

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS TOWARD EQUALITY IN YOUTH

A.M. Sultana

Department of Journalism, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR),  
Kampar, Perak, 31900, Malaysia. Corresponding address: [sultana@utar.edu.my](mailto:sultana@utar.edu.my)

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**Abstract:** *Gender roles have significant impacts on one's professional, social, and family life. By given the importance of gender roles in higher educational institution, the paper aimed to determine the relationship between demographic factors and gender role attitudes among youth at higher educational institutions in Malaysia. The main aim of this study was to measure the relationship between youth gender role attitudes and demographic factors towards equality. The specific objectives of the study are (1) to identify the factors that influence on gender role attitudes and; (2) to analyze the relationship between those factors with the gender equality. Data was collected using a cross-sectional survey and analyzed using descriptive. The findings of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between demographic variables such as ethnicity, region of residence and parental education and gender role attitude among youth towards equality.*

**Keyword:** *Gender Role, Attitudes, Youth, Equality*

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## Introduction

This section starts with the discussion youth attitudes towards gender norms among at higher learning institutions. Generally, gender role attitudes are conceptualized as cognitive, affective and conative components that involve beliefs, emotional reactions and behavioral tendencies related to the subject matter (McGroarty, 1996). Blackstone (2003) conceptualized gender roles attitudes are the roles that men and women are expected to occupy based on their sex. It can be further defined as individuals' roles which influence how men and women interact and the attitudes and behaviors expected of each (Lindsey, 1994). Gender roles can be learned in order to perform the appropriate role towards family, society and community or other social groups. Gender roles, therefore, are the expected attitudes and behaviours in a society associate with each sex.

The present study focuses on gender role attitudes among students who are youth and adolescents. Despite over the past forty years, there has been much research in the area of

adolescent and adult gender role attitudes, a few studies have been conducted on gender role attitudes among youth at higher learning institutions. Frieze, et al (2003) conducted a study in determining gender role attitudes by using the samples of university students from Pittsburgh in the United States, Ljubljana in Slovenia, and Osijek in Croatia. The authors examined gender role among students between the years of 1991 and 2000. The findings of the study showed that although there are no changes was found among women's attitudes over time, but it was found that Slovene males were found to become more traditional over time. In a study conducted by Zainab (2006) compilation of Studies on Women in Malaysia 1990-2004 shows the width and breadth of women's studies in Malaysia. Feminism is equally a popular critical approach used by many scholars in Malaysia, and it is taught to many undergraduates and postgraduates as a valid framework of analysis. The authors also suggested that it is necessary to conduct an ethnographic-oriented approach that will help students to expose to various methodologies as an intervention programme to enable them to rethink gender stereotypes. It is therefore, important to know the factors that may influence on youth's attitudes towards gender equality.

An understanding of gender-based equality and its relation to the development are crucial for the process of learning. (Sultana, 2011). This study focuses on youth's attitudes towards gender beliefs concerning gender equality and inequality. Bergh (2006) defined gender beliefs as normative beliefs about what gender relations in society should be like, or the extent to which a person supports the norms of gender equality. Student's as the adolescent attitudes toward gender equality provide important information regarding the current situation in society, and what might be expected for the future to come (Andrea, 2009). It is, therefore, important to examine youth's attitudes toward gender equality and the factors that influence on their gender role attitudes.

### **Objectives and Research Design**

The specific objectives of the study are (1) to identify the factors that influence on gender role attitudes and; (2) to analyze the relationship between those factors with the gender equality in youth. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed in this study. Data was analyzed using descriptive analysis. Questionnaires were distributed to 300 students at two higher educational institutions in Malaysia. The correlation coefficient was conducted to examine the relationship between respondent's gender role attitudes and the demographic variables. Demographic variables included questions related to the background of the respondents such as age, gender, ethnicity, present academic, region of residence, fathers' educational level, mothers' educational level and the numbers of family members studying or studied at university.

### **Review of the Literature**

#### ***Development of Gender Role Attitude***

There are two theories relevant to the development of gender role such as psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1927) and cognitive-developmental theory (Kohlberg, 1966). According to psychoanalytic theory, one's gender identity develops through identification with the same-sex parent. Generally, the child develops a strong sexual attachment to the opposite-sex parent. Boys come to learn masculinity from their fathers and girls learn femininity from their mothers.

Cognitive developmental theory is another psychological theory on gender identity development that is invented by Kohlberg (1966).

According to Kohlberg gender identities take place in stages such as acquiring a fixed gender identity and establishing gender identity consistency. The first stage begins with the child's identification as male or female when hearing the labels 'boy' or 'girl' applied to the self. By about age 3, the child can apply the appropriate gender label to the self. This is when gender identity becomes fixed. From this context, most boys develop a sense gender ideology is characterized by male dominance in the sexual arena as well as many other areas. Power inequalities between women and men and the negative gender role attitudes that may influence on family and society. In these circumstances, the next section will explore the factors that may influence on gender role attitudes among the youth.

### ***Factors Influence Youth Gender Role Attitudes***

There are several factors influence on youth attitudes towards gender norms. Research shows that demographic characteristics such as age, education, region of residence, ethnicity, and parental education on youth's gender role attitudes. There is an influence of respondent's age on student's attitudes towards gender norms. Although a recent study was conducted by Daniel et al (2013) who found no significant relationship between age and attitude of boys and girls towards gender role stereotypes, a number of studies showed that younger people tend to be more egalitarian in their gender role attitudes than older individuals (Harris & Firestone, 1998; Rice & Coates, 1995). In a study, Fan & Marini (2000) found that males become more egalitarian with age than females. Hence, there is an argument whether age has significant influence on the student's attitude.

Parental education was also found to play an important role for youth attitudes. Studies (Kiecolt & Acock, 1988, Fan & Marini, 2000, Cunningham, 2001, Davis & Pearce, 2007) found a significant relationship between mother's educational attainment and children's egalitarian attitudes. However, despite a number of studies found a positive relationship between parental education and adolescence's or youth's attitudes, there is an argument. In a study, Mahaffy & Ward (2002) found that the fathers' educational attainment was only associated with their son's gender role attitudes. On the other hand, Davis & Pearce, (2007) found the negative association with father's education.

There is another factor such as religion may influence on gender role attitudes. In a study, Davis and Pearce (2007) stated that religious attendance and identification were significantly related to an individual's gender role attitudes. Despite, some studies (Fan & Marini, 2000, Cunningham, 2001) found no effect on gender role beliefs; many studies (Bartkowski 1999; Bartkowski & Read 2003; Hardacre 1997; Hartman & Hartman 1996; Lehrer 1995; Mosher, Williams & Johnson 1992; Sherkat 2000; Wilcox & Jelen 1991) found the influence of religion on gender role attitudes. From the above discussion and reviewed the previous literature, it can be said that there are several factors such age, religion, parental education (Father's educational level and Mother's educational level) and race may have an influence towards gender role attitudes. Based on the above reviewed of literatures, it can be said that there is the influence of demographic characteristics on some one's attitudes towards gender norms. However, gender role attitudes can be measured on the other important aspect, such as values and beliefs concerning gender equality and inequality. The next section will provide an overview of attitudes towards values and beliefs with respect to gender equality and inequality

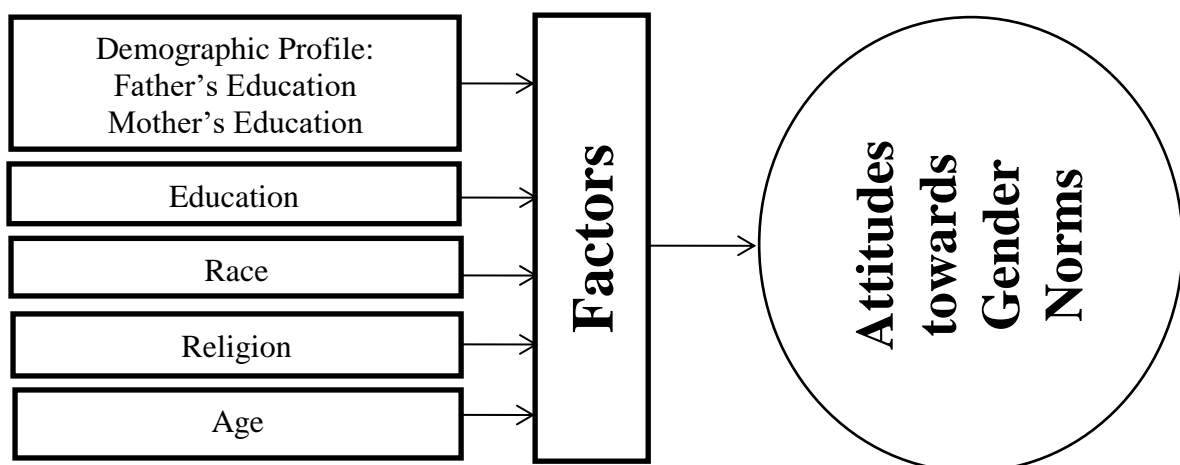
Another demographic characteristic such as region of residence may influence on youth's attitudes. It is commonly believed that people from rural area tend to have a more traditional ideology than the people from an urban area. In a recent study, Bisera (2012) argued that gender role attitudes among men and women are influenced by social and cultural norms. Some studies (Thornton, Alwin & Camburn 1983, Morgan & Walker, 1983) found a significant relationship between gender role attitudes and two variables, age and race. Similarly, many studies (Thornton, Alwin & Camburn 1983, Morgan & Walker, 1983) argued that younger people are associated with more egalitarian gender role attitudes. These people are also associated with a greater shift to egalitarian attitudes over the life course (Fan & Marini, 2000, Bolzendahi & Myers, 2004).

There is an argument about the influence of gender on gender role attitudes. Previous studies (Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992; Fine-Davis, 1989; Belk et al. 1989; & Miller 1984) supported that sex and culture are positively associated with gender role attitudes. A number of studies (Asli 2001; Keith & Jacqueline 2002; Kimberly & Mahaffy 2002; Rosenkrantz 1986) conducted with the aim of determining their thoughts about gender roles of high school and university students; statements including traditional gender roles such as 'woman's main duty is to take care of home and the family', 'man should be the head of the household', 'breadwinning should be the man's responsibility', 'man should be successful in professional life' etc. were addressed to the students. The results revealed that students were confirmed to embrace gender traditional gender roles. These studies also found that female students were found to be embracing the traditional roles less than male students. Gender may influence on gender role attitudes towards equality.

An extensive body of research conducted in the west on gender role attitudes along a continuum that ranges from traditional to non-traditional attitudes. In a study, Harris and Firestone (1998) define non-traditional gender roles as "those roles that do not reinforce or conform to 'expected' differences in roles for men and women. Kamal (2007) examined gender role attitudes between Christian and Muslim college students towards equal access of men and women rights in Lebanon. The research showed that religiosity is associated with traditional gender roles. The author argued that Muslim students tended to have a traditional ideology.

***Theoretical Framework of Gender Role Attitudes towards Equality***

Based on the previous literature, the study has developed the theoretical framework of gender role attitudes towards equality shown in Figure 1.



The data presents two types of factors include demographic (Gender, Age, Education, Religion, Ethnicity) and family related factors (Father’s Educational Level, Mother’s Educational Level, Region of Residence, Family member’s higher Education). It shows that youth’s attitudes towards equality are influenced by can be examined by several factors such as demographic profile (father’s education & mother’s education) of the respondents, education, religion, age, sex and ethnicity.

## Results and Discussion

### *Relationship between Demographic and Family-Related Factors and Youth Attitudes towards Equality*

The study examines the relationship between the demographic characteristics and student’s attitudes towards equality at higher learning institutions. The selected demographic characteristics are age, gender, and ethnicity, region of residence, father’s educational level, mothers’ educational level and family members of studying or studied at university that may influence on student’s attitudes towards equitable gender norms.

Table 1: Correlation Coefficient of Youth’s Attitudes towards Egalitarian Gender Norms or Equality

Item	<i>r</i>	<i>P</i>
<b>Egalitarian Attitude Gender Norms</b>		
Age	0.01	0.93
Gender	-0.09	0.12
Ethnicity	0.26	0.00**
Education	-0.01	0.89
Region of Residence	0.12	0.04*
Fathers’ Educational Level	0.12	0.04*
Mothers’ Educational Level	0.06	0.30
Family Members higher education	0.12	0.05*

Significant levels: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

The results (Table 1) revealed that the ethnicity ( $r=0.26$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), region of residence ( $r=0.12$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), father’s educational level ( $r=0.117$ ;  $p < 0.043$ ) and family members of studying or studied at university ( $r=0.12$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) were significantly and positively associated with student’s attitudes towards equitable or egalitarian attitude gender norms. The significant value of these variables was greater than ( $p < 0.000$ ;  $p < 0.04$ ;  $p < 0.04$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). However, the other variables such as age, gender, education and mothers’ educational level had a weak relationship and negative associations with youth’s attitudes towards equality. With regards to the relationship between ethnicity and youth gender role attitude, there are number of studies supported that there is a significant relationship. Thornton et al (1983); Morgan & Walker, (1983) found a significant relationship between gender role attitudes and ethnicity.

Similarly, the present study showed that parental father’s educational level was significantly influence on youth attitudes toward equality. This study is supported by previous studies (Kiecolt & Acock, 1988, Fan & Marini, 2000, Cunningham, 2001, Davis & Pearce, 2007). These studies found significant relationship between mother’s educational attainment and children’s egalitarian attitudes. Ruzy, et al (2010) argued that in the Malaysian context, a person’s gender is associated with biology, but the construction of gender identity is also influenced by the family members’ education, religious beliefs, ethnicity and societal norms. The findings also argued that region of residence influenced on youth’s attitudes. It is

commonly believed that people from rural area tend to have a more traditional ideology than the people from an urban area. A number of studies (Bourdieu, 1977 & Sztompka, 2005) showed that the place of residence determines the social standing of individuals, along with their preferences and behaviours among youth.

## Conclusion

The study is based on both theoretical and empirical research on gender role attitudes towards equality among the youth. The study determined the relationship between the demographic variables such as age, gender, religion and ethnicity, areas of residence whether rural or urban and parental education and gender attitudes towards equality among youth. In line with, the study has drawn a theoretical framework to show the influence of demographic factors that may influence on gender role attitudes. With respect to the influence of demographic characteristics of the respondent' gender role attitudes towards equality, the empirical findings of the study demonstrated that age, ethnicity and education were positively associated with youth's attitudes towards equality with belief aspects while age, gender and education were positively associated with the student's attitudes towards equality. The findings of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between demographic variables such as ethnicity, region of residence and parental education and gender role attitude among youth towards equality.

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