



Relationship between Gender Role Stereotype and Perception towards Sexual Assault among Adults

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Abstract: Gender role stereotypes are deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about how men and women should behave. These stereotypes can play a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of sexual assault, particularly among adults. Studies have shown that individuals who hold more traditional gender role beliefs are more likely to blame victims of sexual assault and to view perpetrators as less culpable. This is because traditional gender roles often emphasize male dominance and female submissiveness, which can lead people to believe that women who are sexually assaulted were somehow "asking for it." Addressing these harmful stereotypes is essential in reducing sexual assault and creating a more just society. The study aimed to investigate the association between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault in adult participants. Gender role stereotypes are beliefs or expectations that people hold about how men and women should behave, based on societal norms and cultural values. Perception towards sexual assault refers to how people perceive and judge sexual assault, including attitudes, beliefs, and willingness to take action against it. The study used a questionnaire to measure gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault in 140 participants, consisting of 70 males and 70 females. The results of the study showed a positive correlation between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault among females ($p < .00001$), males ($p < .00001$), and both genders combined ($p < .00001$). These findings suggest that individuals who hold more traditional gender role stereotypes may have a more negative perception towards sexual assault. These results have implications for interventions aimed at reducing sexual assault and challenging gender role stereotypes in society.

Keywords: *Gender role stereotypes, Perceptions, Sexual assault, Gender differences, Interventions, Diverse samples, Prevalence, Sexual violence, Society, Development*

1. Introduction

Gender role stereotypes play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of sexual assault, particularly in contexts like India where patriarchal norms are deeply embedded. These stereotypes construct men as dominant, assertive, and sexually driven, while women are viewed as passive and responsible for maintaining modesty. Such beliefs influence how individuals interpret sexual violence, often leading to victim blaming, minimization of assault severity, and justification of perpetrator behavior. Research indicates that individuals who strongly endorse traditional gender roles are more likely to accept rape myths and hold attitudes that distort perceptions of consent and responsibility (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). These cognitive biases reinforce unequal power dynamics and contribute to the normalization of sexual violence.

In the Indian socio-cultural context, gender role stereotypes are reinforced through socialization, media portrayals, and institutional structures, contributing to persistent gender inequality. Studies have shown that traditional gender attitudes are associated with reduced autonomy and opportunities for women, as well as increased tolerance of gender-based violence (Reddy et al., 2003; Mahalingam et al., 2005). Furthermore, men who adhere to rigid gender norms are less likely to recognize behaviors such as harassment or coercion as forms of sexual assault (Chaudhary & Beresford, 2019). The high prevalence of sexual violence in India, coupled with low reporting and conviction rates, reflects not only systemic challenges but also societal attitudes shaped by stigma, shame, and victim blaming (National Crime Records Bureau [NCRB], 2020).

The relationship between gender role stereotypes and perceptions of sexual assault has significant implications for prevention and intervention. Biased perceptions often result in reduced empathy toward survivors, increased acceptance of rape myths, and barriers to reporting and justice (Kahn et al., 2003; McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Addressing these issues requires challenging traditional gender norms through education, awareness campaigns, and policy reforms that promote gender equality and a culture of consent (Banyard et al., 2005). Understanding how stereotypes shape perceptions is essential for developing effective interventions aimed at reducing sexual violence and fostering supportive attitudes toward survivors.

2. Review of Literature

Sexual assault is a critical social and psychological issue, yet perceptions of such acts are not purely objective but are shaped by cognitive schemas, cultural norms, and deeply ingrained gender role stereotypes. These stereotypes define men as dominant, assertive, and sexually aggressive, while women are perceived as passive, nurturing, and submissive, influencing how individuals interpret consent, blame, and responsibility (Eagly, 1987; Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Perception toward sexual assault includes recognition of the act, attribution of blame, perceived severity, and attitudes toward victims, all of which are often biased by pre-existing beliefs. Rape myth acceptance, which includes false beliefs such as victims provoking assault or men being unable to control sexual urges, further mediates this relationship and reinforces distorted understandings of sexual violence (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Burt, 1980).

Theoretical perspectives such as Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), Sexual Script Theory (Gagnon & Simon, 1973), and Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) explain how these stereotypes are formed and maintained. Social role expectations reinforce male dominance and female submissiveness, while sexual scripts position men as initiators and women as gatekeepers, often leading to misinterpretation of consent. Ambivalent sexism, comprising both hostile and benevolent attitudes toward women, further contributes to rape myth acceptance and biased perceptions. Empirical studies consistently show that individuals who strongly adhere to traditional gender roles are more likely to blame victims, minimize the severity of sexual assault, and justify perpetrator behavior (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Viki et al., 2006).

In the Indian context, these dynamics are intensified by patriarchal norms that emphasize male authority and female modesty, contributing to victim blaming, stigma, and underreporting. Research indicates that Indian men are more likely to attribute responsibility to victims, reflecting gender-biased attitudes (Kanekar, 2007), and rape myth acceptance is generally higher compared to Western contexts (Hill & Marshall, 2017). Cultural beliefs related to honor and family reputation, along with structural limitations in legal and support systems, further discourage reporting and reinforce gendered assumptions. Additionally, gender differences are evident, with men showing higher rape myth acceptance and lower empathy toward victims, while women demonstrate greater sensitivity and rejection of such myths (Chauhan, 2022). These perceptions have significant implications, including reduced reporting, increased psychological distress among survivors, and lack of adequate support systems (NCRB, 2020), highlighting the need to challenge gender stereotypes to improve societal responses to sexual assault.

2.1 Objective

To find out the relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault among adults.

2.2 Research Questions

1. This study investigates the influence of gender role stereotypes on the perceptions of sexual assault among adult males and females.
2. This research aims to analyse the impact of adherence to traditional gender roles on male and female adults' perceptions of sexual assault.
3. The objective of this study is to examine the association between gender role stereotypes and victim blaming attitudes in cases of sexual assault among adult males and females.

2.3 Hypothesis

H1- There is a significant relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault among females.

H2- There is a significant relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault among males.

H3- There is a significant relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault among both male and female.

H4- There is significant relationship between individuals who hold more traditional masculine gender role stereotypes and believe that rape victims somehow deserved the assault.

H5-There is a significant correlation between individuals with patriarchal beliefs and the likelihood of dismissing or marginalizing victims of sexual assault.

H6- There is a significant relationship between an individual's level of adherence to traditional femininity and their tendency to engage in victim blaming.

H7-There is a significant relationship between negative attitudes towards transgender individuals and credibility of sexual assault victims.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

The sample of this research study comprises of 140 participants (70 males and 70 females) within the age range of 18-65. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling Technique.

3.2 Inclusion

- Between the ages 18-65

- Comfortable with using online platform
- Know how to read English
- Give consent to participate in the study

3.3 Exclusion

- Not be under 18 or over 65.
- Cannot be uneducated

3.4 Procedure

Initially, the title of the study was chosen. The introduction and literature review were done by studying variables thoroughly. For this research, quantitative methods were used to obtain the data. The research was conducted with participants age range 18-65. An online survey, which took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete was used for data collection. The link was distributed to the participants through social networking platforms. The participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were asked to give written consent in the online survey and confidentiality of the participants was ensured. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, Section I aimed at collecting the sociodemographic information and outlining the purpose of the study. Section II comprised of Attitude Towards Rape Victim Scale containing 25 questions, Section III comprised of Gender Stereotype Scale with 23 questions. The questionnaire was self-administered and internationally validated, ensuring its reliability.

3.5 Data Analysis

After inputting the data into an excel spreadsheet, descriptive statistics were generated for the demographic variables. The data collected for this study was analysed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to examine the relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault. Pearson's correlation coefficient is a statistical measure that is used to determine the degree of association between two continuous variables. The values range from -1 to +1, where -1 represents a perfect negative correlation, 0 represents no correlation, and +1 represents a perfect positive correlation.

3.6 Tools Used

3.6.1 Attitude Towards Rape Victims Scale:

The study employed the Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS) developed by Colleen Ward to assess perceptions of rape victims across domains such as credibility, blame, trivialization, and deservingness. The 25-item scale includes 17 negatively worded and 8 positively worded statements, rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 25 to 125; higher scores reflect more negative attitudes. The ARVS demonstrates good reliability

(Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$) and comprises four subscales: victim credibility, victim blame, victim deservingness, and victim discarded. Higher scores on these subscales indicate tendencies to doubt victims, attribute responsibility to them, believe they deserved the assault, or minimize their experiences.

3.6.2 Gender Stereotype Scale:

The Gender Stereotype Scale by Arjun Sekhar PM and Dr. J. Parameswari is a 20-item tool using a 5-point Likert scale to assess beliefs about gender roles, traits, and abilities. It demonstrates good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$). Higher scores indicate stronger adherence to gender stereotypes. The scale includes four subscales: transphobia, masculinity, femininity, and patriarchy, and is useful for evaluating attitudes and guiding gender equality interventions.

3.6.3 Reliability Table

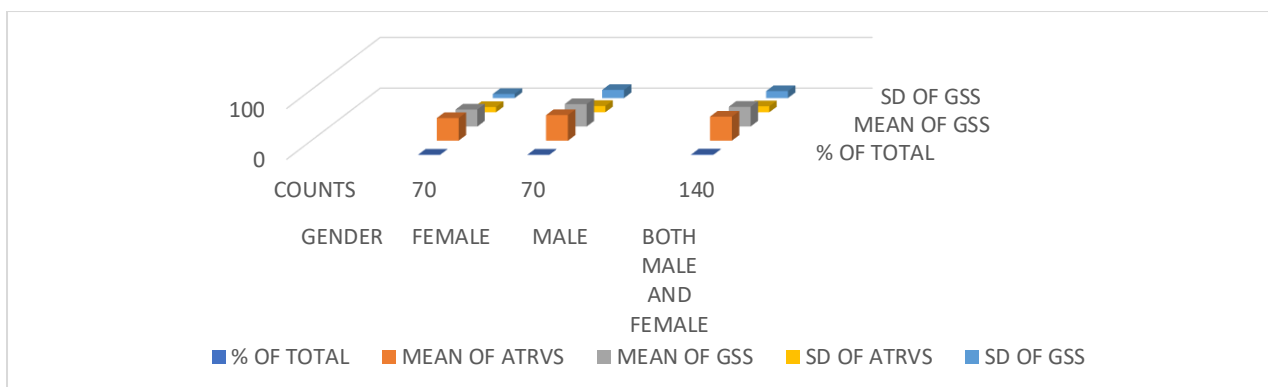
Scale	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Attitude towards rape victim scale	25	0.83
Gender stereotype scale	23	0.84

In both cases, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7 for internal consistency, indicating that the scales are reliable measures of the constructs they are intended to assess. This means that the scores obtained from these scales are likely to be consistent and representative of the attitudes or beliefs being measured, and can be used with confidence in research or other contexts.

4. Result

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of categorical value

Gender	Counts	% of Total	Mean of ATRVS	Mean of GSS	SD of ATRVS	SD of GSS
Female	70	50%	44.52	33.38	10.53	8.13
Male	70	50%	50.5	44.17	12.49	16.07
Both Male and Female	140	100%	47.51	38.8	11.85	13.73



This graph represents the total number of participants, the mean and standard deviation of both the scales of males and females.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the Subscales of Attitude Towards Rape Victims Scale

Gender	Victim Discarded		Victim Credibility		Victim Blame		Rape Victim 'Deserved'	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Female	8.7	2.84	13.35	4.34	15.65	4.80	6.81	2.04
Male	10.47	3.72	16.4	4.87	16.24	5.35	7.38	2.81
Both Male and Female	9.58	3.40	14.87	4.82	15.95	5.06	7.1	2.45

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the Subscales of Gender Stereotype Scale

Gender	Trans Phobia		Masculinity		Patriarchy		Femininity	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Female	7.14	2.45	10.42	3.65	9.82	2.81	5.97	1.52
Male	9.98	4.61	13.91	5.50	12.34	5.09	7.98	3.31
Both Male and Female	8.56	3.93	12.17	4.95	11.08	4.27	6.97	2.75

Table 4. Corelation between Attitude towards rape victims scale and gender stereotype scale

Gender	T-Value	P-Value
Male	2.57888	<.00001**
Female	7.03638	< .00001**
Both Male and Female	5.66292	<.00001**

** Significant at 0.01 and 0.05 level

Table 5. *Correlation between subscales of Attitude towards rape victims scale and gender stereotype scale*

Subscales	Victim Discarded	Victim Credibility	Victim Blame	Rape Victim 'Deserved'
Transphobic	0.472	0.075**	< 1.984	< .00001**
Masculinity	-1.366	< .00001**	<.00001**	< 0.0001**
Femininity	.99064	0.0022*	0.006**	.006262**
Patriarchy	-4.227**	0.202**	0.032**	<.00001**

*Significant at 0.05 level, **Significant at 0.001 and 0.05 level.

Interpretation

The study conducted descriptive and correlation analyses to investigate the relationship between gender role stereotypes and attitudes towards sexual assault. The first hypothesis (H1) proposed that there is a significant relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault among females. The results indicate that females with traditional gender role stereotypes had a more negative perception towards sexual assault, which is supported by a significant correlation between gender stereotypes and attitudes towards rape victims ($p < .00001$). The second hypothesis (H2) proposed a similar relationship among males, and the results indicate that males with traditional gender role stereotypes also had a more negative perception towards sexual assault ($p < .00001$).

The third hypothesis (H3) suggested that there is a significant relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault among both male and female. The results support this hypothesis, as the correlation between gender stereotypes and attitudes towards rape victims was significant among both males and females ($p < .00001$).

The fourth hypothesis (H4) proposed a significant relationship between individuals who hold more traditional masculine gender role stereotypes and believe that rape victims somehow deserved the assault. The results indicate a significant correlation between masculinity and the belief that rape victims deserved the assault ($p < .0001$).

The fifth hypothesis (H5) suggested that there is a significant correlation between individuals with patriarchal beliefs and the likelihood of dismissing or marginalizing victims of sexual assault. The results indicate a significant correlation between patriarchy and victim-blaming attitudes ($p < -4.227$).

The sixth hypothesis (H6) proposed that the level of adherence to traditional femininity does not have a significant impact on an individual's tendency to engage in victim blaming.

However, the results show a significant correlation between femininity and victim-blaming attitudes ($p < .006$).

Finally, the seventh hypothesis (H7) suggested that there is a significant relationship between negative attitudes towards transgender individuals and credibility of sexual assault victims. The results indicate a significant correlation between transphobia and victim credibility ($p < .075$).

In summary, the study provides evidence that gender role stereotypes are significantly related to attitudes towards sexual assault. Specifically, traditional gender role stereotypes and patriarchal beliefs are associated with victim-blaming attitudes, while traditional masculinity is linked to the belief that rape victims deserve the assault. These findings highlight the importance of addressing and challenging gender stereotypes and patriarchal beliefs in efforts to prevent sexual assault and support survivors.

5. Discussion

The relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault among adults is an important area of research, which aims to explore the impact of traditional gender roles on the attitudes of male and female adults towards sexual assault. The study aims to test several hypotheses related to the association between gender role stereotypes and victim blaming attitudes among males and females. The sample for this study consists of 140 participants, and the research uses a purposive sampling technique to collect the data.

The study uses quantitative methods, and an online survey is used for data collection. The survey is self-administered and contains three sections. The first section collects demographic information, while the second and third sections consist of the Attitude Towards Rape Victim Scale and the Gender Stereotype Scale, respectively. Pearson's correlation coefficient is used to examine the relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault.

The study hypothesizes that there is a significant relationship between gender role stereotypes and perception towards sexual assault among females and males. The study also hypothesizes that individuals who hold more traditional masculine gender role stereotypes are more likely to believe that rape victims somehow deserved the assault. Furthermore, individuals with patriarchal beliefs are more likely to dismiss or marginalize victims of sexual assault. The study also hypothesizes that an individual's level of adherence to traditional femininity has a significant impact on their tendency to engage in victim blaming. Finally, the

study hypothesizes that there is a significant relationship between negative attitudes towards transgender individuals and the credibility of sexual assault victims.

Overall, this research study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the impact of gender role stereotypes on the attitudes of male and female adults towards sexual assault. The findings of this study could have important implications for the development of policies and interventions aimed at reducing victim blaming attitudes and improving support for victims of sexual assault.

5.1 Limitations and Strengths of the study

Limitations: One limitation of the study is the small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the results. The study only used participants from one geographic location, which also limits the generalizability of the results to other regions or cultures. Additionally, the study used self-reported measures, which may be subject to response bias or social desirability bias.

Another limitation is the lack of consideration for intersectionality, such as the impact of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation on attitudes towards sexual assault. These factors may interact with gender role stereotypes to produce different attitudes towards sexual assault, and their exclusion may limit the validity of the results.

Lastly, the study did not examine the underlying mechanisms that link gender role stereotypes to victim-blaming attitudes, such as cognitive processes, cultural norms, or socialization. Future research may benefit from examining these mechanisms to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between gender role stereotypes and attitudes towards sexual assault.

Strengths: Despite its limitations, the study has several strengths. It used established and validated measures to assess gender role stereotypes and attitudes towards sexual assault, which increases the reliability and validity of the results. The study also examined the relationship between gender role stereotypes and victim-blaming attitudes among both males and females, which provides a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, the study's results align with previous research on the relationship between gender role stereotypes and attitudes towards sexual assault, which suggests the findings are robust. Lastly, the study highlights the importance of addressing gender stereotypes and patriarchal beliefs to prevent sexual assault and support survivors, which has significant practical implications.

5.2 Future Research

In addition to exploring the impact of interventions aimed at challenging gender role stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes, future research in this area could also investigate the effectiveness of various types of prevention programs and policies in reducing rates of sexual assault. This could involve evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs that focus on promoting healthy relationships, consent, and bystander intervention, as well as examining the impact of legal and policy measures aimed at holding perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Furthermore, future research could delve into the intersectionality of sexual assault and how experiences of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other identity factors may influence attitudes towards and experiences of sexual assault. Understanding the unique experiences and challenges faced by individuals from diverse backgrounds can inform more targeted prevention and intervention efforts.

Finally, given the increased prevalence of technology-facilitated sexual violence, future research could also focus on examining the impact of technology on sexual assault and harassment, as well as developing effective strategies to prevent and address such behaviours in the digital age.

6. Conclusion

The study provides compelling evidence for the significant relationship between gender role stereotypes and attitudes towards sexual assault. The results indicate that traditional gender role stereotypes and patriarchal beliefs are associated with victim-blaming attitudes, while traditional masculinity is linked to the belief that rape victims deserve the assault. These findings underscore the need to address and challenge gender stereotypes and patriarchal beliefs in efforts to prevent sexual assault and support survivors. The study also highlights the importance of developing policies and interventions aimed at reducing victim-blaming attitudes and improving support for victims of sexual assault. Ultimately, this research study contributes to our understanding of the impact of gender role stereotypes on attitudes towards sexual assault and provides important insights for future research and practical interventions.

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