# Gender Roles Attitudes and their Correlations with Self-Esteem in High School Students: A cross-sectional study from West of Turkey

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## Abstract

*Aims of this study are to evaluate attitudes on gender roles and possible effective factors to them, and to determine the correlations between gender altitudes and self-esteem among high school students. This study was cross-sectional and realized among eleven high schools in a city of West Turkey. The study group was 1688 (of target population 65.6%) students. A questionnaire form which consists of three parts was prepared. The first part of questionnaire form created with questions about socio-demographic, socioeconomic, family characteristics and social relationships. The second and third parts were included Gender Roles Attitude Scale (GRAS) and Coopersmith's Self-esteem Scale (CSS), respectively. By GRAS, lower points indicate to "traditional attitude" while higher points are indicating to "egalitarian attitude". By CSS, The scale's scores ranged between 0 and 100. While these scores are increasing self-esteem also increases. Of body mass index 25 kg / m$^2$ and over values were considered overweight / obese. For statistical analyses, SPSS (version 20.0) Statistical Pocket Program was used. Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis Analysis and Spearmann Correlation Analyses were applied. p<0.05 values were considered as statistical significance. Of the study group 861 (51.0%) were girls. The average age was 15.94±0.89 (min: 14, max: 18) years. To be man, rural living, extended family type, patriarchal life style, poor socioeconomic level, men role models, predominantly boyfriends were found that relating with traditional / patriarchal attitudes on gender roles (for each one; p<0.05). A positive but weak correlation was found between GRAS and CSS scores (r$_s$: 0.133; p<0.001).This study has shown that there were many effective factors about traditional attitudes on gender roles. It may be useful to raise awareness to the egalitarian attitudes regarding gender roles in schools.*

**Keywords**: Gender, Self-esteem, Attitude, Role, High school

## Introduction

From culture to culture, the differences occurred as regards the definition of gender during the historical development steps. Gender usually covers the features and roles for man / woman that defined by community / society. Gender is similar but is not same term with sex. Gender is a sociological term. Social roles, marriage and gender identities (for example transsexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality etc.) must evaluate by the gender. On the other hand, sex is a biological term. Also, it can be used for sex / gender as follows: "male / female" and "masculine / feminine", respectively[1,2]. We can argue that are strong effects of gender inequalities in the lives of both women and men. But women are affected more adversely with reasons of gender inequalities[3]. In terms of physical, mental and social, women's health is under threat of gender inequalities[4]. A situation can be observed against women in many social life's areas as access to health care, to take advantage of educational opportunities, income distribution, utilization of social opportunities, and participation in decision-making in working life. As a consequence, women are less educated, economically dependent and remain vulnerable to violence. If we look for men, society accepted unnecessarily superior position of men. This false acceptance creates of psychological trauma among women. If there is not elimination of gender inequalities, the social advancement is not considered to be possible. All around the world, traditional or patriarchal male / female roles are to be changed for social development[2,4-6]. Adolescence defines a period of the transition from childhood to adulthood and is a dynamic process for the acquisition of gender roles and adult responsibilities. Life in this period may cause to effects, positively or negatively, on persons' health status[3,7]. For important effects on gender perception, include the following: Family structure's characteristics, friend group features, attitudes and behaviors of teachers in schools, school life, using the mass media[8-10]. Additionally, a factor on gender perception is self-esteem[10,11].

Self-esteem is an expression of the self-belief about to be important or talented or successful or valuable individual. Another definition is as follows: Self-esteem is an attitude on self-approving[12]. It can be profound effects of gender roles about issues with self-esteem. For completing the formation of social identity, self and the notions of social roles (including gender roles) are integrated by adolescents[13].

Examine of the opinions of high school students on gender roles may be an important value in terms of social science. In this way, it will provide to gain of egalitarian perspective on social roles in the next generations. To succeed in terms of policy which fights of the increased gender inequality and the discrimination; firstly, there is a need to determine youth's attitudes toward behaviors and values about gender roles, and secondly, re-measurement of gender perception in educational institutions is also needed[14].

Aims of this study are to evaluate attitudes on gender roles and possible effective factors to them, and to determine the correlations between gender altitudes and self-esteem among high school students.

## Methodology

Descriptive and cross-sectional typed study realized in 2014 years, between 5 May and 30 June, place in Eskisehir, West of Turkey. This study's target population is students of eleven high schools in Eskisehir. And in city center, Salih Zeki Anatolian High School, Eskisehir Fatih Anatolian High School and Turk Telekom Technical and Industry Vocational High School were included. In addition, eight schools were included from districts of Eskisehir city. These schools are: Muberra Mehmet Gulec Anatolian Teacher High School from Beylikova district; Sivrihisar Technical and Industry Vocational High School, Nurbiye Gulerce Anatolian Health Vocational High School, Health Vocational High School, Sivrihisar Muzaffer Demir Anatolian High School, Fahri Keskin Anatolian High School, Sivrihisar Imam Hatip High School, Sivrihisar Girls Technical and Vocational High School and Sivrihisar Commercial High School from Sivrihisar district. All high schools were included to the study in Beylikova and Sivrihisar districts. Considering the socio-economic status (high-middle-poor), three schools are selected and each school represents as a good-middle-poor socio-economic status in the city center.

Total eleven high schools, 1st, 2nd and 3rd classes' students were 2572. Of these 65.6% (n: 1688) agreed to participate in this study, and the study group has occurred with these students. To reach other students (n: 884, 34.4%), where were not allowed to study again by school administrations and education directorate managers in Eskisehir. Additionally, with cause of a placement test for license, the 4th class students (n = 885) were excluded from the study in high schools which performed of the study.

In line of aims of the study, a questionnaire form which consists of three parts was prepared considering the medical literature[8-11,15-18]. The first part of questionnaire form created with questions about socio-demographic characteristics (school, class, age, sex, urban / rural lifestyle (living in city center or district or village), and place of residence (with his / her family at home / dorm / other), family income, sibling number, to be alive or dead for his / her father or mother, family structure (nuclear family, extended family, broken families), mother's or father's educational status (first school / middle school or high

school / university), mother's or father's job status (working / not working or retired), decision-makers in the family (mother / father / mother and father together/ others), role models for the people in the family (mother / father / brother / sister / others), friend groups (mainly boys / mainly girls / boys and girls equally weighted), friend relationships (good / middle / bad), pocket money per week of the student (enough / insufficient / not getting any money according to their own perception). In addition, Weight and height were measured and recorded by own admission according to its statement. Thus, obesity / overweight status was determined. Of body mass index 25 kg / $m^2$ and over values were considered overweight / obese.

The second and third parts were included Gender Roles Attitude Scale (GRAS) and Coopersmith's Self-esteem Scale (CSS), respectively.

Gender Roles Attitude Scale is 5 point likert type, and consists from 38 propositions. Obtained scores are changing between 38 and 190. Gender roles, lower points indicate to "traditional / patriarchal attitude" while higher points are indicating to "egalitarian attitude"[17].

Coopersmith's Self-esteem Scale was used for self-esteem level of the students. In 1967, The Self-esteem Scale was developed by Stanley Coopersmith[12]. And its validity and reliability study was done by Turan and Tufan in Turkey in 1987 years[18]. There are 25 propositions in these scales and they are answered as follows: "Like me / do not like me". The scale's scores ranged from 0 to 100. While these scores are increasing, self-esteem also increases.

Permissions were received from Eskisehir Education Directorate and related schools' administrations for this study. Appointment day and time, the students gathered in the classroom. Verbal consents were taken from the students. After these operations, the participant students completed the questionnaire form and scales by self-method under observation of researchers. All of which was completed in about 20-25 minutes.

IBM SPSS (version 20.0) Statistical Pocket Program was used in data entry and statistical analysis. Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis Analysis and Spearmann Correlation Analysis were done for statistical analysis and $p < 0.05$ values were considered as statistical significance.

## Results and Discussion

Of the study group 861 (51.0%) were girls. The average age was 15.94±0.89 (min: 14, max: 18) years. Frequencies of residence as follows: 59.2% in Eskişehir city center, 3.9% in Beylikova, and 36.9% in Sivrihisar. The number of living with his / her family was 1233 (73.0%). Of the students 130 (7.7%) were overweight or obese.

Distribution of GRAS' scores by some sociodemographic characteristics was given in Table-1.

**Table-1**
**The distribution of GRAS' scores by some sociodemographic characteristics**

| Sosyodemographic characteristics | n (%) | Scores of GRAS Median (min-max) | Statistical analyses z/KW; p | Multiple comparison | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Residence | | | | | |
| Eskisehir city center (1) | 1000(59.2) | 140.0(50.0-190.0) | | 3-1 | 0.000 |
| Beylikova (2) | 66(3.9) | 142.0(70.0-176.0) | 99.026; 0.000 | 3-2 | 0.000 |
| Sivrihisar (3) | 622(36.9) | 127.0(79.0-181.0) | | 1-2 | 1.000 |
| Class | | | | | |
| 1st | 714(42.3) | 133.0(55.0-190.0) | | - | - |
| 2nd | 547(32.4) | 135.0(52.0-190.0) | 4.194; 0.123 | - | - |
| 3rd | 427(25.3) | 136.0(50.0-187.0) | | - | - |
| Age group (year) | | | | | |
| 15 and under | 611(36.2) | 136.0(55.0-190.0) | | - | - |
| 16 | 582(34.5) | 134.0(68.0-188.0) | 1.937; 0.380 | - | - |
| 17 and over | 495 (29.3) | 134.0(50.0-190.0) | | - | - |
| Sex | | | | | |
| Girl | 861(51.0) | 149.0(57.0-190.0) | 19.963; 0.000 | - | - |
| Boy | 827(49.0) | 123.0 (50.0-188.0) | | - | - |
| Urban / rural lifestyle | | | | | |
| City center (Urban) (1) | 1020(60.4) | 141.0(50.0-190.0) | | 3-2 | 0.002 |
| District (Urban) (2) | 421 (25.0) | 130.0(68.0-178.0) | 114.858; 0.000 | 3-1 | 0.000 |
| Village (Rural) (3) | 247(14.6) | 122.0(66.0-172.0) | | 2-1 | 0.000 |
| Place of residence | | | | | |
| Home (with his / her family) (1) | 1233(73.0) | 137.0(52.0-190.0) | | 3-2 | 0.205 |
| Dorm (2) | 428(25.4) | 128.0(70.0-181.0) | 49.450; 0.000 | 3-1 | 0.001 |
| Other (3) | 27(1.6) | 119.0(50.0-168.0) | | 2-1 | 0.000 |
| Family income | | | | | |
| High (1) | 608 (36.0) | 134.0(50.0-190.0) | | 3-2 | 0.000 |
| Middle (2) | 1015 (60.1) | 136.0(55.0-188.0) | 18.081; 0.000 | 3-1 | 0.000 |
| Poor (3) | 65 (3.9) | 120.0(52.0-167.0) | | 2-1 | 1.000 |
| Number of sibling | | | | | |
| 0 (1) | 169 (10.0) | 145.0(57.0-188.0) | | 3-2 | 0.000 |
| 1-2 (2) | 1173 (69.5) | 136.0(52.0-190.0) | 33.848; 0.000 | 3-1 | 0.000 |
| 3 and over (3) | 346 (20.5) | 128.0(50.0-183.0) | | 2-1 | 0.053 |
| Obese / overweight | | | | | |
| Yes | 130 (7.7) | 132.0(70.0-179.0) | | - | - |
| No | 1558(92.3) | 135.0(50.0-190.0) | 1.079; 0.281 | - | - |
| Total | 1688 (100.0) | 135.0 (50.0-190.0) | - | - | - |

In the study group, 1436 (85.1%) students have a nuclear family. There were 789 (46.7) mothers that graduated primary school and under. Fathers that graduated from secondary school or high school were 864 (51.2%). The numbers of students who have working mothers in a job were 484 (28.7%), and frequency of working fathers was 1469 (87.0%). More than half of students (59.6%, n: 1006) reported that his / her mother or father is accepted as role model individual in the family.

Distribution of GRAS' scores by some characteristics related with family was given in Table-2.

In school's social environment, of the students 38.0% had mixed boy and girl friends. The frequencies of the predominantly boy / girl friends were 27.5% and 34.5%, respectively. Of the students 273 (16.2) reported as insufficient allowance. And 68 students (4.0%) reported that not receiving any money from his / her family.

Distribution of GRAS' scores by friend relationships and allowance was given in Table-3.

In the study group, the median of GRAS was 135.0 (min: 50; max: 190). The median of CSS was 56.0 (min: 8; max: 100). A positive but weak correlation was found between GRAS and CSS scores ($r_s$: 0.133; p<0.001).

**Table-2**
**The distribution of GRAS' scores by some characteristics related with family**

| Some characteristics related with family | n (%) | Scores of GRAS Median (min-max) | Statistical analyses z/KW;p | Multiple comparison | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family structure | | | | | |
| Nuclear family (1) | 1436(85.1) | 135.0(52.0-190.0) | 14.485; 0.001 | 2-1 | 0.001 |
| Extended family (2) | 154(9.1) | 130.0(50.0-180.0) | | 2-3 | 0.010 |
| Broken family (3) | 98(5.8) | 136.5(60.0-190.0) | | 1-3 | 1.000 |
| His / her mother is alive / dead | | | | | |
| Alive | 1675(99.2) | 135.0(50.0-190.0) | 0.388; 0.698 | - | - |
| Dead | 13(0.8) | 134.0(85.0-182.0) | | - | - |
| His / her father is alive / dead | | | | | |
| Alive | 1630(96.6) | 134.0(50.0-190.0) | 2.013; 0.044 | - | - |
| Dead | 58(3.4) | 141.5(93.0-190.0) | | - | - |
| Educational level for mother | | | | | |
| Primary school and under (1) | 789(46.7) | 132.0(52.0-188.0) | 41.522; 0.000 | 1-2 | 0.000 |
| Secondary school or hifg school (2) | 692(41.0) | 137.0(52.0-190.0) | | 1-3 | 0.000 |
| University (3) | 207(12.3) | 144.0(50.0-190.0) | | 2-3 | 0.009 |
| Educational level for father | | | | | |
| Primary school and under (1) | 444(26.3) | 129.0(50.0-190.0) | 42.300; 0.000 | 1-2 | 0.000 |
| Secondary school or hifg school (2) | 864(51.2) | 136.0(52.0-188.0) | | 1-3 | 0.000 |
| University (3) | 380(22.5) | 140.0(55.0-190.0) | | 2-3 | 0.039 |
| Working status for mother | | | | | |
| Working in a job | 484(28.7) | 139.0(52.0-188.0) | 3.180; 0.001 | - | - |
| No working or housewife or retired | 1204(71.3) | 134.0(50.0-190.0) | | - | - |

| Working status for father | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Working in a job | 1469(87.0) | 135.0(50.0-188.0) | 0.262; 0.793 | - | - |
| No working or retired | 219(13.0) | 136.0(66.0-190.0) | | - | - |
| Decision-maker in the family | | | | | |
| Mother (1) | 116(6.9) | 139.5(88.0-190.0) | 47.672; 0.000 | 2-3 | 0.000 |
| Father (2) | 391 (23.2) | 127.0(52.0-190.0) | | 2-1 | 0.000 |
| Mother and father together (3) | 1145(67.8) | 137.0(52.0-188.0) | | 3-1 | 1.000 |
| Other (4) | 36(2.1) | 126.5(50.0-188.0) | | 2-4 | 1.000 |
| Role model in the family | | | | | |
| Mother (1) | 392 (23.2) | 143.0 (52.0-190.0) | 87.594; 0.000 | 2-5 | 0.001 |
| Father (2) | 614 (36.4) | 128.0 (70.0-188.0) | | 2-1 | 0.000 |
| Brother (3) | 200 (11.8) | 129.0 (72.0-182.0) | | 2-4 | 0.000 |
| Sister (4) | 150 (8.9) | 145.0 (50.0-188.0) | | 3-1 | 0.000 |
| Other (5) | 332 (19.7) | 136.5 (55.0-190.0) | | 3-4 | 0.000 |
| - | - | - | | 5-1 | 0.010 |
| - | - | - | | 5-4 | 0.016 |
| Total | 1688 (100.0) | 135.0 (50.0-190.0) | - | - | - |

**Table-3**
**Distribution of GRAS' scores by friend relationships and allowance**

| Friend relationships and allowance | n (%) | Scores of GRAS Median (min-max) | Statistical analyses z/KW;p | Multiple comparison | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Friend relationships in the school | | | | | |
| Predominantly boy (1) | 464(27.5) | 121.0(52.0-188.0) | 171.188; 0.000 | 1-3 | 0.000 |
| Predominantly girl (2) | 582(34.5) | 143.5(50.0-187.0) | | 1-2 | 0.000 |
| Mixed boy and girl (3) | 642(38.0) | 137.5(52.0-190.0) | | 3-2 | 0.037 |
| Friend relationships' status | | | | | |
| Good (1) | 1282(76.0) | 136.0(52.0-190.0) | 7.959; 0.019 | | |
| Middle (2) | 355(21.0) | 132.0(68.0-188.0) | | | |
| Bad (3) | 51(3.0) | 130.0(50.0-190.0) | | | |
| Allowance | | | | | |
| Enough (1) | 1347(79.8) | 135.0(52.0-190.0) | 11.690; 0.003 | 3-2 | 0.006 |
| Insufficient (2) | 273(16.2) | 134.0(69.0-188.0) | | 3-1 | 0.002 |
| No receive any money (3) | 68(4.0) | 122.5(50.0-170.0) | | 2-1 | 1.000 |
| Total | 1688 (100.0) | 135.0 (50.0-190.0) | - | - | - |

**Discussion:** Adolescents are exposure to social pressure by their communities in terms of adapting to the traditional gender roles[19]. In order to achieve gender equality, it was emphasized necessity for expiration of the traditional gender roles within the family and community by the literature[20]. Primarily for it, to know adolescents' gender attitudes and effective factors to them are important.

In our study, we can say that students' attitudes on gender roles tend to "equality" by GRAS scores. In other words, the students have not a perspective as like a "traditional attitude" in terms of gender roles. Some studies reported the similar results[21]. Conversely, some studies' results were not same with our study's result[22]. About opposite results of various studies, some explanations could say sa follows: First, these studies were realized in different featured populations, and second, different scales were used for measuring gender perception.

One of the important factors is "Urbanization" about differences in gender roles' attitudes. We expect that gender inequalities decrease while urbanization rate is increasing. Pinar et al. reported the rural population has more traditional gender roles than the urban population[22]. Similar results were obtained by this study. Sivrihisar's students have more traditional gender roles than students of Eskisehir city center and Baylikova. Sivrihisar is 90 km away from the city center and the countryside. Therefore "traditional attitudes" may be more in Sivrihisar.

Kulik et al. shown that egalitarian attitude increased with age in adolescent group[15]. According to their study, older adolescent exposure to gender equality debates at schools more than younger adolescent. From Turkey, a converse result was reported by Pinar et al.[22]. According to this, traditional attitude about gender role was increasing with age. However, we could not find any association between attitudes related with gender role and age. Regional cultural factors may explain the different results in this subject.

Gender differences in gender role attitudes are an effective factor. Ndobo et al. reported as girl high school students have more egalitarian and boys have more traditional attitudes in France. Raffaelli et al. reported from United States that decreasing traditional gender role attitudes in girl adolescents with age increase, but any change was not shown in this subject in boy adolescents[24,25]. Aslan's master's thesis from Tukey, Ankara reported as girl high school students have egalitarian attitudes more than traditional attitudes in terms of gender roles[26]. Various studies reported similar results[14,22,27-31]. By literature, we can say as "most of the times there are traditional attitudes in boys, and egalitarian attitudes in girls." Our study provides a result in this direction. The men can not approve the decrease of their high social status of which provides them more freedom and social support in the community. To the contrary, it seems that the girls are aware of the struggle for women's rights.

In Turkey, the families who migrated from rural areas to urban areas live the alteration to modern family structures from the traditional structure. This change consists gradual and under the influence of some social factors[26]. Today, the traditional gender attitudes can be seen among young people who are living in urban areas. Perhaps, they may be lived in rural areas in childhood age. For this population, there is a need of time to transit from the traditional attitude of egalitarian attitudes in terms of gender roles. In this study, consistent with the literature, it was found to have more egalitarian attitudes of the students whose majority of their life living in the urban areas.

Some studies reported that egalitarian attitudes about gender roles have been among the students who are living with their families more than others[30,31]. We presented a similar result with literature. Students staying in dormitories were generally from rural areas in this study group. One of the reasons may be that the students who are living in dorm have more traditional attitudes in our study.

Among adolescents, the positive effects of high family income on the development of egalitarian attitudes were presented in previous studies[16,32,33]. But some studies were reported as no relation between family income with attitudes on gender roles among university students[22,27]. Our study group was conducted with high school students, not university students. This study, traditional attitudes were found higher in frequency in the students with poor family income ($p < 0.05$).

Kulik's study showed a positive relation between sibling number and traditional gender roles[15]. This study's results were tending to support the result of Kulik. We showed that have more traditional attitudes of the students who have 3 siblings and over. But there were not any relation between sibling number and traditional attitudes in studies from Turkey[21, 22, 29].

More traditional attidues on extended families were reported in many studies[29,30,34]. A similar result was found in this study ($p < 0.05$). In large families, to internalize the traditional roles of housewives, particularly, was reported. Therefore, adolescents are affected from their housewife mothers'[30].

In this study, students whose father died have more egalitarian attitudes on gender roles ($p < 0.05$). A reason for this may be the role played by their mother. While egalitarian attitudes were increasing, mother's / father's education level increases were reported[15,16,33,35]. In our study, it was found that the positive effects of the mother's / father's high education level on egalitarian attitudes (for each one $p < 0.05$). At the same time, the effects of mother's educational level on egalitarian attitudes were presented higher than effects of father's educational level in various studies[21,22,27,29,34]. The fundamental reason of the emergence of similar results may be adoption of modern lifestyle in highly educated families.

Having a working mother decreases gender inequalities by some studies' results[14,15,26,29]. The same result was obtained in this study (p<0.05).

A family is the first social environment, and will have an effect on all life's periods. From the first day of birth, the child's gender roles were begun to be created by their families. Despite the changes of gender roles via contact to different environments in other periods of life, first form of attitudes on gender roles will remain as the solid foundation generated by the family[36]. It is reported parents were approved to be role models by adolescents. Connected therewith, adolescents, attitudes about gender roles gained by their parents[15, 21,25,33,34, 37,38]. Girl adolescents, affected by their father on the development of attitudes, especially, were reported from United States[25]. Another study from Turkey reported mothers are more successful than fathers in subject which transfer the traditional attitudes to children[26]. By the results of our study, we can make inference that people who are considering father or brother as the role model have kept in the forefront the traditional attitudes. Additionally, if mother or sister selected for role model, students have egalitarian attitudes, generally. In our study, about decision-maker in the family, if this is a man (father) type of attitudes tends to be traditional. As the same time, type of attitudes tends to be egalitarian if it is a woman (mother).

No correlation was found between gender roles and the status of relationships with their friends (p>0.05). But students who have predominantly boyfriends have traditional attitudes on gender roles (p<0.05). Similar results reported in previous studies are available[39].

Gender roles have an important place in the development of self-esteem[40]. Lennon et al. reported a positive correlation between self-esteem and gender roles[39]. This study put forth a similarly result. By the correlation analysis, egalitarian attitude on gender role was increasing while self-esteem level was increasing. But we can say that this is a weak relationship ($r_s$: 0.133). Further studies are needed to determine cause-and-effect between self-esteem and gender roles.

*Limitations:* This is a cross-sectional study. Because it is cross-sectional, cause-effect relationships cannot be presented to readers. This study provides a regional basis. The results cannot be generalized.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that there were many effective factors (to be man, rural living, extended family type, patriarchal life style, poor socioeconomic level, men role models, predominantly boyfriends) about tend to traditional attitudes on gender roles. It may be useful to raise the awareness of the egalitarian attitudes regarding gender roles in schools. Increasing the activities

related to self-esteem may cause to increase the perception of gender equality.

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