gender role attitude and two aspects of coping namely accepting responsibility and escape avoidance. On the basis of this, for further research exploring other aspects of coping or psychological variables is recommended to yield better and more in-depth knowledge. Including other age group may also be suggested to reveal their attitude towards gender role for different generations.

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Conflict of Interest
The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.