

SOCIOECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATES OF FEMALE ROLE PERCEPTION AMONG WOMEN IN BANGLADESH

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The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship of certain socioeconomic and demographic variables with Female Role Perception (FRP). 1480 women from urban and rural areas of Bangladesh were selected by stratified random sampling. One personal data blank and one FRP Scale by Ilyas and Zaman (1982) were administered individually by the interviewers visiting the households of subjects. It was found that FRP was significantly related to place of residence, family type, age and number of children. The higher the income, the more non-traditional was the FRP. Working women were more liberal in FRP than nonworking 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' levels of education were also positively associated with nontraditional FRP of women. Findings of the study further revealed that type of occupation bears a significant relationship to FRP.

Psychologists and sociologists are giving considerable attention for studying sex role or male-female role perception. A number of studies have examined the relationship of the various socioeconomic and demographic variables to sex role perception (SRP), especially the female role perception (FRP) (Baruch, 1972; Kutner and Brogan, 1974; Lipman-Blumen, 1972; Mason & Bumpass, 1975; Meier, 1972; Scanzoni, 1979; Steinman & Fox, 1970; Tomeh, 1978). However, these findings cannot be generalized for two important reasons. First, most of the research has been carried out in the United States and thus has a limited cultural perspective. Second, almost all the studies have used college samples which are fairly homogeneous in FRP. It is expected that sampling from a more heterogeneous population than a college group in other countries may yield different results. This is why, in the current research, the sample was selected from a more heterogeneous population. The sample comprised of working and non-work-

ing women from urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. The respondents also varied widely in age, education, occupation and income. It was hoped that the present investigation in Bangladesh would be helpful in throwing light upon the cross-cultural aspects of the findings in the area. With this expectation the study was designed to examine the relationship of certain socio-economic and demographic variables with FRP.

In the present study, attitudes related to normative conception of appropriate behaviour of females is defined as female role attitude and responses related to the role attitude is conceptualized as female role perception. The specific objective of the study was to examine the relationship of FRP with place of residence, family type, age, number of children, monthly income, work experience, occupation and education.

In view of the above objective the following hypotheses were tested in the current research:

1. Women who reside in urban areas would score higher on FRP (i.e., would be more nontraditional or liberal in their Sex Role Attitude) as compared to those who reside in rural areas.
2. Women who are members of nuclear families would score higher on FRP as compared to those who are members of joint families.
3. Women who are younger in age would score higher on FRP as compared to those who are older in age.
4. Women who have fewer children would score higher on FRP as compared to those who have more children.
5. Women whose families have higher monthly income would score higher on FRP as compared to those who have lower monthly income.
6. Women who are working would score higher on FRP as compared to those who are nonworking.
7. Women whose parents are working would obtain higher scores on FRP as compared to those whose parents are nonworking.

8. Women who have more education would score higher on FRP as compared to those who have less education.
9. Women whose (i) parents and (ii) husbands belong to higher education level group would score higher on FRP as compared to women whose parents and husbands belong to lower education level.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 1480 women from urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. They were selected from Dhaka, Comilla and Rajshahi districts by stratified random sampling. The variables of stratification were (a) place of residence (urban/rural) and (b) work experience (working/nonworking). The strata-wise distribution of subjects was as follows: urban nonworking 326, urban working 422, rural nonworking 520, rural working 212. Age of respondents ranged from 15 to 85 years, with greatest number falling in the age category of 20–29 years. Educational background of respondents ranged from no school education (illiterate) to university graduation.

The data of the present study were collected from January, 1982, to May, 1982.

Instruments

One Personal Data Blank and one standardized Female Role Perception (FRP) Scale (Ilyas & Zaman, 1982) were used for data collection. Personal Data Blank gathered subjects' socioeconomic and demographic information and the FRP Scale measured Female Role Perception. FRP scale consists of two parts. The first part includes 20 items which include statements, dealing with adult female role situations, particularly related to family, occupational and social life. These items are all short statements expressing either a "traditional" or "nontraditional" female-role preference. Traditional preferences suggest that a woman's family responsibilities are more important than her personal career, her primary purpose is to be responsible for household and childcare tasks, subordinating her own interests to wellbeing of husband and family. Nontraditional preferences, on the other hand, stress equality between sexes and consider a women's satisfaction and achievement equally important with those of husband and family.

The second part consists of two paragraphs. Paragraph A states that women should focus attention on home and family affairs, while paragraph B states that women should be equal to men in opportunities, pay and types of occupation chosen. Subjects were asked to respond to these items by selecting one of the five possible answers indicating their degree of agreement with the statement.

A subject's total score on the FRP scale was the sum of the scores on the two parts. Here, low total score indicate traditional attitude regarding the role of women, while a high total score represent nontraditional or liberal attitude.

Procedure

Data were collected through interview methods. All the interviewers were given training in administering the Personal Data Blank and the FRP Scale to the subjects. Aims and objectives of the present study were discussed with the interviewers at the outset of the training. All of the interviewers were females. They were Master degree holders or M.Sc. Final year students of Psychology or Social Work Department in the Dhaka University.

The instruments were administered individually by the interviewer to the selected samples by visiting their household. After establishing rapport subjects were interviewed. It was the interviewer's task to give necessary explanations or illustrations (especially for rural respondent) whenever the respondent asked for them.

RESULTS

The results of this study are reported in terms of FRP means of various groups. However, in order to test the significance of difference between the groups, point-biserial or product-moment correlations are computed, which also enable us to see the differences in the extent of relationship.

Table 1 shows that the mean FRP score for urban women ($M = 25.48$) was higher than that of rural women ($M = 20.65$). Significant point biserial correlation [$rpbi (1478) = .3019, p < .01$] between FRP and place of residence also indicate that FRP varies significantly according to place of residence (table

4). Mean FRP score for respondents of nuclear families ($M = 23.53$) is higher than that of joint family ($M = 22.17$). Point biserial correlation [$rpbi (1478) = .0792, p < .01$] between FRP and family type is also significant (table 4).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Female Role Perception Scores
by Demographic Characteristics

(N = 1480)

Demographic Characteristics	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Place of Residence</i>			
Rural	732	20.65	9.79
Urban	748	25.48	9.37
<i>Family Type</i>			
Nuclear	1003	23.53	9.74
Joint	477	22.17	10.12
<i>Age (in years)</i>			
15–19	197	20.89	10.03
20–29	642	24.08	9.61
30–39	367	23.59	10.12
40–49	182	22.88	10.10
50 and older	92	19.35	.84
<i>Number of Children</i>			
0– 3	1040	23.87	9.97
4– 7	369	21.35	10.04
8–11	67	20.67	9.11
12–19	4	22.75	8.84

Note: Low FRP Score = More Traditional
High FRP Score = More Non-traditional

Mean FRP score for different age groups reported in table 1 show that women who have age between 20 and 29 years have the highest mean FRP score ($M = 24.08$), while women with age 50 years and above have the lowest mean FRP score ($M = 19.35$). Significant negative correlation [$r(1478) = -.0459, p < .05$] between age and FRP score in table 4 indicates that older women are more traditional in female role perception.

Mean FRP score of respondents by number of children is presented in table 1. It is found that women who have children ranging 0 to 3 have the highest mean FRP score ($M = 23.87$). Significant negative correlation [$r(1478) = -.1346, p < .0001$] between FRP and number of children confirm that women with smaller number of children are more nontraditional in FRP.

Observation of mean FRP score of different income groups in table 2 reveals that women whose families have higher monthly income have more liberal FRP. Significant positive correlation

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Female Role Perception Scores by Income

Total Monthly Income in Taka	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Less than 1000	785	20.81	9.97
1001 – 2000	383	24.51	9.24
2001 – 3000	152	26.76	8.20
3001 – 4000	65	26.88	9.57
4001 and above	95	27.78	9.08

[$r(1478) = .1282, p < .0001$] indicates that income is positively associated with FRP (table 4).

Mean FRP scores of subjects by their own and parents' work experience is presented in table 3. As predicted, working women have higher mean FRP score ($M = 26.90$) than nonworking women ($M = 20.24$).

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of Female Role Perception Score
by Work Experience

Work Experience	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Own</i>			
Working	634	26.90	8.90
Nonworking	846	20.24	9.62
<i>Father's</i>			
Working	1365	23.05	9.87
Nonworking	115	23.65	10.03
<i>Mother's</i>			
Working	106	23.77	9.40
Nonworking	1374	23.04	9.92

Variability in FRP is less in working women ($SD = 8.90$) than in nonworking women ($SD = 9.62$). Significant point biserial correlation [$rpbi(1478) = .4121, p < .01$] between the FRP and own work experience (table 4) confirms the hypothesis that working women are more liberal in FRP than nonworking women.

Table 4
Correlations of Female Role Perception Score with
Demographic and Socioeconomic Variables

Correlation between	Coefficient of Correlation
<i>Point Biserial Correlation between FRP and</i>	
	<i>rpbi</i>
Place of residence	.3019**
Family type	.0792**
Own work experience	.4121**
Father's work experience	.0204
Mother's work experience	.0234
<i>Pearson's Product Moment Correlation between FRP and</i>	
	<i>r</i>
Age	-.0459*
Number of children	-.1346***
Total monthly income	.1282***

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .0001$

However, nonsignificant point biserial correlation between FRP and father's work experience, FRP and mother's work experience (table 4) indicate that parents' work experience was not related to daughter's FRP.

Mean FRP score of respondents by occupation is represented in table 5. Data reveal that women who are in administrative and managerial occupation have the highest mean FRP score ($M = 30.76$), while housewives have the lowest mean FRP score ($M = 20.24$). Women who are in high level professional occupation have

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Female Role Perception score of Subjects by Occupation

Occupation	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
High level professional	80	29.70	7.19
Semi-professional	171	28.73	8.26
Administrative and managerial	37	30.76	6.46
Clerical and related	73	27.82	8.38
Technical and skilled labour	106	26.22	9.30
Unskilled labour & domestic servant	130	22.90	9.55
Housewives	846	20.24	9.62
Others	37	22.81	7.69

Chi-square between Female Role Perception and Occupation:

$$X^2 (14, N = 1480) = 225.90, p < .0001$$

second highest mean FRP score ($M = 29.70$). Significant chi-square [$X^2 (14, N = 1480) = 225.90, p < .0001$] between FRP and occupation indicates that type of occupation significantly influences FRP (table 5).

Among all socioeconomic and demographic variables, education is found to be the most important factor for female role "modernity". Data reported in table 6 reveal that the higher the education the more liberal is the FRP. It is found that women with the highest educational qualification have highest mean FRP score ($M = 29.81$), while illiterate women have the lowest

Table 6
Means and Standard Deviations of Female Role Perception Score
by Education

Education Level	n	M	SD
<i>Own Education</i>			
Illiterate	430	18.61	9.27
Class I to Class V	356	21.51	9.60
Class VI to Class X	179	22.78	9.58
S.S.C./H.S.C.	299	26.76	8.63
Graduation and higher degree	216	29.81	7.71
<i>Father's Education</i>			
Illiterate	364	19.19	9.24
Class I to Class V	388	21.66	10.30
Class VI to Class X	190	23.76	9.52
S.S.C./H.S.C.	335	25.29	9.02
Graduation and higher degree	203	28.58	8.24
<i>Mother's Education</i>			
Illiterate	744	20.13	9.44
Class I to Class V	449	24.96	9.74
Class VI to Class X	215	27.68	8.49
S.S.C./H.S.C.	59	28.36	8.92
Graduation and higher degree	13	28.46	7.79
<i>Husband's Education</i>			
Illiterate	221	18.53	9.47
Class I to Class V	283	20.90	10.07
Class VI to Class X	149	20.63	9.03
S.S.C./H.S.C.	263	23.15	9.33
Graduation and higher degree	370	27.02	8.62
<i>Unmarried women</i>	194	25.80	10.06

mean FRP score ($M = 18.61$). It is further observed that women with highest educational qualification have the lowest variability in FRP ($SD = 7.71$), while women with academic qualification category class I to class V have highest variability in FRP ($SD = 9.60$). Data of table 6 furthermore indicate that the higher the parents' and husband's level of education, the more liberal are women's FRP. Highly significant X^2 results between FRP and education also indicate that own [$X^2 (8, N = 1480) = 252.05, p < .0001$], father's [$X^2 (8, N = 1480) = 157.64, p < .0001$],

Table 7

Chi-Square between Female Role Perception and Education

Chi-square between FRP and	X^2
Own Education	252.05*
Father's Education	157.64*
Mother's Education	154.38*
Husband's Education	164.06**

Note: FRP is trichotomized as Traditional, Moderately Traditional, and Nontraditional. Education is Categorized as Illiterate, Class I to Class V, Class VI to Class X, S.S.C./H.S.C., Graduation and Higher Degree.

* $p < .0001, df = 8$

** $p < .0001, df = 10$

mother's [$X^2 (8, N = 1480) = 154.38, p < .0001$] and husband's [$X^2 (10, N = 1480) = 164.06, p < .001$] educational qualifications are the determining factors for making women liberal in FRP.

DISCUSSION

Results of the study showed that female role perception is related to several socioeconomic and demographic variables. It was found that urban women were more nontraditional in FRP than rural women. Illiteracy of most women in rural Bangladesh

(Rabbani, 1984) might be an important reason for their being traditional in FRP. Moreover, the males in rural Bangladesh treat women only as housewives and clearly differentiate female role from male role. These in turn might have made rural women traditional in FRP. But higher educational background of urban women and their exposure to urban life might be responsible for making them nontraditional in FRP.

Data on family type and FRP revealed that the respondents of nuclear families were more nontraditional in FRP than those of joint families. The argument is that in a joint family elderly people are present and they transmit traditional values to its younger members. Moreover, in a joint family presence of both sexes in greater number encourages role differentiation concept rather than role sharing.

Significant negative correlation between age and FRP indicated that younger women were more nontraditional than older women. But this relationship was not strictly linear. Young women of age 5 to 19 years were a bit traditional. However, non-traditional FRP reached its peak by the age of 20 to 29 years and then gradually declined thereafter. Guardianship of parents or husbands in young age might be responsible for traditional FRP in young women. When this guardianship goes, they become liberal. Again, they become traditional with increasing age. Traditional FRP of older women in Bangladesh can be justified on the grounds that 20 years back women's education was not accepted so widely as compared with the modern time. Hence, women who are at present 40 years of age and above did not have higher education and are likely to be conservative in FRP.

Data on number of children and FRP indicated that women who were childless or had a small number of children tended to favour nontraditional roles. Absence or smaller number of children made men's attitude liberal towards sex role differentiation (Tomeh, 1978). This in turn might make women nontraditional in FRP.

Results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that women whose families had higher monthly income would have more liberal FRP. Higher income is related to higher educational back-

ground. Studies have showed that education has made women liberal in Sex Role Attitude (Brogan & Kutner, 1976; Mason & Bumpass, 1975). Generally, income of a family becomes higher when both husband and wife are working. Previous researches have shown that wife's work involvement has made her less traditional in sex role attitude (Scanzoni, 1979; Zaman, 1978). The results of the study also showed that working women were more non-traditional in FRP than nonworking women. Wives' employment reduces their economic dependence on their husbands and makes them less confined to household activities. They engage in non-traditional roles. Moreover, wives' work involvement outside home changes husbands' traditional sex role outlook. Husbands agree to share household duties, childcare and other activities with their wives. Husbands' positive attitude might be a reason for development of nontraditional FRP of wives. The present study did not find any significant relationship between parents' work experience and daughter's FRP. However, prior studies on Sex Role Attitude and parents' work experience have given contradictory results. Some studies have shown that daughters' sex role values have been affected by the mothers' pattern of employment outside of home (Meier, 1972; Nye & Hoffman, 1963; Vanfossen, 1977; Vogel, Boroveoman, Broverman, Charkson & Rosenkrantz, 1970), while other studies have shown no relationship between mothers' employment and SRA of daughters (Brogan & Kutner, 1976; Lipman-Blumen, 1972).

Findings of the present study revealed that type of occupation bears a significant relationship to FRP. It was found that women in administrative and managerial occupation were the most nontraditional in FRP, while housewives were the most traditional in FRP. It was also observed that women in high level job were nontraditional, while women in low level job were traditional. It can be argued that women who were in high level job were also highly educated and their higher educational background might make them nontraditional, whereas women in low level job get poor wages. The low wages reduce reward from outside job and as a result they develop preference for childcare and domestic work. This, in turn, wields influence on the development of traditional FRP.

Results of the present study indicated that education was one

of the most important factors for making women modern in role perception. It was found that women with the highest educational qualifications were most nontraditional, while illiterate women were the most traditional. It was observed that the higher the education the more liberal was the FRP. A few other studies have also shown similar results (Bayer, 1975; Brogan & Kutner, 1976; Mason & Bumpass, 1975; Scanzoni, 1979). Results of the present study further indicated that parents' and husbands' level of education were positively associated with nontraditional FRP of women.

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