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Gender socialization practices among the parents of preschoolers

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Abstract

Gender socialisation is the process through which society makes sure that children learn the appropriate gender-specific behaviours. Particularly early childhood plays a sensitive and crucial role in an individual's life as they establish the foundations for their future. The present study was undertaken to assess the gender socialization practices of parents of preschoolers. The total sample for the present study consisted of 120 parents (both mother and father) whose children age ranged from 2.5 – 4 years. A scale was prepared to assess the gender socialization practices (GSPS). The scale was comprised of 172 statements pertaining to various gender-specific parenting practices with regards to, i.e. toys, clothing, food practices, education and occupation. Major findings of the study indicated that the majority of parents had strongly agree and agree opinions towards gender neutral toys, food practises, educational and occupational choices while some parents had disagreed opinions with regards to gender neutral clothing.

Keywords: Gender socialization practices, preschoolers, parents

Introduction

Gender socialization is the process through which society ensures that children learn the acceptable behaviors associated with their gender. It also divides youngsters into separate life paths based on whether they are male or female. Gender socialization therefore channels human behavior. A child learns that sexes differ not only biologically, but also socially and culturally. Individual sex is a biological concept that relates to the male and female division of the human species. Gender, on the other hand, is a social construct that denotes masculinity and femininity, as well as the social, psychological and cultural dimensions of male and female identity. Children learn gender stereotypes as they grow up: females are emotional, soft, easy to conceive, patient, nurturing and caring, whereas males are strong, unemotional/less emotional, rational and logical. This is a reflection of the gender socialization that occurs during childhood. However, it is an unconscious process and parents are often unaware that they are instilling traditional gender roles and identities in their children. (Haloi, 2016) ^[5]. Specially the formative years of an individual's life are very sensitive and crucial as this span lays foundation for the forthcoming life.

In terms of child development, parenting style is a determining element. It has an impact on children's psychological and social functioning. The influence of one's own parents has a significant impact on parenting style (Belsky, 2005). Parenting style is influenced by personality type, educational accomplishment, culture, social background and the influence of their spouse. Parenting style is influenced by the temperament of both the parent and the child and the mother and father may have different parenting styles (Joseph & John, 2008) ^[6].

The purpose of the proposed study is to evaluate the effects of educational status and family structure on gender socialization practices among preschooler's parents, as these activities teaches the children to learn the appropriate gender-specific behaviors. It influences a child's gender identification, personality and behavior in addition to teach them about gender roles. It is crucial to evaluate these gender socialization procedures because they have an impact on children personalities and social wellbeing to a great extent.

Objective: To assess the gender socialization practices of mother and father.

Methodology

Sample and its selection

The study's sample included 120 parents with children between the ages of 2.5 and 4 years,

whose children did not have any disabilities and who were the residents of Udaipur city.

. For present study two nursery schools were selected and 60 fathers and 60 mothers were chosen for the purpose. Then, in order to collect data, the Gender Socialization Practices Scale (GSPS) was administered to the eligible respondents.

Tools and their description

GSPS (Gender Socialization and Practices Scale): This Scale was developed by the investigator related to practices of parents towards clothing, food, toys, education and occupation on the basis of gender.

This questionnaire was prepared by the investigator under the guidance of advisor. It was a 5-point scale seeking answers ranking from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It was used to assess the level of gender socialization practices of the sample regarding the following headings: -

Table 1: Dimensions of Gender Socialization and Practices Scale

S. No.	Dimensions	Items
1.	Toys	44
2.	Clothing	28
3.	Food Practices	28
4.	Education	28
5.	Occupation	44
6.	Total	172

Table 2: Interpretation of Gender Socialization and Practices Score on the basis of Toys and Occupation

S. No.	Categories	Score-range
1.	Strongly agree	148-220
2.	Agree	74-147
3.	Disagree	1-73

Table 3: Interpretation of Gender Socialization and Practices Score on the basis of Clothing, Food Practices, Education and Occupation

S. No.	Categories	Score-range
1.	Strongly agree	161-240
2.	Agree	81-160
3.	Disagree	1-80

There were total 172 items in the scale. The scores were given as: -

Table 4: Scores of scale

5	Very happy / Strongly agree / Very true
4	Happy / Agree / True
3	Neutral / Undecided / Moderately true
2	Sad / Disagree / Slightly true
1	Very sad / Strongly disagree / Not at all true

Validity

Through pilot study data, panel members validated the content of the Gender Socialization Practices Scale (Toys, Clothing, Food Practices, Education, and Occupation). The calculated mean score was obtained as 4.1 which shows that the scale was suitable for assessing the Gender Socialization Practices among the Parents of Pre-schoolers.

Reliability

The internal consistency, or reliability, of a group of survey items is measured by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The reliability value of the scale was 0.96.

Statistical analysis

The data collected were analysed in the following ways in light of the objectives set forth for this study.

- i. Frequency and percentage were used to analyse the data to assess the gender socialization practices of parents of pre-schoolers.

Results

Dimension wise gender socialization practices of mother and father

Table 5: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding toys (n=60)

S. No	Dimensions	Score-range	Mother		Father	
			f	(%)	f	(%)
1.	Strongly agree	148-220	60	(100%)	60	(100%)
2.	Agree	74-147	-	-	-	-
3.	Disagree	1-73	-	-	-	-

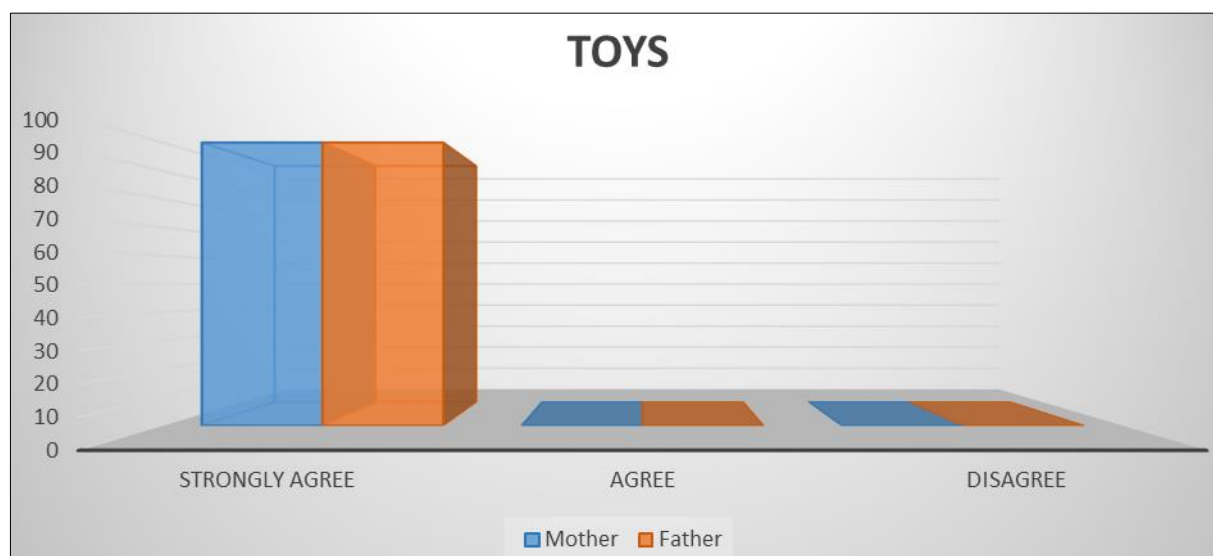


Fig 1: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding toys

As seen in the above graph, mother and father both strongly agreed (100%) with the remarks about toy selection, demonstrating that they were sharing the same opinion. It can be deduced from the above findings that both mother and father didn't have stereotypical gender perceptions regarding toys, and they were allowing their children to play with any toy irrespective of their gender.

According to Francis (2010) [4], toy preferences were strongly skewed towards one gender over the other, with boys favouring toys and resources that place an emphasis on technology and activity and girls favouring nurturing and stereotypically feminine interests. The findings of this study run contrary to the aforementioned findings. Today, however, this has a

significant impact on children's choices due to changes in the educational level of parents and various awareness campaigns for parenting approaches that promote gender-neutral parenting.

Table 6: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding clothing (n=60)

S. No	Dimensions	Score-range	Mother		Father	
			f	(%)	f	(%)
1.	Strongly agree	161-240	-	-	-	-
2.	Agree	81-160	51	(85%)	49	(81.6%)
3.	Disagree	1-80	9	(15%)	11	(18.3%)



Fig 2: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding clothing

The statistic demonstrates that mothers were slightly ahead (85%) with their counterparts (81.6%) regarding agreeableness for gender specific choice followed by remaining subjects as disagreeableness in (18.3%) in fathers and only (15%) in mothers, which obviously illustrated that there were still had some gender-based preconceptions for the choice of clothing for their children.

Coyne *et al.* (2021) [3] examined that children participated in three gender-related tasks while wearing either a gendered, counter-gendered or gender-neutral costume. The wearing of costumes had no effect on any task for girls. However, when wearing a neutral costume as opposed to a masculine-typed one, boys liked feminine toys substantially more.

Overall, both parents were slightly against wearing anti-gender apparel because they let their daughter dressed in whichever way she wanted while refusing to let their boy wear frock, skirts, etc. These parents enforced strict rules for their son while being indifferent on the gender identity of their daughter.

Table 7: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding food practices (n=60)

S. No	Dimensions	Score-range	Mother		Father	
			f	(%)	f	(%)
1.	Strongly agree	161-240	-	-	-	-
2.	Agree	81-160	60	(100%)	60	(100%)
3.	Disagree	1-80	-	-	-	-



Fig 3: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding food practices

It is evident from the above graph that all the parents (100%) shared the same viewpoint, with the assertions about eating habits, demonstrating that they were treating their children similarly in terms of food preferences and healthy habits. Mahmood (2021) ^[1] discovered that early dietary changes, particularly those made during young age, may benefit health and lower the risk of contracting diseases in later life. Given that there was a significant time for parental supervision and engagement with their children, family dinners have been proven that it influenced greatly on how youngsters model their

eating habits.

Table 8: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding education (n=60)

S. No	Dimensions	Score-range	Mother		Father	
			f	(%)	f	(%)
1.	Strongly agree	161-240	-	-	-	-
2.	Agree	81-160	60	(100%)	60	(100%)
3.	Disagree	1-80	-	-	-	-

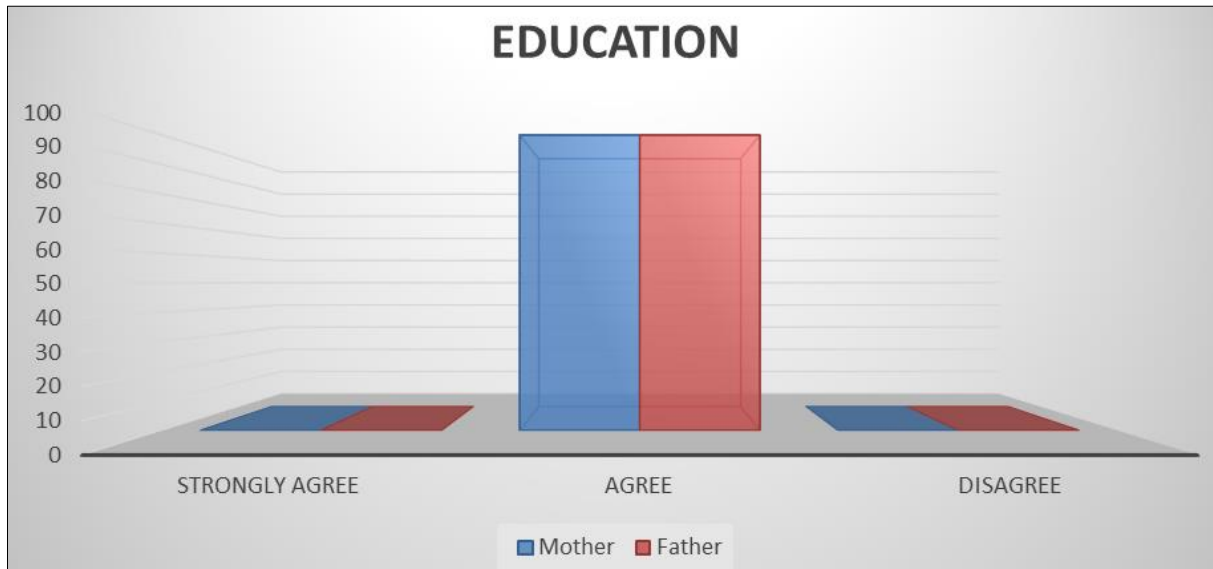


Fig 4: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding education

As it can be observed from the figure – 4 that the scenario is similar with the findings related to food. Here also all the parents (100%) were agree with the educational assertions, demonstrating that they were treating their children equally in terms of educational opportunities. Basnet (2022) ^[1] revealed that parent’s decisions and involvement in their daughters' secondary education directly influenced their professional paths. A chance for a better profession and life presented itself for some people whose

parents influenced on choosing an educational path paid off.

Table 9: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding occupation (n=60)

S. No.	Dimensions	Score-range	Mother		Father	
			f	(%)	f	(%)
1.	Strongly agree	148-220	54	(90%)	54	(90%)
2.	Agree	74-147	6	(10%)	6	(10%)
3.	Disagree	1-73	-	-	-	-

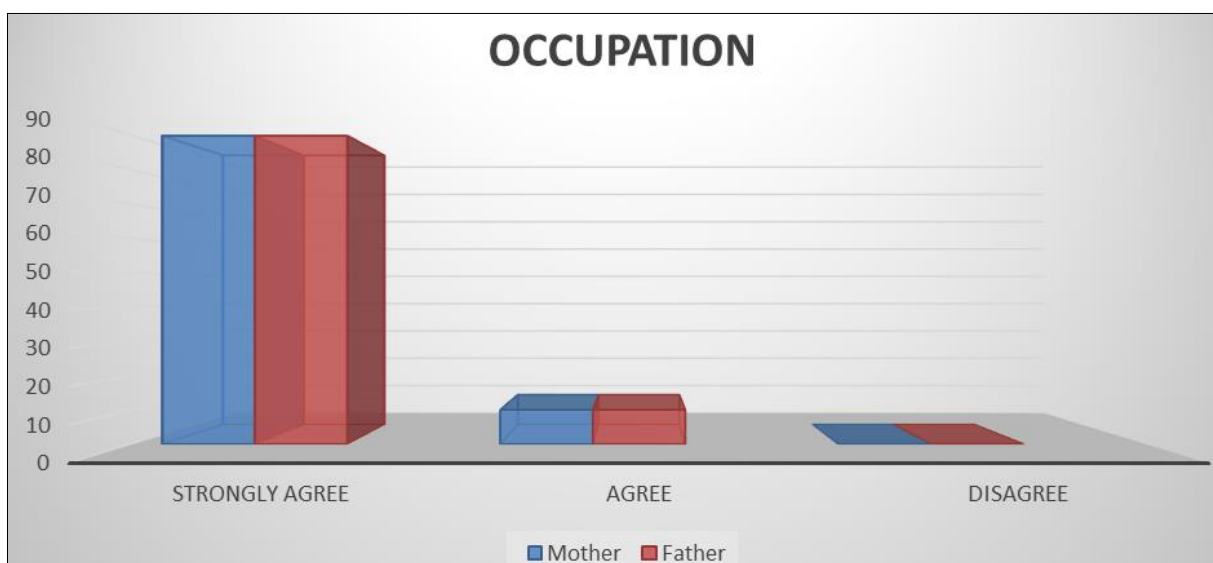


Fig 5: Gender socialization practices of mother and father regarding occupation

As Figure 5 reveals that the mother and the father both had the same opinion by having strong agreement in (90%) and (10%) agreement amongst them with the statements of occupation, indicating that they were providing equal opportunities for their children to choose their preferred occupations and careers based on their interests.

Bloemen-Bekx (2019)^[2] studied shown that a strong mediating influence of parental preference in addition to confirming the direct effect of gender on entrepreneurship orientation.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicated that the majority of parents had strongly agree and agree opinions towards gender neutral toys, food practises, educational and occupational choices while some parents had disagreed opinions with regards to gender neutral clothing. Gender stereotypes are still prominent when it comes to clothing though, as parents had such a mind-set that the way an individual dresses influences both their own behaviour and the attitude of other people towards them. Men's and women's roles are evolving with time, therefore parents shouldn't limit their children's curiosity and education based on gender. The relevance of gender-equitable attitudes and settings should be emphasised by parents, family members, schools, and educational policymakers since they have positive impacts on the lives of children.

Implications

The thorough empirical research described in the earlier chapters can open the door for contributions to numerous varying purposes. Among the study's few implications are:

- The present study will be beneficial to understand gender socialization practices among the parents of preschoolers.
- The outcomes will be useful in planning the intervention programs on socialization practices for parents and teachers.
- The findings will be useful to curriculum developers when designing books for preschoolers.

Recommendation

The current analysis recognizes numerous dimensions that could lead to its growth. The following suggestions can be used in future research projects:

- The current study can be conducted on single earner and dual earner parents.
- The present study can be done on single-parent families with either a mother or father.

Acknowledgement

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