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## **Test of a South Asian Model of Childhood Experiences, Gender Role Attitudes, and Behaviors: The Case of Sri Lanka**

By Faiz MMT Marikar<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

The social status of males and females is an important concept for cross-cultural research. In addressing this issue, a cultural insider can be recognized as a strength that allows the researcher to take part in the everyday lives of local people. In addressing the achievements of the Sri Lankan State's administrative sector, researchers have paid minimal attention to both gender equity and the influence of equality on hiring rates. This study mainly focuses on the impact of gender in personal development, which may be influenced by research participants decision-making processes. Data were collected from newly-recruited Sri Lankan administrative sector employees. A questionnaire was distributed among a total sample consisting of 36 males and females to test a South Asian model Childhood Experiences, Gender Role Attitudes, and Behaviors. Results indicated that men's involvement in taking care of children at the pre school stage is poor. Male dominance in family issues was noted, and in most situations it was observed even in daily routines. In summary, though male dominance is prominent in South Asia, it did not affect the gender-related attitudes and emotions in child development processes and decision-making.

*Keywords: Gender equity, Sri Lanka, Administrative sector*

### **Background**

Gender equity refers to the equal valuing of males and females, and equal opportunities for life and work regardless of gender. Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was established by the United Nations in 1948, gender equity has been accepted as a fundamental principle of human rights. Women comprise a substantial portion, approximately 50%, of today's workforce (Bureau, 2005; Segal, 1992). However, despite nearly equal representation in the workplace, a substantial gender difference exists in career progression, as men progress faster and advance higher compared to women. Several surveys on this issue illustrate this matter. Although nearly one-half of the workforce is comprised of women, they occupy only one-third of all management positions (Bureau, 2005; Colwill, 1993), and women are more likely to be junior- or middle-managers than senior executives. Only 3% of women in the workforce occupy senior management positions (Segal, 1992).

In 2012, the United Nations agreed on the landmark United Nations System-Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women to implement the gender equality policy in its highest executive body, the UN Chief Executives Board, chaired by the Secretary General. Spearheaded by UN Women, the UN-SWAP for the first time assigns common

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performance standards for the gender-related work of all UN entities, ensuring greater coherence and accountability.

The Gender Equality Capacity Assessment Tool is a means of assessing the understanding, knowledge, and skills that a given organization or individual has in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women, and on the organization's gender related policy. Capacity assessment refers to the process through which the information is gathered and analyzed, and to the results of this analysis.

When assessing the capacity of individuals, attention is paid to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes each person has regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as how they integrate these concepts into their daily work. The information gathered includes how much they know and understand about these concepts (such as gender equality and women's empowerment), policies (such as organizational gender strategy and gender mainstreaming strategy), procedures (such as how gender equality should be reflected in procurement or recruitment processes), and how capable they are of implementing these and other processes.

Capacity assessment at an organizational level evaluates what policies, strategies, and procedures are in place to ensure that gender equality and the empowerment of women can be adequately included in an agency's mandate. The Participatory Gender Audit, a methodology developed by the International Labor Law, is a systematic, participatory, and gender-sensitive methodology for analyzing how gender is mainstreamed within an organization.

### **Transparency, Accountability, Gender Equality, and Power**

Promoting gender equity is about working towards fairness in relationships between males and females and being alert to the ways that gender may create inequality. Although the terms 'transparency' and 'accountability' can seem ubiquitous these days, they are rarely defined with much rigor. The vagueness that surrounds these terms stems partly from the fact that they are used in numerous different issue areas (Florini, 1999). However, the roots of most definitions of transparency and accountability are found in the literature of political sciences and governmental institutions (Neyland, 2007; Siklos, 2003; West *et al.*, 1998). These studies stress that governmental organizations should be transparent, meaning that organizations are called upon to make internal aspects of their activities externally visible. The idea is that openness will reduce the opportunities for corruption or unethical practices. The present study defines decisions or practices as 'transparent' when information about how they are executed is accessible to insiders and outsiders in an accurate and comprehensible form. The purpose of transparency is closely connected to enabling outsiders to hold organizations to account for their policies and performance (Florini, 1999; Levay & Waks, 2009). Institutions can be said to be transparent when they release information relevant to holding them accountable (Giddens, 1984).

Gender equality programs frequently emphasize the importance of transparent position appointment processes; transparency is seen as a way of increasing the likelihood of a fairer process and reducing in hiring practices. Studies on gender mechanisms in organizations emphasize that transparency enhances women's chances of promotion and decreases the chance of gender-related bias (Allen, 1998; Finland, 1998; Ledwith & Simonetta, 2000; Rees, 2004). All these studies show that bias is common if assessments are based on obscure criteria and the evaluation process is kept confidential.

## **Gender Equality Theories**

Gender equality is a contested concept. Different conceptualizations underlie gender equality programs, and those conceptualizations can be traced back to analytically distinct perspectives within feminist theory (Booth & Bennett, 2002; Verloo, 2005). One perspective has been named the ‘equal opportunities’ or ‘equal treatment’ perspective and is based on liberal feminism: the idea that women and men are equal and therefore have equal rights, as well as equal access to an equal representation in public life. From this perspective, gender equality aims to enable women and men to compete as equals in the workplace and the labor market and to create equal opportunities by eliminating structural and procedural barriers to women’s success (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000).

## **Gender Laws in Sri Lanka**

Today in Sri Lanka we live in an environment that embraces international standards as a strategy for imposing alien and, in general, western values, on our government and people. Politicians and even public officials seem to have forgotten that, as a member of the international community, the Sri Lankan government has signed and agreed to be bound by international treaties like the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), instruments such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), and international policy documents such as the beginning Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. There is also increasing amnesia regarding the manner in which our governments had, with the participation of civil society, introduced legislation incorporating international standards. Legislation such as the Penal Code Amendments (1995 and 2006), the Maintenance Act (1999), the Domestic Violence Act (2005), and the amendments on maternity leave and child labor have brought some commitments under international instruments like CEDAW, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and ILO conventions, into the domestic laws and policies of our country. Therefore, gender laws in Sri Lanka are super-imposed by non-governmental organizations.

This article discusses the sample selection for a study designed to control gender equality in families and how it was promoted in their daily lives. The capacity of individuals is commonly assessed using tools such as questionnaires and surveys, individual tests, focus groups, and interviews. The methodology for this study included in-depth interviews and a questionnaire.

The current study mainly focuses on the influence of gender in individuals’ personal development, which may be shaped by decision-making processes of their families. The purpose of promoting gender equity in the educated population is to create equal and enriching lives for all people in Sri Lanka. The South Asian model of Childhood Experiences, Gender Role Attitudes, and Behaviors will reflect on boys’ and girls’ decision-making abilities and and plan ways to overcome inequalities through an ongoing process of self-reflection, observation, planning, and evaluation.

## **Methodology**

### *The recruitment case-Administration of Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was administered to state administrative sector employees in Sri Lanka, who were given 30 minutes to answer the questionnaire. Before the questionnaire was administered, participants provided their knowledge about gender equity and equality before

administration of the questionnaire. Care was taken to avoid exchanging the administrative sector employee information or ideas.

### *Data Collection*

The research study used qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Participants were 36 young men and women with a mean age of 30.75 years (Standard Deviation [SD] = 4.003 years), the females and males in the sample were 61.1% and 38.9%, respectively. The average family mean size was 2.94 individuals (SD = 1.433 individuals). All participants self-identified as employed in the Sri Lankan administrative sector. Although the researchers did not make a more fine-grained inquiry about participants' heritage, there is no reason to believe they differed from the general population. The sample represented Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu populations as 83.3%, 8.3%, and 8.3%, respectively, which is close to the general Sri Lankan population statistics. Educational levels ranged from Bachelor's Degree to Master's Degree.

The respondents were occupied in one of the four major academic areas, i.e. management, social sciences, natural sciences, and medical sciences, in the state administrative services. They were encouraged to talk about concrete cases and incidents based on anonymity rather than in generalities

### *Data Analysis*

To analyze the questions, the informal reasoning displayed by individuals, representing a high and low level of understanding of gender-based issues, were compared with the computer-aided SPSS software system. The validity of the translation was independently assessed by two observers competent in the English language. For statistical analysis, we transformed all our data using the SPSS statistical analysis package.

## **Results**

### *Self-Reflection*

It is useful for child care professionals to reflect on how much time they spend communicating with boys and girls and their method of interaction with the children. Table 1 shows that a father alone spends a lesser amount of time with the children compared to a mother alone in Sri Lanka. Percentage-wise, it denotes only 11.1% of fathers while 44.4% mothers looked after the kids. Some families are well looked-after by father and mother, which is far higher than the extended family support; it is around 33.4% in the educated crowd. Though it shows 33.4%, the researchers of the study believed that the mother plays a significant role in this context.

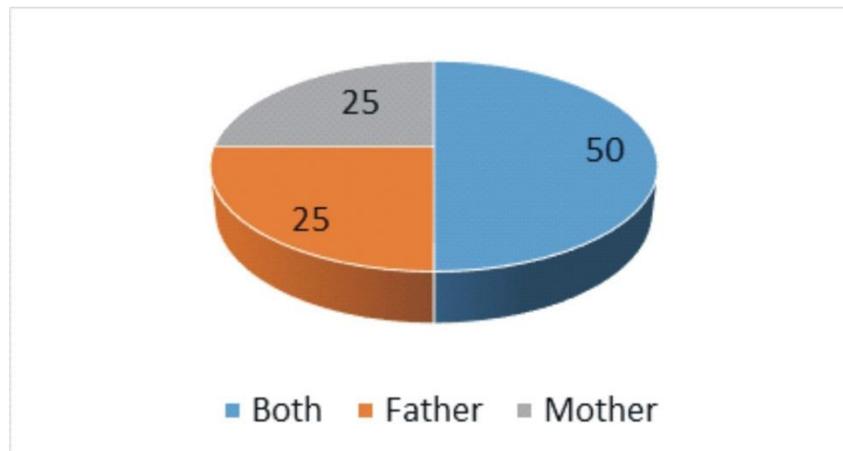
**Table 1 - Caregiving while growing up**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Father (F)	4	11.1	11.1	11.1
Grand Mother (G)	1	2.8	2.8	13.9
Mother (M)	16	44.4	44.4	58.3
M,F	12	33.4	33.4	91.7
M,F,G	3	8.4	8.4	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	

*Reflection of gender influence*

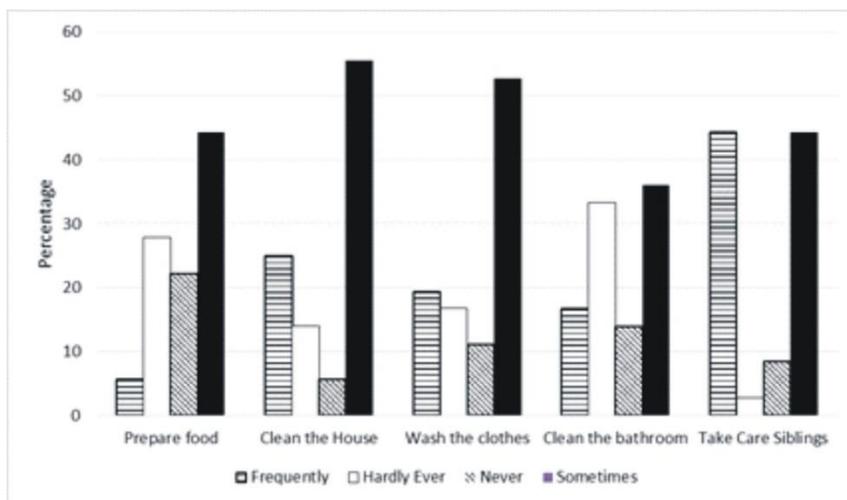
Very early on in childhood, a growing child's mind is free from gender bias, though gender stereotypes influence their mindset to be changed over time. Here, the educated group in Sri Lanka shows a radical change towards a better person in the society. In half of the sample population (50%), parents do the decision-making together (Fig. 1). Individual decision-making such as father or mother's decision-making is somewhat same, and it is the same: 25% for both parties. It is indeed a good indicator among the educated crowd in Sri Lanka, which is almost equal to developed countries (Giddens, 1984).

**Fig. 1 Gender Influence on mother and father decision-making**

**Practical ideas for promoting gender equity**

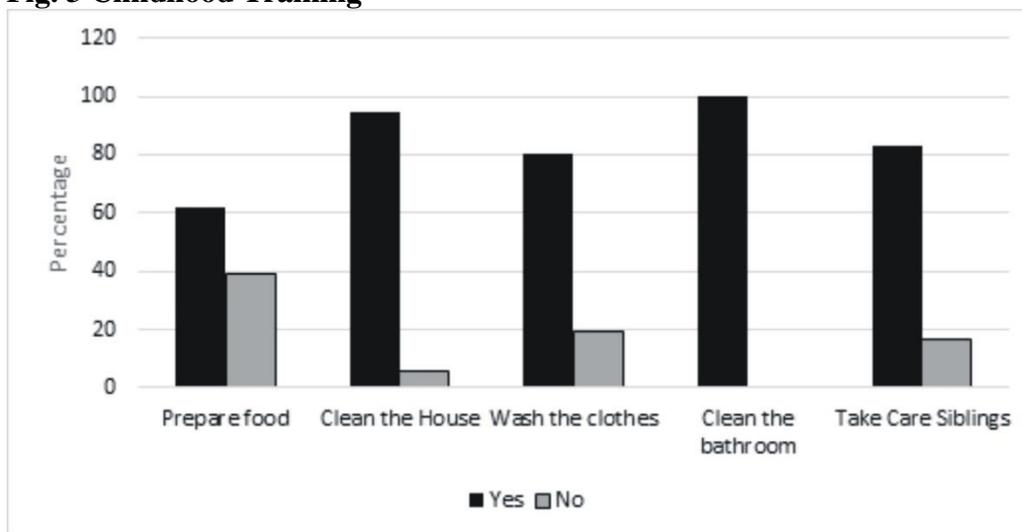
It can be helpful to consider the sample population's ideal practices for gender equity and the reasons that generate difficulty in promoting gender equality in their workplaces. The researchers asked them whether the father or any other male relative helped in food preparation, house cleaning, washing the clothes, cleaning the bathroom, and taking care of siblings. It was interesting to observe that almost in all scenarios, the males helped in day-to-day activities only sometimes (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2 Male Support in Daily Life Tasks**



This is the stereotypical role model of Sri Lankan males, even in the educated crowd. Further expansion of this study regarding how to teach children has unfolded. The same questions were asked about their childhood training in food preparation, house cleaning, washing the clothes, cleaning the bathroom, and taking care of siblings. The outcome of this questionnaire produced the answer “yes” in at least 60% for all sectors (Fig. 3). This indicates that their socialization has led to personal independence.

**Fig. 3 Childhood Training**



**Conclusion**

In many people’s lives and experiences, gender bias is present to some extent. During character building, it can produce barriers to promoting positive equity for children. By valuing and actively working towards gender equity, the barriers of gender stereotypes and prejudice can be defeated to enable boys and girls to benefit equally from their childhood experiences. Since qualitative research frequently involves face-to-face contact between the researcher and the

subject, open-ended rather than closed questions; unstructured, rather than structured-interview samples are typically small. To generate a hypothesis it is much more useful if the small samples under study are relatively homogeneous since a general population makes the task of identifying common patterns almost impossible.

In this study, the reviews indicate that impression management tactics tend to vary in the frequency with which they employ different impression management tactics, and in some cases, masculine typed impression management tactics tend to lead to better performance in educating their children. Furthermore, as per the quantitative and qualitative research, blending a similar concept among men and women will lead to the success of their offspring. Each outcome in this study needs to be carefully examined by future researchers.

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**Appendix: Questionnaire on Gender Equity and Equality**

1. How old are you: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sex:  Male  Female
3. Religion  Buddhist  Hindu  Islam  Catholic  Other
4. Employment: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Education :  BSc  MSc  PhD
6. How many persons do you live with you? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Who provides the main source of income in your home?  Self  Partner  Parents  
 Older relatives  Pension
8. Is your current boss is male or female?  Male  Female
9. Who took care of you when you were growing up?  Mother  Father  
 Grand parents  Uncle/Aunt  Other
10. When you were teenager, did your father or another male relative in the home

	Frequently	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Prepare food				
Clean the house				
Wash clothes				
Clean the bathroom/toilet				
Take care of you or your siblings				

11. Who had the final word in your household about decisions involving you and your brothers and sisters (their schooling, their activities):  Mother  Father  
 Both equally
12. From the time you were born until you were 18 years old, were you taught how to:

	Yes	No
Prepare food		
Clean the house		
Clean the bathroom/toilet		
Wash clothes		
Care for younger siblings		

13. Gender issues are major problem in our society so we have to take some important steps for removing gender inequity, please give one or two solutions for remedial measures.