

SEX ROLE ATTITUDES OF WORKING AND NON-WORKING WOMEN

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The present study describes the sex role attitudes of working and non-working women. The sample consisted of 60 women (30 working, 30 non-working). The sex role attitudes were assessed with a Sex Role Attitude Scale (Anila & Ansari, 1992). The study revealed that there was no significant difference in the sex role attitudes of working and non-working women. No difference was found in the sex role attitudes of the women within the age range of 25 to 35 years. Mothers' educational level and fathers' occupation also did not show any significant effect on the sex role attitudes of women. Only fathers' educational level had a significant ($p < .002$) effect on the sex role attitudes. The women with highly educated fathers showed modern sex role attitudes.

Society is a group of people living together with its own culture, customs, ways of living, and specific roles to be played by its male and female members. Through the passage of time, these roles have been fixed for the two sexes. Generation after generation, both the sexes are supposed to play these already fixed roles for them. The expectations of society about specific behaviours of males and females have given rise to a set of attitudes called sex role attitudes. But, these roles do not necessarily remain the same and may sometimes be changed with the passage of time and under the influence of modernization.

Reber defined sex role attitudes as "Sex role is the full compliment of behaviour and attitude of one's role in life as it is associated with one's sex. Generally, it refers to set of patterns of behaviour involving certain rights, obligations and duties which an individual is expected, trained and indeed encouraged to perform. A person's role is precisely what is expected of him or her by others and ultimately, after the particular role has been thoroughly learned and internalized, by the person himself or herself" (cited in Corsini & Ozaki, 1984, p.650).

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According to Elsevier (1979) the female sex role prescription is based on the premise that women will be both wives and mothers having primary responsibilities for both child care and house work. It is assumed further that the normal household includes a male bread winner, not merely, a male, but the bread winner who is the head of the household. It is assumed that the male earner's occupation determines the social status of the entire household. Part of the wife's obligation is to enhance the husband's occupational role performance and his status. All these elements of the sex role scripts constrain women's activities in spheres that are defined as her own career advancement, personal growth, community service, social, and political action.

In the late 1950's, and early 1960's, several studies of high school, and college students, described women with a traditional feminine orientation as better adjusted, higher in self-esteem, and more confident than their peers. But in the early 1970's Bernard (1972), Gove and Tudor (1973) presented impressive epidemiological evidence that traditional feminine role "makes women sick". They criticised that the housewives' role was low in status, isolating, and contracting, and that it created dependency, and led women to suppress their own initiative, and negative emotions in the interests of others. Evidence showed that married men, and single women were about equal in mental health, and superior to house wives who were not employed. Though home makers who entered the labour force might be better off than those who stayed at home, they were likely to obtain low level jobs with little reduction in domestic responsibilities (Cleary & Mechanic, 1983). A survey by Joann Vanek revealed that employed women spend average of 26 hours a week on house work, but that non-employed women spend 55 hours per week. Working women are likely to be more efficient in the use of their time, and to be able to parcel down the work to a minimum (cited in Elsevier, 1979).

The relationship of sex role beliefs to the well being of employed and non-employed mothers is little understood, particularly in working class samples. Ferree (1980) found that working class women in paid employment had more liberal attitudes than their non-employed counterparts.

Satisfaction in roles depends in part on the congruence of the role with social norms. These norms change with age (Bem, 1981), and social conditions (Weitz, 1977). Measures of psychological effects of

this congruence of roles with changing norms would be advantageous, but are seldom available. Other factors affecting the influence of roles provide for status, intimacy, and patterns of role accumulation. Helson and Picano (1990) examined the effects of traditionality of role on the women in a longitudinal sample. The findings indicated that acceptance of traditional values was socially rewarded, especially for women, that resourceful people tend to work for, and to gain social rewards; and that people who receive support tend to be optimistic, and well regarded. When wives approved of their present roles, and perceived that their husbands also approved, they tended to plan to continue in these roles (Helen, 1975).

The parents play an important role in the sex role socialization through differential treatment. Baruch (1972), Stain and Bailey (1973), and Lobel and Bempechat (1992) suggest that maternal employment and education is associated with higher educational and occupational aspirations for daughters. Thus when females are provided with achieving female models, their attitudes toward careers, success, and so on seem to be favourably affected. Similar is the case with fathers' education and occupation (Benson, 1968; Fagot, Leinbach, & O'Boyle, 1992; Maccoby, 1992).

Anila (1992) relates the sex role attitudes with the attributions of responsibility for sexual harassment. A sample of 200 male and female students was taken from the Punjab University, and the Quaid-i-Azam University. The instrument used was Sex Role Attitude Scale (Anila & Ansari, 1992). The results indicated that the students who have traditional sex role attitudes attributed the responsibility for sexual harassment more to girls, and the students who have modern sex role attitudes attributed the responsibility for sexual harassment more to the boys. In this study the significant differences between students having different demographic variables was also investigated. It was found that female students had more modern sex role attitudes as compared to male students. The Quaid-i-Azam University students had more modern sex role attitudes. The students who studied in English medium institutions had more modern sex role attitudes. The significant difference was also found between students with different parents' education with main effect of mother's education indicating that mother's education effects her child's beliefs and attitudes about sex roles. Significant difference was also found between students belonging to families with different monthly expenditure and students whose families observe veil and students whose families do not

observe veil on the Sex Role Attitude Scale. No significant difference was found between students with different parents' occupation.

A study by Illyas (1987) examines the relationship of certain socio-economic and demographic variables with Female Role Perception (FRP). 1480 women from urban and rural areas of Bangladesh were interviewed by visiting their households. It was found that FRP was significantly related to place of residence, family type, and number of children. The higher the income, the more non-traditional was the FRP. Working women were more liberal in FRP than non-working women. Parents' work experience, however, was not related to the FRP. It was observed that the higher the education, the more liberal was the FRP. Parents and husbands level of education was also positively associated with non-traditional FRP of women.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether there is any difference in the sex role attitudes of working and non-working women. Whether they hold traditional or modern attitudes about sex role. The study also tried to find out whether certain demographic factors like age, fathers' occupation, and fathers' and mothers' education have any effect on the sex role attitudes of working and non-working women.

METHOD

Sample

A sample of 60 married women (30 working and 30 non-working) was taken. All of them were between 25 to 35 years of age. Their education was B.A/B.Sc. Working women of government grades 10 to 15 were taken from different government offices of Islamabad. The non-working women (housewives) were taken from the residential areas of Islamabad.

Instrument

Sex Role Attitude Scale (SRAS)

The instrument used in the study is Sex Role Attitude Scale (Anila & Ansari, 1992). It consists of 32 declarative statements about relations between men and women with which the subject expresses degree of agreement or disagreement on a 5-point scale.

The items of the scale cover the areas: (i) Work roles of men and women, (ii) Parental responsibilities of men and women, (iii) Personal relations between men and women, (iv) Level and type of academic achievements for men and women, (v) Occupational abilities of men and women, and (vi) Marriage plan and vital life decisions. Half of the items are phrased in a traditional or male dominant manner and the other half items are phrased in a modern or egalitarian manner. The modern items were scored as 5 to 1 from agreement to disagreement. While in the traditional items the scoring is reversed. The range of the scores in SRAS is from 32 to 160. The high total score on SRAS indicates modern attitudes, whereas, a low score indicates traditional attitudes.

Procedure

Each subject was approached individually at her office or home. Before administration they were explained the task which they were to perform. They were asked to complete the scale according to their own opinion. There was no time restriction for the completion of the scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First of all, the alpha reliability coefficient or internal consistency of the scale for the present sample was computed. An alpha coefficient of 0.78 was obtained which indicates that sex role attitude scale is a reliable measure. *T*-test was applied to see the difference in sex role attitudes of working and non-working women, of women below 30 and above 30 years of age and also to see the effect of fathers' occupation on sex role attitudes of women. One way analysis of variance was computed to see the effect of fathers' and mothers' education on sex role attitudes of women.

The study revealed that the working women indicate modern sex role attitudes (*Mean* score= 114.3667). The reason for such an attitude being their awareness of the environment. This results from having an opportunity to interact with the society which provides them with awareness of their ability and competence in various spheres of life. The realization of their worth tends to make them more

independent in their thoughts and actions. Secondly, in this modern world physical labour has been reduced to a minimum. Women can easily compete with men in fields where mental capability is required. Hence the complex regarding their incompetence which manifests itself in low self image is diminished and a positive attitude towards life develops. Owing to these reasons the primitive ideas are replaced by a more modern outlook or a modern sex role attitude.

Quite unexpectedly the gap between the sex role attitudes of working and non-working women is not wide. The non-working women of the sample also showed modern sex role attitudes (*Mean score* = 107.033). It was revealed that there is not much difference in sex role attitudes of working and non-working women, $t(58) = 1.94, p > .05$. Thus the acceptance of customary role assigned to them by the society, handed down generation after generation, does not imply that non-working women are trapped in past. They have ample awareness of the modern world. Their modern sex role attitude can be attributed firstly to their education. Education being the only tool which can open new horizons for a person. Secondly, media too, has proved to be an effective source of generating the desire to explore the unknown avenues. The outcome is a new outlook on life and on self image. They are more informed of their rights and their share in society, unknown to traditional women. Thus it can be concluded that non-working women may be socially inactive but they too have a modern sex role attitude. May be lack of will or desire hinders their stepping forward in practical life.

Further, the study tried to detect if a difference on sex role attitude existed between women ranging from 25 to 35 years of age. No significant difference was found between women of age group of below 30 years and above 30 years, $t(58) = 0.07, p > .05$. The *mean* scores of both the groups indicate modern sex role attitudes (below 30 years = 110.5946, above 30 years = 110.8696). The reason seems to be the age or the period when their minds developed and reached maturity. This happens to be in the late 70s and early 80s of this century, the time when overall outlook of people began to change into an exceedingly liberal one. Since the subjects of the study were educated and had modern views whether working or non-working, it reflected their awareness about the demand for feminist rights, an equal status in society which was previously denied to them. The gap in the age groups of the subjects is not wide, perhaps a wider gap in age will ensure a difference in sex role attitudes due to lack of

education, lack of exposure to the modern world via media, and conservative ideas of the past.

The study revealed that fathers' education had a significant effect on the sex role attitudes of women, $F(2, 57) = 7.295, p < .002$. This finding is similar to some Western studies (e.g., Benson, 1968; Fagot, Leinbach, & O'Boyle, 1992; Maccoby, 1992). It is a fact that male dominance without any argument exists all over the world. In the Pakistani society the condition is more serious and forceful. Man in this society is no doubt quite influential and his will prevails more effectively against a woman's will. Therefore, man's behaviour or outlook upon life whether traditional or modern plays an important role in moulding the personalities of the other family members. As a husband he exercises great influence on his wife and as a father he plays an essential role in developing his daughter's personality and thoughts. On analyzing the effect of fathers' education on the sex role attitudes of women it was found that as the fathers' educational level increases, the women's sex role attitudes move from traditional views to modern views (*Mean* scores: below B.A/B.Sc. = 100.77, B.A/B.Sc. = 107.35, above B.A/B.Sc. = 117.96). Thus, uneducated men with conservative ideas act as a barrier against the development of modern attitudes of their daughters. These men may accept a few changes in the role of women. They may favour education for them, but might not approve of or appreciate their having freedom of thought and expression. This line of thought is reflected in their daughters' attitudes. Even if these women are educated their thoughts seem to oscillate between traditional and modern approach towards life.

On the contrary, women having highly educated fathers have modern sex role attitudes. Highly educated men tend to accept women as equal to them. They are willing to accept them in roles other than that of mother and wife. They encourage them to enter practical life and work with men, seek their own identity instead of a man's wife, mother or daughter. The women in turn acquire these lines of thought and learn to stand up and step forward. Therefore, the women brought up under the influence of educated men have modern sex role attitudes. Thus men's sex role attitudes are reflected in women.

On the other hand, this study proves that as opposed to fathers' influence, the mothers' level of education does not affect daughters' sex role attitudes, $F(2, 57) = 2.645, p > .05$. This finding is in

contrary to some Western researches (e.g. Baruch, 1972; Lobel & Bempechat, 1992; Stain & Bailey, 1973). It may be because generally, mothers' role in the Pakistani social system is dependent on the expectations of their husbands. They play the roles which are assigned to them by their husbands. Husband is the leader, provider, and protector of the family and a woman's attitudes are mostly determined by her husband's views. Mothers like daughters are, therefore, also dependent upon their husbands and abide by rules which are imposed on them. Hence mothers do not play a significant role in the formation of sex role attitudes of their daughters.

The effect of fathers' occupation on the sex role attitude of women also proved insignificant, $t(58) = 1.45, p > .05$. The reason may be that in this society men keep the matters concerning their profession aloof from home. They keep family and work at different levels which in result does not affect family affairs, casting no influence on the sex role attitudes of women.

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