



Mothers' sex typing of children's behaviour: a study of attitude towards gender socialization

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Abstract: Gender socialization is the process which starts at birth and involves learning cultural roles according to one's sex. The present study made an attempt to identify different dimensions of gender socialization. The study was conducted in two villages (Sidhpur Sarkari and Rani Sidhpur) in Bhawarna block of district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh. The sample consisted of 30 mothers in the age range of 21- 35 years along with 60 children in the age range of 3-10 years were also selected for the study. The data was collected through a check list adapted by AICRP-CD unit from "The Child Gender Socialization Scale" developed by (Judith and Craig, 2008). The checklist covered seven areas where a mother generally shows gender discrepancies. These areas were common family activities, playing with toys, expected behaviors, occupations, education, parental behaviour and cross gender activities. The data on all the aspects of socialization were collected and scored separately for each aspect. The mean values, SD and t-values were calculated for each aspect. The results revealed that significant gender differences in playing with kitchen set, jewelery sets and toys were observed. Further significant gender differences in activities like cleaning grains and cutting grass were also observed. The maternal attitude towards sons and daughters in the area of education was also found to be significant.

Key words: Gender Socialization, family, Children and play material.

Introduction

Socialization is the process, through which the child becomes an individual respecting his or her environment laws, norms and customs. Gender socialization is a more focused form of socialization, it is how children of different sexes are socialized into their gender roles. Gender socialization takes place from earliest childhood through adolescence and throughout all social interactions in which we participate.

Parents are normally first and most crucial agents of socialization. Girls and boys are not born as such, but are made. Gender socialization starts from the time we are born, the easy query "is it a boy or a girl?" (Gleitman et al., 2000). In all societies in the world girls and boys are treated differently and there are different expectations from girls and boys from the family and community members. What shapes most children and adolescents, regardless of other circumstance, is the



impact on their lives of their societies' gender- based expectations. The expectations of sex- based roles vary across cultures, geographies and classes. New born humans are socialized into them. The discrimination of gender roles are developed as a part of personality through the socialization process and consequently reflected in all realms of life whether its home or work place, education or health. Femininity roles and characters of gender are learnt and reinforced during the socialization practice within multifarious family relationships, where publicly attributed actions and responsibilities conform to the norms of each society (Dick and Cassell, 2002). Girls and young women learn that females are regarded as emotional, only considered adults if married and even then expected to be submissive to men in decision making. Boys and young men learn that it is considered masculine to be strong and dominant, violent, sexually active, not to show emotions and their inner feelings and to exercise authority over women and children. Early socialization patterns of gender identity shape later male female relationship, attitudes towards sexuality, marriage, intimacy, trust, having and rearing children, home management etc. Gender Socialization is a process that can take many forms to orient a person about his gender. One of the main forms is child rearing in the family. When this happens, a person acquires a gender identity or a perception of himself or herself as masculine or feminine. This perception of masculinity or femininity may be borne out of perceived parental expectations in conformity to societal norms. This usually is modeled or reinforced by parents, peers and society in general. (Raffaelli and Ontai 2004) explored gender-related socialization in the

families and found that many parents socialize their daughters in ways that are marked by "traditional" gender related expectations and messages. Male and female respondents described different experiences of household activities, socialization of gender-typed behavior, and freedom to pursue social activities or gain access to privileges. There has been considerable gender research on inequality over the past two decades. However, there is limited research on gender socialization of children within the family and community especially in the rural areas.

The concept of identifying oneself within the socially defined parameters starts at a very early age. Children learn at a very early age what it means to be a boy or a girl and their role configuration in the socially defined perimeters. The process of gender role socialization is acquired through a diverse process of opportunities, encouragements, discouragements, overt behaviours, covert suggestions, and various forms of guidance and exposure. As children grow and develop, the gender stereotypes they are exposed to at home are reinforced by other elements in their environment and are, thus perpetuated throughout childhood and on into adolescence .

Methodology

The study was conducted in two villages i.e. Sidhpur Sarkari and Rani Sidhpur of district Kangra Himachal Pradesh. The sample consisted of 30 mothers in the age range of 21- 35 years along with 60 children in the age range of 3-10 years were also selected for the study. All young mothers were belonging to the low socio-economic status and their educational status was up to primary level and Middle level. The data was



collected through a check list adapted by AICRP-CD unit from "The Child Gender Socialization Scale" developed by Judith E Owen Blakemore. Craig A. Hill. The checklist covered seven areas where a mother generally shows gender discrepancies. These are common family activities (like-cleaning house, cutting grass, care of cattle, looking after siblings, collecting firewood etc.), playing with toys (like-gun, kitchen set, cars, dolls etc.), expected behaviors (like-behave politely, being gentle, dressing decently, talking loudly etc.), occupations (like- doctor, engineer, teacher, nurse, police officer etc.), education (higher studies, career education, technical education etc.), parental treatment (restrictions, reward, punishments, praise etc.) and cross gender activities (discouraging boys to play with girl's

toys, discouraging girls from dressing like a boy etc.). The data on all the aspects of socialization was collected and scored separately for each aspect. Then mean, SD and t-values were calculated for each aspect.

Results

Significance level of gender differences in maternal attitude in various areas like use of toys, activities, behaviour, choice of occupation were calculated by using t test . It has been seen that in the areas of choice of occupation, activities and education where differences were significant prior to intervention programme, whereas non-significant during post test (table 1). Hence, it can be said that some amount of changes can be brought into mothers' attitude through intervention.

Table No. 1. Gender differences in different areas of gender socialization

Areas	Pre test (t-value)	Post test (t-value)
Toys	0.00016	0.960
Activities	3.790**	0.0006
Behaviour	0.0015	0.0007
Choice of occupation	4.901**	0.0006
Education	2.199*	0.0003
Parental behaviour	0.00021	0.380

Table No. 2. Gender differences in using different toys

Toys t-value		T guns	T. kitche n set	T docto r set	T car	Dolls	T Jeweler y	T tool kit	T architec t set
T- Valu e	Pre- Test	1.06	2.284*	5.62* *	4.87* *	8.223* *	5.110**	7.386* *	1.097
	Post - Test	0.19 6	0.276	0.001 3	0.003 3	0.0014	0.0026	0.189	0.980



While gender differences in using different toys were studied it has been found that no significant gender difference has been existed in post test level between sons and daughters although significant difference were observed during pre-test level (Table No. 2). Fisher & Thompson (1990) and Lindsey & Mize (2001) also found in their studies that parents encourage their children to play with toys that are congruent with their sex and discourage to engage in cross gender play & toys.

The difference in the socialization of son and daughter was more prominent in the areas such as activities performed by child, behaviors / mannerisms, occupations, education and parental treatment as compared to the areas of toys and cross gender activities. In use of toys, Mothers showed positive feeling when girls play with toy kitchen set, jewelry set and dolls and exhibited positive feelings when boys play with doctor set, toy car and toy tool kit.

Table 3: Mean and SD of gender differences in gender socialization (n=30)

Areas	Mean	SD	t-value
Toys	24.46	26.33	0.011
Activities	56.97	58.56	0.045
Behavior	36.86	37	0.680*
Occupation	45.66	52.56	-
Education	34.43	28.7	7.266**
Parental behavior	34.56	35.4	0.002

Table4 : Mean scores and significant level of daughters in various activities n=30

Activities	Mean	SD	t-value
Playing football	3.63	3.63	1.00
Jump rope	3.63	3.63	1.00
Playing marble	3.63	3.63	0.801
Climb tree	3.67	3.63	0.801
Looking after siblings	2.57	2.57	0.572
Cleaning house	1.87	1.93	0.423
Sweeping	3.63	3.63	5.00
Mooping	2.87	3.1	6.229
Helping in kitchen	5.23	2.73	7.325
Washing cloths	3.73	3.63	0.414
Washing utensils	3.00	3.27	0.072
Collecting grass	2.4	2.57	8.329**
Care of cattle	1.8	1.97	0.169
Marketing	3.73	3.7	0.813
Care of sick	2.8	3.2	0.031
Carrying tiffin to field	2.46	3.03	0.007
Cleaning grain	1.8	2.8	6.454**
Collecting firewood	3.67	3.1	0.004
Carrying heavy load	3.6	2.8	0.002
Total	56.97	58.56	0.045



Means and standard deviations of all variables in the study were shown in Table 3 separately for toys, Activities, Gender differences in various activities were significant. Mothers showed significant level among their daughters in activities like, sweeping mopping, helping kitchen, collecting grass, cleaning grains etc.

CONCLUSION

This can be concluded from the above findings that attitudinal differences were found in almost all the above parameters of gender socialization, with major emphasis on choice of occupation and the activities performed by the child in their daily life routine. As parents have the primary influence on gender role development in the early years of child's life, they are the first socialization agents he or she will come into contact with and they teach stereotypes through different ways and behavior like "the way they dress their children, the way they decorate their children's rooms, the toys they give their children to play with, their own attitudes and behavior, so the implications of the study are in terms of educating mothers/parents on gender socialization. Educating mothers in the areas of gender socialization can bring positive change in their attitudes and behavior towards their children.

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