

# Gender Stereotypes and their Influence on Self-Esteem among the Rural College Students in Rural West Bengal

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## Abstract

The development of appropriate self-esteem is a fundamental component of comprehensive personality development. Gender stereotypes play a significant role in the formation of self-esteem. These stereotypes create scenarios wherein women are expected to assume domestic responsibilities and caregiving roles, whereas men are expected to fulfil the role of breadwinners and generally maintain a more dominant position than women. Such gender stereotypes directly influence self-esteem. Self-esteem can be conceptualized as the evaluative aspect of an individual's self-concept (Rodríguez-Roca *et al.*, 2021). The comparison of an individual's self-concept and personal/social ideal engenders feelings of self-worth and acceptance.

This study aimed to investigate the impact of gender stereotypes and self-esteem among rural college students in West Bengal. This study employed a qualitative survey-based research methodology.

**Keywords:** Gender stereotype, Self-esteem, Personality development, College students.

## INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes are assumptions and beliefs about specific groups that may be positive or negative, based on their characteristics. Gender stereotypes are beliefs that may create a generalization of behaviors about an individual according to their gender. Again, Gender stereotypes are commonly held beliefs about the attributes, characteristics, and behaviors of men and women. Stereotypes about women and their gender roles depict them as inferior to men (Rodríguez-Roca *et al.* 2021). Gender role stereotyping is rooted in socialization agents,

which consist of family, schools, neighborhoods, churches, media, and peer groups. Gender roles are conspicuously configured from a very young age through socialization. The early years of family life, school life, and the media paved the way for the development of such ideas. The expectations of boys and girls are derived from the basic alternative and multi-faceted images of masculinity and femininity. In this era, the bourgeois society developed gendered socio-spatial practices that confined women to the domestic sphere. These gender stereotypes influence self-esteem and create discrepancies between the ideal self and the real self in the context of education and career.

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Self-esteem refers to one's personal judgment of worthiness and is an evaluative component of self-knowledge. Self-Esteem is the individual's perception of himself or herself, which allows individuals to evaluate themselves in many situations. Self-Esteem is developed by positive or negative experiences. Positive experiences encourage individual strengths, whereas negative experiences can contribute to individual limitations, inadequacies, or worthlessness (Dharsini & Jebaseelan, 2017). Sources of self-esteem for men could be achievement, personal control, and being valued by others. Sources of self-esteem for women could be feelings of being valued by non-competitive relationships, caring for others, and having their needs recognized. It has been found that rural college students feel comparatively lower self-esteem than urban students (Osmanaga, 2014). Gender stereotypes affect self-esteem among college students. Family and societal perceptions were significantly related to self-esteem.

### Background of the Study

Gender stereotyping is an important factor contributing to low self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to feelings and thoughts that help build the self-concept of individuals. This provides a perception of how much one is worth or valued (Rodríguez-Roca *et al.*, 2021). Self-esteem is a key element of mental health. It significantly helps address academic and non-academic matters in daily life. The educational environment plays an important role in development and sustenance. The formation of students' self-concepts, self-images, and self-perceptions is largely mediated by various internal and external factors. These factors included gender, age, subject matter, socioeconomic status, and teaching style. Self-esteem development was not uniform among all individuals. External factors, such as 'gender,' affect the degree of self-esteem. As an important external factor, gender influences thoughts about self-worth, value, and merit (Ertl *et al.*, 2017). The personal capabilities of individuals are likened to 'intellectuality,' 'competence,' 'empathy,' and 'nurturance' based on gender roles. These attributes are linked to criticisms pertaining to worth, value, and merit in an academic or non-academic environment. Since age, gender roles have become a matter of importance and concern. The discussion on gender roles and their influences is mostly seen in urban and metropolitan cities under the influence of modern development. The consequences of gender roles are mostly unexplored

in rural areas, and their influence on individual personality development is not well documented.

### Statement of the Problem

In rural India, girls have faced social stratification-based gender discrimination since childhood. They are subjected to adverse situations while growing up in male-dominated societies. The traditional and patriarchal view of society places more importance on males and less privilege on females in terms of education, mobility, healthcare, work opportunities, and choice of profession. Although the government has taken initiatives to provide education, nutrition, health care, and an increase in the age of marriage for the empowerment of females, it has raised the safety and obedience concerns of rural girls (Priya Dharsini & Samuel Jebaseelan, 2017). Consequently, the restrictive upbringing received by girls results in the development of female gender stereotypes in their self-perception. Such gender identification deformities lower the self-concept of girls by making them feel vulnerable, incompetent, and inferior, thereby affecting their self-esteem and personal and social well-being. Young adulthood is a crucial period in which self-esteem is developed based on experiences of peers, friends, and society (Rodríguez-Roca *et al.*, 2021). Rural college students from Bengal, India constitute an unexplored area in the present gender research scenario. Research on gender in rural college students is important for understanding the transformation of gender expectations, performance, and self-perception resulting from the mentioned socio-cultural changes. This exploration can reveal the underlining of adapting gender and sociocultural identities among educated girls. In this situation the present researcher decided to conduct the study on **"Gender Stereotypes and Their Influence on Self-Esteem of Rural College Students in Rural Bengal"**

### Research Objectives

The primary objective of the study is to examine the gender stereotypes among college students in rural Bengal and their influence on self-esteem. However, as gender role and self-esteem are bound by other variables, other important objectives have also been taken into consideration. Such objectives are as follows:

- To study the awareness level of gender stereotypes among male and female college students in rural Bengal.
- To study the influence of gender stereotypes on self-esteem among male college students in rural Bengal.

- To study the influence of gender stereotypes on self-esteem among female college students in rural Bengal.

### Significance of the Study

No study has comprehended the effect of gender stereotypes on the self-esteem of rural college students in rural Bengal, India. This study holds immense significance in the current context since gender-based discrimination and biases from the perspective of rural college students are present in society. This study investigated the relationship between self-esteem and different perceptions of gender-stereotyped cognitions among rural male and female college students. The study also attempted to develop an aggregate picture that can assist in understanding the complex relationship between gender stereotypes and self-esteem. Thus, the study is highly significant not only from an academic excellence standpoint, but also from a practical standpoint, as it aims to find possible remedial measures.

### Literature Review

Considerable research has been conducted to understand the ways in which gender shapes people's individual and collective consciousness. Social scientists' attempts to understand the social construction of collective gender identities, particularly among college students, have led to the growing realization that gender stereotypes have a different kind of presence than stereotypes about ethnicity or race. There has been an attempt to examine how gender stereotypes have an insidious quality, creating a vicious cycle that generates restrictive constructions of gender identities and is perpetuated by them (Van Kylen 1990). A college is often seen as a place where independence, development, and growth occur. This is a time when individuals are accepted or rejected by their peers or peer associations, which can significantly impact self-esteem. However, gender inequalities in rural Bengal institutions for higher learning remain a reality. Having grown up in families with inequities, students decide to marry their associational groups, which imposes gender stereotypes. Being aware of these inequities makes it difficult to defuse them. Because of gender stereotypes, women suffer from a low sense of self-esteem, which makes them consider themselves inferior to men. Awareness of these stereotypes, in turn, does not obliterate them but often internalizes them further. A study by Gao, which focused on Chinese college students, demonstrated that self-esteem plays a crucial role in the mental well-

being of college students. The research findings indicated that self-esteem significantly predicts depression, anxiety, and interpersonal sensitivity among these students. (Gao, ZHANG & Xi 2015). Research conducted in China has demonstrated gender-based disparities in self-esteem, with males generally exhibiting higher levels than females. However, unlike findings from Western studies, the self-esteem gap between sexes in China fluctuates with age. During the high school period, female students tended to have greater self-esteem than their male counterparts did. Subsequently, male self-esteem gradually surpassed that of females as they grew older. (Wu & Cai, 2006). Research has demonstrated that gender-role stereotypes have a significant influence on society. When individuals behave in ways that contradict these stereotypes, they often face social pressures to conform. This pressure, stemming from societal expectations about gender roles, can have detrimental effects on the physical and psychological well-being of people. (Chen, 2017). Diener and Diener (1995) conducted a comprehensive investigation involving 13,188 university students from 31 nations to explore the connection between the two variables. The findings revealed a correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction, and self-esteem was found to impact life satisfaction. Gender stereotypes are also associated with life satisfaction. A study on the explanation for variation in self-esteem among urban college students concluded that gender stereotypes are one of the reasons for their high self-esteem (Wolff, 2021).

### Delimitation of the Study

In the villages of West Bengal, India, the influence of gender stereotypes on the self-esteem of college students is examined in the current study. More specifically, male and female students' self-esteem levels are evaluated differently as they are influenced by male and female gender stereotypes, respectively. 100 college students from 2 districts are taken as sample, which includes 50 male and 50 female students. The study aims to find out if there is any relation between gender stereotypes and self-esteem among male and female college students in West Bengal. So, the present study is delimited to Nadia and North 24 Pgs districts of West Bengal.

## METHODOLOGY

This study aims to investigate gender stereotypes and their influence on the self-esteem of female and male rural college students in rural Bengal. So,

this is a Descriptive Research. The researcher used survey method to collect data from the participants. So, the present research is Descriptive Survey Based Research.

The researcher used open ended questionnaire to collect data from the participants and no statistical analysis have been done. Only simple percent have been used for a clearer understanding of the findings. The research is qualitative in nature.

So, the research is Qualitative Descriptive Survey based Research.

### Population

Students born and brought up in rural area and studying in rural general degree colleges in West Bengal are the population for the present study.

### Sampling Procedure

Nadia and North 24 Pgs are two districts of West Bengal and vast part of these districts are rural in nature. There are many general degree colleges are in the rural area. From there total 100 college students are selected as sample, which includes 50 males and 50 female students.

### Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling technique has been adopted in the present study to collect data from the participants.

- Total number of Male participants: 50
- Total number of Female participants: 50
- Total number of participants: 100

### Data Collection

The researcher collected data from the participants through face to face Interview and telephonic Interview as per the convenience of the participants.

### Data Analysis

Analyzing interview data requires a methodical approach to organize, code, and interpret qualitative information. As a form of qualitative data, interview responses typically encompass non-numeric details such as opinions, insights, or personal accounts. This type of data analysis involves systematically processing and making sense of the subjective information gathered during interviews.

### Steps of Data Analysis

Transcription: Started by converting interviews

into written form. This has been done by hand. The researcher ensured the transcripts are precise to capture the subtle details of each conversation.

**Thorough Review:** Gone through the transcripts several times to fully absorb the information and gained a comprehensive understanding of the responses.

**Record Observations:** First the researcher made notes of initial impressions and thoughts.

After that, the key concepts are classified into different categories. And at last core category is formed by keeping in mind about the objective of the present research.

### Objective wise Data Analysis

- Keeping in mind about Common Personality Trait Dimensions in GSAS, the present researcher tried to find out the awareness level of gender stereotypes among male and female college students in rural Bengal. Following dimensions were taken into considerations for this purpose:

**Personality Traits:** In this category the researcher considered Emotional status, Dominating nature and Caring attitude.

- Out of 50 Male students 42 opined that girls should be more emotional.
- Out of 50 Male students 44 opined that males are more dominating in nature and that is quite fine.
- Out of 50 Male students 46 opined that girls are more caring than male.
- On the other hand, out of 50 Female students 26 opined that males should be more emotional.
- Out of 50 Female students 38 opined that males are more dominating and that is quite okay.
- Out of 50 Female students 36 opined that girls should be more caring than male.

### Social Roles

Out of 50 Male students 40 opined that girls should look after the household works and look after the child and take proper care of the other family members.

On the other hand, out of 50 Female students 17 opined that girls should look after the household works and look after the child and take proper care of the other family members.

### Occupational Roles

Out of 50 Male students 33 opined that only males are the bread earner and females are not allowed to work outside home.

On the other hand, out of 50 Female students 21 opined that not only males are the bread earner but females also can be bread earners. So, they want to do job outside home.

### Leadership and Decision-Making:

Out of 50 Male students 29 opined that major decision in the family should be taken by male members.

On the other hand, out of 50 Female students 37 opined that major decision in the family should be taken both by male and female members.

- **To find out the influence of gender stereotypes on self-esteem among male college students in rural Bengal.**

Out of 50 Male participants 44 participants admitted that because of this gender stereotypes they feel superior to female. It gives them more confidence. Their self-esteem becomes high.

- **To find out the influence of gender stereotypes on self-esteem among female college students in rural Bengal.**

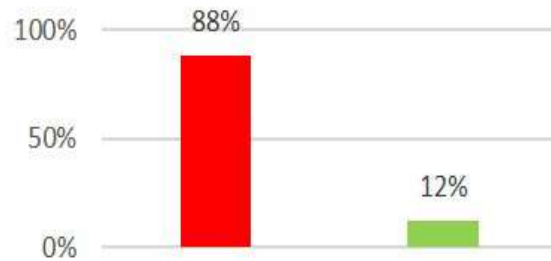
Out of 50 Female participants 46 participants admitted that because of this gender stereotypes they feel inferior to their male counterpart in most of the situation. Their self-confidence and self-esteem are highly affected because of this gender stereotypes. They become more shy, timid, introvert and feel hopelessness.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

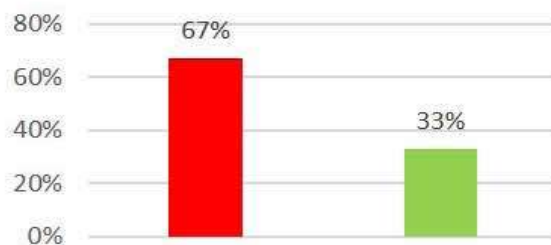
The aim of the present study was to understand gender stereotypes and their influence on the self-esteem of college students in the rural areas of Bengal.

The major findings are:

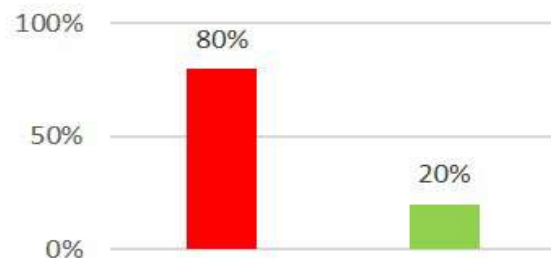
- 88% male students of rural Bengal think that Personality Traits of females should be more caring and more emotional but less dominating, which is typical gender stereotype.



- In Graph 1 the red column indicating gender stereotype views and green column indicating gender equal thoughts in terms of Personality Traits among the rural male students.
- Almost 67% female students of rural Bengal think that Personality Traits of females should be more caring and more emotional but less dominating, which is again typical gender stereotype.

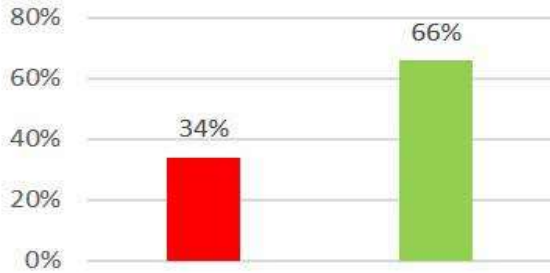


- In Graph 2 the red column indicating gender stereotype views and green column indicating gender equal thoughts in terms of Personality Traits among the rural female students.
- 80% male students think that the social roles of females should be traditional that is gender stereotype in nature.

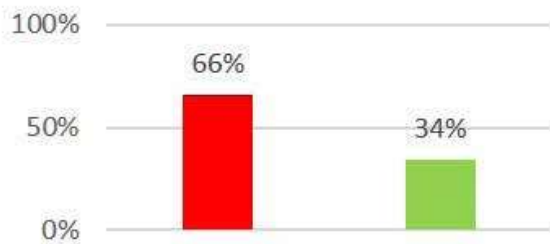


- In Graph 3 the red column indicating gender stereotype views and green column indicating gender equal thoughts in terms of social roles of female among the rural male students.

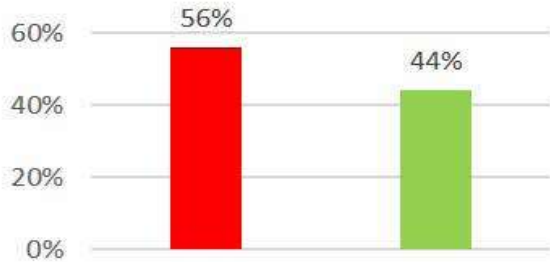
- Only 34% female students think that the social roles of females should be traditional & that is gender stereotype in nature. 66% female students think that social roles of females have changed and gender stereotype should be removed.



- In Graph 4 the red column indicating gender stereotype views and green column indicating gender equal thoughts in terms of social roles of female among the rural female students.
- 66% male students think that only male member will do job and only they will be the bread earners.



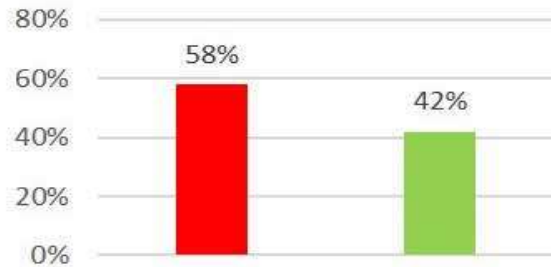
- In Graph 5 the red column indicating gender stereotype views and green column indicating gender equal thoughts in terms of job & responsibility among the rural male students.
- 44% female students think that female member can also do job and they can also be the bread earners.



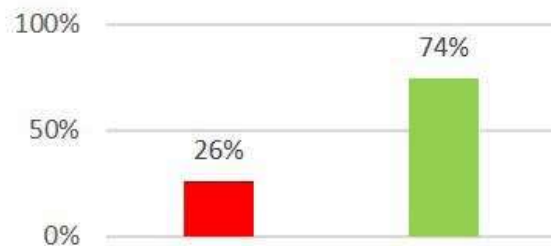
- In Graph 6 the red column indicating gender stereotype views and green column

indicating gender equal thoughts in terms of job & responsibility among the rural female students.

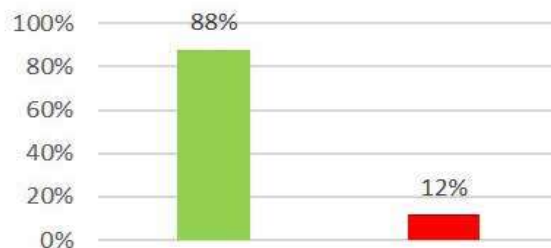
- 58% male members think that decision in the family should be taken by male members only.



- In Graph 7 the red column indicating gender stereotype views and green column indicating gender equal thoughts in terms of decision taking power in the family among the rural male students.
- 74% female students think that decision in the family should be taken by both male and female members.



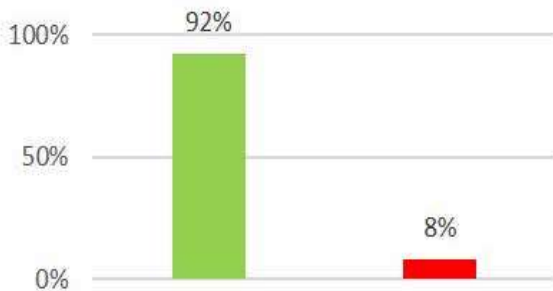
- In Graph 8 the red column indicating gender stereotype views and green column indicating gender equal thoughts in terms of decision taking power in the family among the rural female students.
- 88% Male students admitted that because of gender stereotypes they feel superior to female. Their self-esteem becomes higher.



- Graph 9 represents the view of rural males

that if there is direct relation or no relation between gender stereotype and self-esteem. Green column indicates positive relation and red column indicated no relation.

- 92% female students feel that gender stereotypes made their self-esteem lower.



- Graph 10 represents the view of rural females that if there is direct relation or no relation between gender stereotype and self-esteem. Green column indicates positive relation and red column indicated no relation.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender roles encompass societal expectations of how to think and behave according to gender. Gender stereotypes encompass a desire to avoid any perceived deviation from societal expectations regarding appearance, demeanor, and attitude. Gender stereotypes injure natural self-esteem by limiting identity options to those that are controlled externally. The impact of gender stereotypes on self-esteem among rural college students in rural Bengal has been examined, highlighting the influence of societal expectations on individual behavior. Understanding how gender stereotypes influence self-esteem in rural college students is essential to promoting gender equality. This study aimed to understand the influence of gender stereotypes on the self-esteem of college students in rural Bengal. Gender stereotypes are very common among male students. It is also unfortunate that a large number of female students think in a patriarchal way. However, one good thing is that many women try to break this gender stereotype mentally. Change has started. Hope things change quickly if an awareness program can be organized frequently. Stereotypes surrounding male and female behaviors must be addressed through informed initiatives. Women should not be discouraged from allowing their creativity to flourish, and individuals should be treated as capable and competent irrespective of sex. Gender equality should be ensured through

initiatives, such as awareness programs and education. Institutions should organize workshops with trained psychologists to help students deal with societal pressures and cultivate a strong self-image. Parents should teach the importance of choice and individuality, and foster a supportive environment for their children. It is the responsibility of the community, teachers, and the government to address the issue of gender stereotypes, ensuring equal opportunities and challenges for all.

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