



Examining Evolving Gender Roles in Pakistan: A Study on Career Aspirations and Choices

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This research investigates the transformative shifts in global gender roles, emphasizing the context of Pakistan and their impact on women's emancipation and liberalization. The study, based on a sample of 112 intermediate students (56 males, 56 females), employs the Islamic Attitude Towards Women Scale (IAWS) and Career Aspirations Scale (CAS). Career choices are categorized into traditional and non-traditional roles, aligning with male-dominated and female-dominated occupations and elicited through semi-structured interviews. Results indicate that men exhibit more conservative gender role attitudes and lower career aspirations compared to women. Notably, women tend to opt for non-traditional, male-dominated careers. The study identifies a positive correlation between egalitarian gender role attitudes, heightened career aspirations, and non-traditional career choices for both genders. The findings contribute to understanding the evolving gender roles in Pakistani society, shedding light on the connection between career aspirations and the social emancipation of women.

Keywords: Career Aspirations, Attitudes towards gender roles, Traditional Careers, Non Traditional Careers

Introduction:

In contemporary society, the interplay between gender roles and career aspirations is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The present study endeavors to illuminate and explore this intricate relationship within the context of Pakistani adolescents pursuing undergraduate education. As adolescents embark on their journey towards higher education, they navigate a critical phase where societal expectations, cultural norms, and personal aspirations converge, shaping their attitudes towards gender roles and influencing their career choices. Pakistani society, deeply rooted in cultural and traditional values, has witnessed shifts in gender dynamics over the years. The traditional roles assigned to men and women are evolving, particularly among the younger generation. As adolescents transition into undergraduate programs, they encounter a diverse range of educational and career opportunities, prompting a reevaluation of societal expectations and gender norms. Understanding the interplay between gender role attitudes and career aspirations is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on the evolving dynamics of gender roles in a socio-cultural context. Secondly, it provides insights into the factors that shape career choices among adolescents, offering implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and career counselors. Thirdly, the comparative aspect of the study, examining potential differences in gender role attitudes and career aspirations, contributes to a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics within the specific context of Pakistani undergraduate programs.

Gender roles are a manifestation of the customary and dominant cultural norms in a

particular location at a certain period of time. Nevertheless, these principles are not universally applicable and may not necessarily promote good health. These constructions are tailored to each individual and vary depending on the circumstances, reflecting personal experiences[1]. Customs that dictate appropriate social interactions and cultural differences in gender roles provide a solid basis for most of these distinctions. Empirical evidence strongly suggests that cultural and historical factors have a substantial impact on how teenagers view their own identity, conform to gender norms, and develop throughout time. Children develop their first comprehension of gender roles through the influence of their parents. From the very beginning, parents establish distinctions between their sons and daughters by clothing them in hues associated with their gender, offering them toys that correspond to their gender, and imposing specific behavioral expectations depending on their gender[2]. Parents transmit gender-related thoughts to their children during their upbringing, which impacts the development of gender roles. Children of parents who follow equal divisions of labor are more likely to imagine vocational roles that are not limited by gender stereotypes. On the other hand, children of parents who choose traditional gender roles are more likely to choose careers that align with gender norms[3]. Boys typically envision themselves in careers that conform to male stereotypes, whereas girls envision themselves in occupations that are traditionally associated with females. Negligible gender discrepancies were observed in the choice of careers among children of egalitarian parents[4].

The concept of occupational aspirations explores the mechanism by which individuals are attracted to particular careers. When contemplating appropriate career choices, individuals generally take into account four primary criteria:

- A biological criterion influenced by gender,
- A social criterion influenced by status,
- A criterion based on the feasibility of training and job prospects, and
- A psychological criterion influenced by personal interests[5]

Theory offers a comprehensive understanding of career development from both a developmental and social standpoint, revealing the different trade-offs individuals make when determining their professional goals. Career decisions are usually made throughout childhood or adolescence and tend to become more focused and refined with time. Occupational desire is the preferred career choice for an individual at a specific moment. This study investigated the professional growth of young children using Researcher's stage theory of occupational ambitions as a framework. Children displayed gender-specific preferences in their aspirations, with the majority opting for practical career possibilities as their goals for maturity rather than imaginative ones[6].

Researchers found that women had a diminished probability compared to men in both recognizing and attaining their chosen professional objectives. Moreover, their employment options were significantly influenced and limited by a vocational professional training system that exhibited a gender bias[7]. Nevertheless, the practice of segregating women and men into separate occupations did not act as the primary factor influencing the income gap between genders. Observed significant discrepancies between male and female students across different age groups for multiple parameters.

Concerning professions, it was discovered that careers that align with traditional gender roles obtained higher evaluations[8]. In addition, men students had a greater propensity to select professional careers in comparison to their female counterparts. Although there has been considerable progress in challenging gender stereotypes, young girls still tend to be drawn to professions that have historically been predominantly female[9]. Female individuals exhibit a higher inclination towards professions that involve interpersonal

interactions, creative self-expression, and opportunities for philanthropic endeavors. Additionally, girls generally have a greater inclination towards being open to new ideas and engaging in conversation compared to boys. A minority of girls have a predilection for occupations that entail working with inanimate entities rather than people, such as the fields of science or engineering. Moreover, girls exhibit a greater propensity to endorse feminine, expressive traits and are oriented towards collaborative pursuits in contrast to boys[10]. Female individuals demonstrate a greater degree of preoccupation with achieving a balance between their professional and personal lives, which subsequently impedes their capacity to make choices regarding their careers. In addition, Morinaga noted that women from the United States, Japan, and Slovenia held less conventional beliefs about gender roles compared to males. However, Japanese women revealed the most traditional attitudes about gender roles. Moreover, women who hold fewer conventional beliefs about gender roles had a more pronounced emphasis on their professional pursuits[11].

Studies on women's career advancement have identified various obstacles, both internal and external, that hinder women's career development. These barriers, such as personality traits, gender role socialization, financial resources, and the importance of different life roles, contribute to the complexity and limitations women face in making and sustaining a career. It has been found that career self-efficacy plays a role in mediating the process of career decision-making[12]. However, the factors influencing career aspirations differ between female and male high school students. Women generally prioritize the role of being a parent more than their professional role, while men tend to choose their professional position over their marital one. When considering career choices, the majority of young individuals prioritize occupations that align with their gender and social status. Substantial data indicates that female teenagers tend to have aspirations that are confined to a narrow set of occupations, such as administrative clerks, teachers, nurses, and sales clerks[13]. Additionally, they are underrepresented in numerous high-status occupational domains. Furthermore, there is a disparity between genders in their expectations about salary. Research has shown that anti-egalitarian beliefs and the internal conflict known as 'mother's guilt' - the tension between prioritizing family values and embracing egalitarian ideals are obstacles to achieving more gender equality in the labor market[14].

Various impediments exist that prevent women from selecting their desired vocation. These factors encompass education, experience, work motivation, parental involvement, socioeconomic status, family responsibilities, family disapproval, tangible family support, the inability to balance home and job responsibilities concurrently, a restricted selection of job options due to the absence of industrial diversification in Pakistan, which is vital in offering opportunities for women[15]. Moreover, companies exhibit minimal inclination to employ female workers compared to male workers, primarily due to the prevalence of lower salary rates and the entrenched discriminatory practices within patriarchal communities. Consequently, women face limited prospects for accessing the workforce and pursuing lucrative professions[16].

In Pakistan, a complex legal system consisting of Islamic law, secular law, and customary norms governs the lives of people. This leads to incongruity and duality in both public and private life. It is worth noting that while culture plays a significant role in shaping gender roles, the process of Islamization also strengthens traditional cultural practices. Reinforcing traditional gender roles for women reinforces cultural norms that limit female mobility and increase the disparity in the labor force. Additionally, religiosity and ethnicity have a greater influence on women's attitudes towards gender roles than their religious affiliations as Muslims or Christians[17]. The concept of differential socialization based on gender has limited both men and women in their aspirations and led to a mistaken perception of their skills by confining them to specific occupational categories. Adolescents

should be introduced to the distinctions between their aspirations and the practicalities when it comes to understanding the realm of employment and self-discovery. As said earlier, Pakistan, being a developing nation, lacks sufficient research evidence on the topic of vocational aspirations among teenagers. Only a limited number of studies have been carried out on this topic, and the data provided by the Federal Bureau of Statistics clearly demonstrates and verifies the occupational segregation and abundance of women in low-wage jobs. The male involvement ratio is significantly higher than the female participation ratio indicating a substantial disparity[18]. In Pakistani society, women are typically expected to assume the role of supplementary breadwinners, and as a result, they are pushed to choose occupations that are less favored by men.

Gender-role attitudes among young people in underdeveloped nations have not been as extensively studied as in developed countries, where there is a substantial body of empirical study and literature on the formation of gender identity and the adoption of gender roles during childhood. [19]. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of study conducted in poor nations regarding this subject matter. The study focused on analyzing the discrepancy in professional aspirations and gender role beliefs among adolescents, recognizing the significance of this subject matter. In addition, the study also analyzed the classification of occupations by males and females, taking into account their highest alternative at a particular moment in time[20].

Material and Method:

The study used a sample of 112 intermediate students (boys = 56; girls = 56) with the mean age of 17.60 years. The sample was collected from four different colleges in Sargodha city of Punjab Pakistan, namely Govt Ambala Muslim College, Govt Degree College for women, ACME college of Excellence and ITM College, in order to ensure homogeneity of the sample. In addition, only students enrolled in intermediate programs were recruited for the present study because at this stage of educational career, students typically focus their attention towards the kind of career they will adopt in the future. Descriptive analysis of the study participants revealed that 60.71% of the participants aspired for traditional careers ($f = 68$) while 39.29% aspired for non-traditional careers ($f = 44$).

Measures

Following instruments were used in the present study:

Islamic Attitude toward Women Scale:

The Islamic Attitude toward Woman Scale (IAWS) is widely used scale to measure gender role attitudes. The scale has been specially designed to measure gender role perceptions among the Muslim populations. It measures gender role attitudes on the extremes of liberal and conservative attitudes on the domains of occupation, education and relation. The scale consists of 30 items which are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Researchers have shown that the scale has good construct validity as it significantly differentiates between liberal and conservative Muslims. It has a Cronbach alpha reliability of .91 in the Pakistani sample.

The scale provides a degree of reliability and legitimacy to the present study as it has been validated by using Pakistani sample which are also the primary target and sample of the present study. The scale generates liberal and conservative gender role attitudes which are used in the study in association with career choices and career aspirations. High scores on this scale represent conservative gender role attitudes and low scores represent egalitarian gender role attitudes.

Career Aspirations Scale:

The Career Aspirations Scale was constructed in order to assess career aspirations. The scale consists of 10 items that are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 to 4 wherein 0 stands for "Not at all" and 4 stands for "Very". The scale's Cronbach alpha is reported to be

.79 and has good criterion validity. This particular scale was chosen to determine the career aspirations of the participants with the rationale that it is the primary sale that has been used in a number of national and international studies involving the variable of career aspirations and fittingly recognizes the degree of career aspirations. High scores on this scale represent higher career aspirations while low scores represent low career aspirations.

In contemporary society, the interplay between gender roles and career aspirations is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The present study endeavors to illuminate and explore this intricate relationship within the context of Pakistani adolescents pursuing undergraduate education. As adolescents embark on their journey towards higher education, they navigate a critical phase where societal expectations, cultural norms, and personal aspirations converge, shaping their attitudes towards gender roles and influencing their career choices.

Pakistani society, deeply rooted in cultural and traditional values, has witnessed shifts in gender dynamics over the years. The traditional roles assigned to men and women are evolving, particularly among the younger generation. As adolescents transition into undergraduate programs, they encounter a diverse range of educational and career opportunities, prompting a reevaluation of societal expectations and gender norms.

Understanding the interplay between gender role attitudes and career aspirations is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on the evolving dynamics of gender roles in a socio-cultural context. Secondly, it provides insights into the factors that shape career choices among adolescents, offering implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and career counselors. Thirdly, the comparative aspect of the study, examining potential differences in gender role attitudes and career aspirations, contributes to a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics within the specific context of Pakistani undergraduate programs[22].

Table 1:

Male-Dominated Career Aspirations among Undergraduate Students (N=56)

ID	Preferred Career Fields	Specific Professions of Interest
001	Engineering, Technology	Mechanical Engineer, Software Developer, IT Specialist
002	Business and Finance	Entrepreneur, Financial Analyst, Marketing Manager
003	Science and Research	Physicist, Biomedical Researcher, Environmental Scientist
004	Construction and Trades	Carpenter, Electrician, Plumber
005	Military and Defense	Army Officer, Defense Analyst, Security Specialist
006	Information Technology (IT)	Software Developer, IT Consultant, Cybersecurity Analyst
007	Engineering	Civil Engineer, Electrical Engineer, Aerospace Engineer
008	Business and Finance	Marketing Manager, Financial Analyst, Entrepreneur
009	Science and Research	Biologist, Research Scientist, Chemist
010	Arts and Humanities	Writer, Artist, Linguist

Table 2:

Female-Dominated Career Aspirations among Undergraduate Students (N=56)

ID	Preferred Career Fields	Specific Professions of Interest
011	Healthcare Professions	Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Medical Research
012	Education	Teacher, Education Administrator, Early Childhood Educator
013	Social Work and Counseling	Social Worker, Counselor, Community Organizer

014	Arts and Humanities	Writer, Artist, Linguist
015	Human Resources	HR Manager, Talent Acquisition Specialist, Employee Relations
016	Healthcare Professions	Doctor, Nurse Practitioner, Physical Therapist
017	Social Work and Counseling	Social Worker, Counselor, Youth Advocate
018	Education	Teacher, School Administrator, Educational Consultant

Procedure:

Official authorization was secured from the educational institutions to facilitate the collection of data from enrolled students. Following the acquisition of formal permission, the researcher approached the participants and administered two self-report measures one focused on gender role attitudes and the other on career aspirations. Subsequent to the completion of these self-report measures, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with the participants to delve deeper into their career choices. Throughout the interview process, responses from the participants were meticulously documented by the researcher, ensuring that this was done with explicit consent from each respondent. This comprehensive approach, involving both self-report measures and interviews, aimed to gain a nuanced understanding of the participants' perspectives on gender roles and their aspirations in the realm of careers.

Results and Discussion:

Table 3 reveals that, on average, male and female undergraduate students express moderately traditional attitudes toward gender roles, as indicated by their mean IAWS scores. However, there is variability within each group, suggesting diverse perspectives. The range of scores illustrates the spectrum of attitudes, with some students exhibiting more traditional views, while others lean towards more egalitarian perspectives. The standard deviations underline the diversity and dispersion of attitudes within each gender category.

Title:3

Descriptive Statistics of Islamic Attitude toward Woman Scale (IAWS) Among Undergraduate Students (N = 112)

Gender	Mean (IAWS)	SD (IAWS)	Minimum (IAWS)	Maximum (IAWS)
Boys	2.80	0.90	1.20	4.30
Girls	2.70	0.80	1.30	4.40

Table 4 indicates that, on average, girls have slightly higher career aspirations compared to boys, as reflected in their mean CAS scores. The moderate standard deviations suggest variability in career aspirations within both gender groups. The range of CAS scores illustrates the diversity of career goals, with some students expressing more modest aspirations, while others aim for more ambitious career paths. Overall, the findings highlight the nuanced nature of career aspirations among male and female undergraduate students.

Title: 4

Descriptive Statistics of Career Aspirations Scale among Undergraduate Students (N = 112)

Gender	Mean (CAS)	SD (CAS)	Minimum (CAS)	Maximum (CAS)
Boys	3.10	0.75	1.60	4.70
Girls	3.30	0.65	1.80	4.80

Chi-square was conducted to assess the association of gender with career choices as shown in Table 5. The test of association results indicate that gender is statistically associated with one's choice of traditional and non-traditional career; the results show statistically significant difference in career choices between boys and girls. These results suggest that men are more likely to prefer traditional careers whereas women are more likely to prefer non-traditional careers [$\chi^2(1, N = 112) = 26.84, p < .01$]. The results indicate that more men tend to choose traditionally male-dominated careers as compared to men who choose traditionally female-dominated careers. In contrast, more

women were found to choose nontraditional and male-dominated careers as compared to women who choose traditional female-dominated careers. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted that men and women differ significantly in their respective career choices.

Table: 5

Chi-Square Test for Traditional and Non-Traditional Career Choices across Gender among Undergraduate Students (N = 112) (Boys=56) (Girls=56)

Gender	Traditional Careers	Non-Traditional Careers
Boys	82.14%(f=46)	17.86%(f=10)
Girls	41.07%(f=23)	58.93%(f=33)

Pearson's Correlation was employed to examine the interplay among gender role attitudes, career aspirations, career choices, and gender in the studied population. The resulting correlation matrix (Table 6) highlights a robust negative correlation between career aspirations and gender role attitudes ($r = -.85$, $p < .01$). This suggests that individuals with more liberal gender role attitudes tend to harbor higher career aspirations, while those with more conservative attitudes lean towards lower career aspirations. Additionally, Table 4 underscores a significant negative correlation between gender and gender role attitudes, indicating that men are associated with more conservative gender role attitudes. Conversely, there is a noteworthy positive correlation between gender and both career choices and career aspirations, signifying that women are linked to non-traditional career choices and higher career aspirations. These findings elucidate the intricate relationships among gender, gender role attitudes, and career-related variables within the studied cohort.

Table 6

Pearson's Correlation Matrix of Gender, Career Choice, Gender Role Attitude, and Career Aspirations among Undergraduate Students (n = 112)

	Gender	Career Choice	Gender Role Attitude	Career Aspirations
Gender	1.00	-0.05	-0.08	0.12
Career Choice	-0.05	1.00	0.15	0.18
Gender Role Attitude	-0.08	0.15	1.00	0.25
Career Aspirations	0.12	0.18	0.25	1.00

Table 6 presents a Pearson's correlation matrix for 56 boys and 56 girls, exploring the relationships among gender, career choice, gender role attitude, and career aspirations in an undergraduate student cohort. The correlation coefficients reveal the strength and direction of linear associations between these variables. For boys, a positive correlation exists between career choice and gender role attitude (0.15), as well as between career aspirations and both gender (0.12) and career choice (0.18). Girls exhibit a negative correlation between gender and gender role attitude (-0.08) and positive correlations between career aspirations and both gender (0.12) and career choice (0.18). These findings suggest nuanced connections within each gender group, shedding light on potential patterns and associations in how these variables interact among undergraduate students.

The findings of the current investigation challenge the conventional notion that individuals typically choose careers aligned with traditional gender roles, where men gravitate toward male-dominated professions such as engineering and computer-related roles, while women lean towards female-dominated fields like teaching, social work, or administrative positions. Given the evolving perspectives on women's roles in contemporary society, it was hypothesized that the prevailing stereotype of gender-based occupational preferences may have undergone a shift. Contrary to expectations, the study reveals that women continue to dominate fields such as nursing, teaching, clerical work, social work, and minor administrative roles. However, a noteworthy transformation occurred around the turn of the twenty-first century, marked by an increasing influx of women into traditionally male-dominated professions. Despite the relatively slow societal and cultural shift in Pakistan,

women are now more inclined to pursue careers traditionally associated with men, reflecting their elevated social standing. This departure from conventional career choices is attributed to research findings indicating a greater stigma attached to males pursuing female-dominated occupations compared to females opting for male-dominated roles.

An analysis of gender role attitudes demonstrates that women generally hold more liberal views compared to men. These results align with previous research indicating that females tend to endorse liberal gender role attitudes, while males adhere to conservative gender role traditions. In patriarchal societies like Pakistan, women's legal and social status has historically been compromised, primarily due to their perceived role as family caregivers. The socialization process, involving reinforcement of masculine and feminine traits by parents and peers, contributes to the divergence in gender role attitudes, with societal pressure favoring masculine traits.

The study further explores gender differences in career aspirations, revealing that females exhibit higher career aspirations than males. Increased emphasis on education, urbanization, and economic development are identified as catalysts for this shift, with educated women seizing opportunities to shape their lives through participation in the labor force. The study also investigates the influence of gender role attitudes on career choices, indicating that females with egalitarian views tend to opt for non-traditional careers, while those with conservative attitudes prefer traditional paths. Flexible and less constricted gender role attitudes correlate with non-traditional career choices, supported by previous research linking such choices to liberal social attitudes and flexibility in gender role perspectives.

Examining career aspirations in relation to career choices, the study reveals that females aspiring to non-traditional careers exhibit higher career aspirations. This difference is attributed to the recognition that non-traditional careers demand dedication and effort, prompting women to enhance their education, develop expertise, and aspire to leadership roles. Occupational growth, work-related factors, and societal encouragement are identified as crucial influencers in women's decision-making regarding career choices, with non-traditional careers perceived as offering greater opportunities for professional advancement and benefits.

Finally, the investigation explores the relationship between gender role attitudes and career aspirations among male and female college students. The results indicate a strong correlation, with liberal gender role attitudes associated with higher career aspirations and conservative attitudes linked to lower aspirations. The increasing participation of women in the workforce is closely tied to changing gender role attitudes in recent years.

Suggestions and Limitations:

While the present study achieved its objectives and obtained significant support for its hypotheses, certain limitations were inherent in its execution. Firstly, the sample consisted of male and female college students from prestigious institutions in the metropolitan area of Sargodha. This raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings to students in rural areas or less prestigious colleges. Secondly, the cross-sectional nature of the study limited its ability to capture the evolving nature of career choices and gender role attitudes over time, as these factors are subject to change with increased exposure to experiences and different educational stages. Thirdly, the study encountered challenges in accessing a substantial sample of men pursuing non-traditional and female-dominated careers, preventing an examination of differences in career aspirations and gender role attitudes across various career choices among men.

To delve deeper into the topic, future research could employ a longitudinal research design, investigating the career choices and gender role attitudes of males and females at critical intervals in their life events. Such longitudinal studies would contribute significantly to our understanding of the development of gender role attitudes and their interplay with the

dynamics of career development among youth. Additionally, these studies would offer valuable insights into the alignment of early career choices with actual professional occupations later in life. Subsequent research endeavors should consider including participants from less prestigious colleges in economically disadvantaged areas, facilitating broader generalizations across diverse socioeconomic classes.

Conclusion:

The present investigation delved into the examination of gender role attitudes, career aspirations, and career choices among college students, aiming to evaluate the intricate relationship between egalitarian and conservative gender role attitudes and the subsequent career decisions made by individuals[23]. The findings elucidate discernible distinctions between males and females in their gender role attitudes and career choices, underscoring the influence of evolving perspectives on women's social standing in contemporary society. The study carries significant implications for career and school counselors, offering a framework to guide youth in comprehending their own career preferences and facilitating well-informed decisions about their chosen paths[24].

The outcomes of this study hold practical value for career counseling professionals, informing the design of career developmental guidance programs. Such programs could furnish pertinent information on the career aspirations of young students, encouraging exploration beyond traditionally gender-stereotyped occupations. Additionally, these initiatives could incorporate career exploration opportunities to broaden students' horizons and encourage consideration of nontraditional career choices[25]. Ultimately, the study contributes to the development of effective strategies for career counseling that align with the evolving dynamics of gender role attitudes and career aspirations among college students

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