

ATTITUDE TOWARD WOMEN'S ROLES IN PERSPECTIVE OF FAMILY - SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AMONG INDIAN CAREER WOMEN

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between family social environment, self-esteem and attitude toward women's roles of career women. A random sample of 944 career women between the age group of 25 to 50 years was selected for the study. It was hypothesized that younger career women brought up in stimulating family social environment, develop high self-esteem and express more liberal attitude than the adult women. The findings support that greater liberal attitude towards women's roles, indicate women transition to modernity and striving for professional advancement, though less supporting family environment is observed. Living in multi-role world probably makes them move independent than their mothers, who lived in a dual role world.

Key words : family social environment, self-esteem, professional advancement

Introduction

This exploratory study addresses career women attitude toward women's roles in perspective of family-social environment in different age groups. It draws attention to the socialization pattern of girls and helps to assess family environment in Indian families. Girls enter adulthood by assuming the roles of worker, spouse and parent, where as boys are groomed to be independent. In developing countries, where females are more guided by environmental and psychological factors, they are forced to consider the choice between family and career or opt for both. The responsibility for not adopting non-traditional roles in various age groups lies on both, the attitude of family members and the females themselves. Whitbeck and Christine (2001) in line with the above subject for relationship between multi-dimensional family functioning and personal growth initiative for women found that the family processes and personal growth, accounted for as significant factors for women's high personal growth and avenues for development.

In Indian culture, the girls are differently socialized than the boys. They get inadequate feedback and care, which may be the reason for developing their anemic personality in general. The behavior patterns and 'mother as role', especially presented to them for modeling, differentiates gender stereotypes, and contributes greatly to role adoption and personality development. How easily they can adopt new roles is entrenched in the ideologies of Indian culture. Girl's psyche is molded in such a way, that they start perceiving themselves from the point of view of others and so give more importance to their physical appearance instead of personality qualities. Chowdhry & Anita Kumari (1996) found that girl's competence is not simply a trait, but a structure developed by interaction and negative responses they receive in the family. It is also evidenced that they are nurtured with reinforced negative attitude for themselves, hence they develop deformed self-image, unworthy and stereotyped thinking. Kapur and Prabhu (1995) found rejection, anger, poor self-esteem and negative reinforcement, have influential impact on behavior of females. Peterson (1986) found that self-esteem of girls diminish during adolescence due to restrictions posed by the family but can be enhanced by parents support. Thus it is needed to understand as to how career women would perceive their roles with high and low self-esteem where family social environment is considered to be an influencing factor. However, adolescent males may plan their vocational career and life course relatively independently, where as females consider whether to combine, or choose between family and career. The choice between family and career is greatly affected by environmental and psychological factors.

There is a need to design a developmental model of gender roles, to be applied, to support and ease role adoption by girls along with equal participation of the family in their psychological empowerment. Block (1984) reported the same fact that differential socialization in terms of role adoption of sons and daughters, contribute greatly beyond biological differences. Role ideology constructs the

gender beyond the self and into larger world of relationships. Often one's gender role identity is inferred from an ideological statement about the role of women in the family or the society. Ojha (1991) found, prejudice and anxiety are associated with similar parental attitudes. In consistence, Achenbach et al. (1991) concluded that, family configuration may have an effect on children's behavior, but the social contexts in which they live, appear to be far more important to personality development. Tseng and Ilsa (1999) rightly stated that, family tries to maintain or restore the balance between demands and resources by promoting changes in family structure and interaction that give the family more strength and skill for dealing with strains and demands effectively. Olson also reported that the perceived power of the parents, values, attitudes, life styles and own socio-emotional competence, largely affects children. Hence the contributors framing the women's attitude toward their roles, is the need to focus and draw the boundaries of genesis. It is felt that the greater the positive interactions in the family, the higher the self-esteem, positive attitude and emotional competence will exist among females.

Attitude toward women's roles

As more and more women in India are entering multi roles, their physical and mental well-being are put at stake, nevertheless, the way they perceive their roles, prepares them physically and mentally to withstand all situations and enhances their self-esteem. Western researches have observed that more roles are not always better than fewer and that condition is associated with particular roles or role combinations. Learly and Mechania (1983), Gore and Mangiane (1983), Kessler and McRae (1982), Ross, Mirowsky and Huber (1983), Baruch and Barnett (1986), Hirsch and Rapkin (1986), found quality of role as an important factor to be considered. However many studies report that health and psychological well-being in women do increase with the number of roles undertaken, Antonacci and Adelman (1987). Gore and Zeiss (1987) found women having multiple roles, have enhanced selves, are more independent, confident, tolerant, individualistic and complex than women with fewer roles. In line, Richards and Gitelson (1985) suggested that more liberal attitudes in girls exist, who were higher in assertive qualities and perform multiple roles.

Indian review of literature shows that the traditional and stereotyped attitude proved an obstacle in the way of the role performance of women necessary for development. It was also reported that success anxiety is common among career women, as they perceive failure in the form of social rejection. Mehta (1970), Verma (1985), Tanwar (1987) found that even educated women in India generally want to retain certain traditional roles as prescribed by the society. Latha (1993) supports that sociological influence is more on attitude of girls toward equality of women. Mathur (1996) also reported that women having high self-esteem have positive attitude towards their multi roles.

Since the Indian society is characterized as transition to modernity, issues pertaining to conformity of women's traditional roles versus independent professional career and resolving the family-career conflict in favor of female demands, lie in transition too.

Cultural Characteristics of Indian Families

In the past, women have experienced greater cultural pressures to assume only the role of caring, may it be the family or in profession out of home. Though certain cultural stereotypes still exist against them in the society, but are less visible than once they were. It is obvious that challenge entailed in such a family environment, is high for younger generation than the older ones. Briefly, this accounts for the gap between the ideology of equality and traditional male superiority in economic, occupational, political, and educational spheres as in practice. However women have entered and proved their competence in every field but the change is still very slow because of their mind set. Government and policy makers are drawing attention of the society to empower women by educating and making them economically independent. Still a little effort on the part of the family and society at large is left to empower them psychologically. The hypothesis concerned is that younger females will express more liberal attitude towards women roles than the older ones. It is also assumed that stimulating family environment promotes liberal attitude toward women's roles and above all, mother's education and occupation also enhances positive attitude toward their roles.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 944 career women between the age group of 20 years to 50 years, selected by simple random sampling. The females were from middle income group families working in Delhi (Capital of India) and Meerut (U.P.) (National capital region). The sample drawn were serving in different organizations and in different professions like teaching, medical, finance, marketing, media, law and management having average income of Rs. 15,000 to 25,000 a month.

Measures

The questionnaire for Attitude towards women roles consists of 82 items and is based on 5 point Likert scale pertaining to four areas viz. traditional role patterns (37 items), educational and occupational equality (11 items), multiple roles (12 items) and family career conflict (22 items). The response choices ranged from (1) Strongly agree (2) Agree (3) Undecided (4) Disagree (5) Strongly disagree. The strength of agreement or high score indicate non-traditional or liberal attitude toward women multi roles.

The interest and a wide variety of conceptualization used in the study was pointed out by Etaugh (1986). The items originally developed, especially written by the consent of 10 subject experts and adapted from earlier published scales and suitable to Indian culture and conceptualization (Benson and Vincent 1980; Galambas, Peterson, Richards and Gitelson 1985; Hartman and Hartman 1983; Mason and Bumpass 1975). The first draft contained 108 items out of which only 82 items were retained after item analysis. Review of Indian literature also showed that some of the issues considered by women are pertinent to the description of attitude which are characterized as modern and transition to modernity in societies. These issues pertain to (a) maintaining women's traditional roles v/s developing independent professional career, political involvement, and leadership responsibilities; (b) gaining equal educational and occupational opportunities for women; (c) resolving the family career conflict in favor of family versus career demands; (d) attributing gender related differences to innate sex differences.

Reliability

Reliability of the test was estimated by the internal consistency method. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient method yielded the following alpha coefficients.

Factors	Alpha coefficients
I Traditional role	.82
II Educational and Occupational Equality	.76
III Multiple roles	.73
IV Family and Career conflict	.81
V Attitude toward women roles	.85

So the scale is considered reliable with the sample.

Family environment scale

Family environment scale by Moose and Moose 2nd edition (1993) was used to study family social climate of career women under study. The scale is composed of 10 sub-scales, concerning three dimensions that measure the socio environmental characteristics of all types of families. Real form was used, measuring perception of their family environment with five major areas viz. cohesion, expressiveness, control, organization, conflict and personal growth. There are 45 numbers of items in total covering 5 areas having 9 items in each area. The test retest reliability is .89.

Self-esteem Inventory

Self-esteem inventory by M. S. Prasad and G. P. Thakur, a person's global orientation towards the self (self worth), plays a key role in determining behavior. The inventory consists of 60 items based on Likert 7 point scaling technique. Each item has seven possible responses indicating which one suits to them. The higher numerical score on test reported personal perceived score of high level of self-esteem. The test retest reliability is .82

Part (A) Personal (Intrinsic Self-worth) (Personally perceived)
Part (B) Social (Acceptance, Perception of external source) (Socially perceived)

Procedure

The pilot study was conducted on 100 career women in Meerut city (U. P.) India and the English and Hindi version underwent minor modifications to ensure identical semantic connotations. After sample selection, participants were contacted at their work places and were convinced to participate in the study. At the initial phase, family environment scale and self-esteem inventory were administered personally, then after a gap of 10 to 15 days, with their consent, they were interviewed and given attitude scale. An assurance was given to all the participants that their responses would be used for research purpose only.

Plan of Statistical Analysis

Correlation and Multiple regression analysis (stepwise) applied to find out the combined effect of I.V.s viz. family social environment (its dimensions), self-esteem, parent's education, parent's occupation, subject's age, education, city stay and profession, on D.V. (attitude toward women's role) and also the order of entry of I.V.s in the equation to assess better predictors. The estimation of model parameters and predictor's contribution were carried to find out direct and indirect effects of I. V.s on D. V. (SPSS-6). A path model was developed to conceptualize the problem under study and in bringing out the empirical implications.

Results

The study was intended to explore the relationships among variables, and to predict attitude toward women's roles. The IVs (Family social environment, self-esteem, cohesiveness, independence, expressiveness, achievement orientation and dummy variables viz. parents education and occupation, subject's age and

profession) and DV (attitude toward women roles) were subjected to multivariate correlation and multiple regression analysis. Path model was developed, by retaining highly associated variables. The matrix revealed highly related variables, i.e. the more accurate predictors, based on their relationships. It further revealed that self-esteem, family social environment, stay in 'A class' city and mother's education, were the major related variables to permit needful predictions about attitude towards women roles. By using deductive rationale in the study, the variables candidate's education, occupation, age, mother's occupation, father's education and occupation were found to equally contribute positively to attitude formation.

In order to give best estimate of the criterion, the regression weights were calculated for the different predictor variables. The stepwise regression analysis was used and 'R' values calculated to estimate proportion of the total variance in the criterion and also to assess which of the 10 variables contributed significantly.

D.V.	Attitude towards women role				
I.V.	Beta	R	t-values	Sig. level	Significant
Age	.162	.129	5.108	.001	**
Education	.042	.150	1.262	.20	
Family social environment	.170	.252	5.616	.001	**
Occupational status	.129	.181	3.647	.003	**
Stay (city)	.205	.252	6.802	.001	**
Self-esteem	.181	.224	5.908	.001	**
Mother's ed.	.120	.251	3.732	.002	**
Mother's occ.	.003	.132	.099	.90	
Father's ed.	.050	.190	1.199	.13	
Father's occ.	.024	.170	.730	.46	

The tables (1&2) reveal that in hierarchy, family social environment, stay in city and self-esteem, exert significant effect and interact at step 1, step 2 and step 3 respectively, contributing maximum R2 14.9%. Mother's education, candidate's occupation and age, also rendered a moderate status. The significance of gain, in the explained variance at each step from its previous step, was tested by 'F' test, which was found to be significant.

Hence assumptions, concerned with the effects of the type of influence on attitude toward women roles among career women, admit that the higher the self-esteem, the more the non-traditional attitude will be. The results also support the role of family social environment; mother's education and city stay on attitude.

Path model gives the picture of direct and indirect effect of independent variables on dependent variable. Hence it was found that family social environment, self-esteem, city stay, age, mother's education and candidate's occupation, exert direct effect on attitude where as father's occupation exerted indirect effect on attitude.

Finally there were maximum 14 possible path arrows between 8 variables. The path model accurately reflects the empirical relationship model, eliminating weak path coefficients.

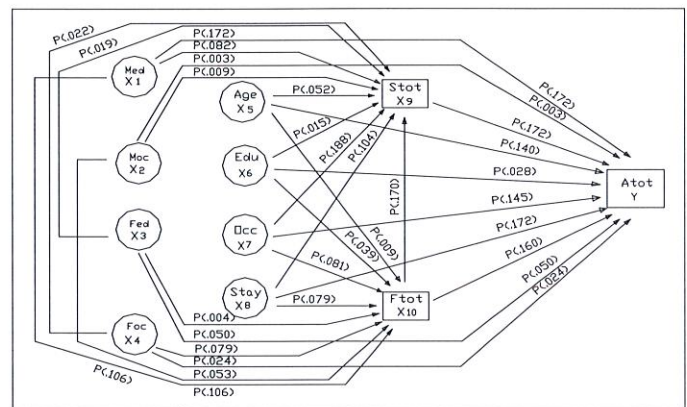


Figure-1
Conceptual Causal Model

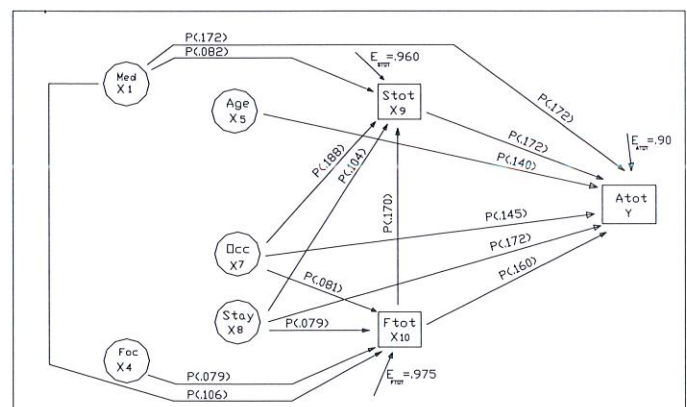


Figure 2
Modified Path Model
(Attitude toward Women's Roles)

Discussion

The study suggests that attitudes toward women roles show that hypothesis concerning roles of stimulating family social environment; high self-esteem and mother's education are the prime variables to contribute in attitude formation. Younger career women express more liberal attitudes toward women roles than do older ones. Analysis has further shown that more traditional attitude of adult women is accentuated by lower middle economic background. Adult woman who grow up in rural areas or live in smaller communities, express more traditional attitudes than the urban

I.V.	R ²	Beta value				
1. Family Social environment	.064	.253/1				
2. Stay	.112	.223/1	.221/2			
3. Self-esteem	.149	.184/1	.233/2	.196/3		
4. Mother's ed.	.170	.166/1	.152/4	.190/2	.186/3	
5. Candidate's occ.	.180	.161/1	.156/4	.105/5	.175/2	.165/3
6. Candidate's age	.197	.140/6	.160/1	.120/4	.145/5	.172/2

career women. The openness in interaction experienced by urban/metro women help in forming a more liberal attitude. Although recent years have brought more favorable attitudes towards women's emancipation, which is reflected in the importance granted to female's education and in making them politically and economically empowered. Findings also suggest that even today non-supportive environment created by males in society and family, are great obstacles in the professional growth and change in attitude of women. It is evidenced that stronger effect of self-esteem on attitude toward women role is due to mainly their socialization. In spite of all drawbacks of society, they make themselves compatible with their future orientation of professional career.

Conclusion & suggestion

In sum, self-esteem, family social environment, mother's education and city stay are the major contributory variables to attitude formation regarding women roles. The results also suggest that women in the age group of 20 to 30 years express non-traditional attitude in comparison to older women. Precisely women's educational attainment and professional status are the reflection of positive attitude of women roles. Hence it is inferred that good family social environment and professional status promote self-esteem and also contribute to non-traditional attitude among career women. The results of this study imply that to develop non-traditional attitude amongst women, they should be given good education, empowered economically, politically and be included in all social and national activities. Younger age is more critical in shaping self-esteem, attitude and quality of role performance therefore parents and teachers should take initiative to let the girls experience success in early years of development and avoid sending negative messages directly or indirectly. It will give them a sense of competence, accomplishment and help in developing their own "Self", besides ego and motivation. It is evidenced that successful career women are typically characterized by self-confidence, self-acceptance, feeling of adequacy, personal competence, high self-esteem and positive attitude towards their role. Feminine personality is passed down from mothers to their daughters, therefore mother's acceptance of her role potentially contributes and is instrumental in performing roles of daughters. Self-esteem developed gradually during early years of life which may be raised by employing intrinsic stimulation by people around her.

This study sets the stage for further research that will explore the impact of males (brother, father, husband) attitude towards women roles on pursuing achievement path and planning their future career.

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