

# Gender Ideology Among Public University Students in Bangladesh: Does Parents' Education Matter?

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## Abstract

Previous studies in Bangladesh lack in investigating the influence of educational attainments on gender ideology among the public university students. This study aims to estimate the association between educational attainments and gender ideology among public university students in Bangladesh. To assess the relationship, this study followed a quantitative research methodology. In total, 908 students were included following the cluster sampling from five purposively selected public universities. Both male and female students participated and were interviewed after verbal consent. A structured interview questionnaire was distributed to collect data. Students' educational attainment was measured by three variables: i) total GPA of SSC and HSC, ii) stream/group of HSC education and iii) participation of any gender related course or class. Gender ideology was measured using a 28-item Likert-type attitude towards women scale. Collected data were analyzed through SPSS-23 software. The study protocol was approved by the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Rajshahi. This study showed that the students' educational attainment had no significant influence on students' gender ideology. This study found that mothers' higher education was associated with the students' more egalitarian gender ideology and students' mothers' lower education was associated with the students' more conservative gender ideology. This study also revealed that female students were more likely to hold an egalitarian gender ideology than male students. The study findings concluded that university student's sex, their parent's education is associated with their gender ideology. Policy makers should consider parent's education to promote egalitarian gender attitudes among the university student Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Gender ideology, educational attainment, parents' education, public university students, Bangladesh

## Introduction

Gender ideology is one of the factors which have positive or negative influence on gender equality (Kroska, 2007). The term 'ideology' is often defined as a manner of shared beliefs/opinions (Eagleton, 2014). The term 'gender ideology' refers to a person's beliefs related to gender-specific roles, rights, and responsibilities, which legitimize the socially constructed differences between women and men (Goldson, 2005; Karim & Law, 2016; Kroska, 2007; Spence & Helmreich, 1972). Kroska argues that the construction of gender ideologies is generally one dimensional and ranges from conservative (traditional/patriarchal) to liberal (egalitarian) (Kroska, 2007). In this study,

gender ideology is defined as public university student's attitudes toward women's socio-economic and financial roles in Bangladesh. Particularly, students' attitudes regarding socially prescribed appropriate roles, rights, and responsibilities of men and women (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016). Educational attainments and gender education are two mechanisms that might reduce gender inequality. Education is a very important resource for the students that might be categorized into different sectors, such as formal education, informal education, and semi-formal education. In this study, education refers to a person's highest level of education that they completed successfully, which is referred to as



their educational attainment. Moreover, completing a level of education means the attainment of the level's learning objectives, which are often verified through the evaluation of acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies. To the best of our knowledge, there is a lack in literature that focuses on investigating the association between educational attainments and gender ideology among the public university students in Bangladesh. Therefore, this study aims to fulfill the gap in existing literature.

## Objective of This Study

The main objective of the study is to estimate the relationship between educational attainment of students, their mothers' education, and gender ideology of the public university students in Bangladesh.

## Literature Review

Family is significant socialization agent and we learn familial norms, values, and ideologies and transmit it to the next generation (Kulik, 2002). Scholars argue that parent's age, education, and ethnicity influences their children's educational attainments (Bhandari & Timsina, 2024; Marcinkowski & Reid, 2019) and their gender role attitudes (Kulik, 2002). A recent study shows that father's involvement in household work and child care donates egalitarian gender attitude among their children (Cano & Hofmeister, 2023). It is also illustrated that more educational attainments promoted more egalitarian gender role attitudes in individual level among the young adults (Kulik, 2002). Scholars further argue that conservative gender attitudes increase the probability of supporting gender inequality (Kroska, 2007; Marcinkowski & Reid, 2019). An earlier study in Bangladesh illustrated that conservative gender ideology hinders the practices of gender equality, in contrast egalitarian gender ideology promotes and strengthens gender equality (Islam & Karim, 2012). Some previous studies show that gender inequality is deeply rooted in the familial and societal structure and gender ideology (Gangoli, 2017; Hunnicutt, 2009; Sultana, 2010; York, 2011). Therefore, it is important to investigate the association between the university students'

parental educational attainments and their gender ideology in the context of Bangladesh.

## Methodology

### Study Population and Sampling

This study was conducted with students (the first-year academic session) of five public universities in Bangladesh. This study followed multi-stage cluster sampling to select the respondents. At first, the faculties were chosen following a random sampling procedure in each selected university. Secondly, the departments were selected following a random sampling from the available departments under primarily selected faculties. Then all the students at the first-year academic session were included as respondents. In total, 908 students participated.

### Method of Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was developed and used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was in Bengali language which was distributed among the respondents in sealed envelopes. Then we requested the respondents to fill in the questionnaire and to return it after one working day. We asked questions about general information, family background, educational attainment of the students, education of the respondents' parents, religious and political information, and attitude towards gender role.

### Study Measures

#### Gender Ideology

In the present study, university students' gender ideology was measured using the attitude towards women scale (AWS) developed by Spence and Helmreich (1972). A 28-items of AWS (e.g., "swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than of a man") were selected and contextualized to determine people's attitudes towards women's role in different areas of society (Spence & Helmreich, 1972). The items of the AWS were rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree, to strongly disagree. Items scores were summed up to find the total score of the scale, ranging from 0 to 84. The lower score indicated

the most conservative gender ideology, and the higher score indicated the most egalitarian gender ideology. Cronbach's alpha for the AWS in the present study was 0.89.

### Statistical Analysis

SPSS 23.0 software was used to analyze the data (Kirkpatrick 2015). A profile of the study participants was developed using descriptive statistics for all variables. We measured the gender ideology of the participants by 28 contextual items taken from AWS. To examine the influence of participants' educational attainment and their parents' education on gender ideology, we used multivariate regression analysis.

### Ethical Issues

We conducted the study following the research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki to investigate the objectives of the study (Goodyear, Krleza-Jeric et al. 2007). The Faculty of Social Sciences Academic Review Committee at the University of Rajshahi approved the study protocol. The protocol was explained to the respondents. A written informed consent was obtained in the consent form along with the questionnaire. We assured them that their participation was voluntary, can withdraw anytime, not bound to finish the questionnaire and might leave at any point.

## Findings and Discussion

### Sex, Age, and Marital Status of the Respondents

Sex refers to the biological difference between male and female which is one of the vital factors that allocate power to a person in the traditional societies like Bangladesh. Among the respondents, 59.8% were male and 40.2% were female students (see table 1). Age is one of the important demographic characteristics of any individual. One's behavior, attitude, motivation, and experiences with different social issues may vary according to his or her age group. The students who participated in the study were from 17 to 24 years old. The average age of the participants was 19.40 years ( $SD=1.02$ ). About 89% of students were less than 21 years old, and only about

11% of students were 21 to 24 years old. Findings further showed that 97.5% of respondents were unmarried and only 2.5% were married students (see table 1).

### Educational Attainment of the Respondents

The students who participated in the study scored a minimum GPA (SSC+HSC) of 6.71 and a maximum of 10. The average total GPA (SSC+HSC) of the participants was 9.33 ( $SD=0.59$ ). Among the respondents 18% of students scored a GPA of 10, about 56.77% of students scored a GPA of 9 to less than 10, about 23.3% scored a GPA of 8 to less than 9, and only 2% of students scored a total GPA less than 8 (see table 1). Findings regarding the students' streams of HSC education showed that 49.9% of respondents were from the humanities group, 33% from the science group and 17.1% from the business studies group (see table 1). The students were also asked whether they had attended any course or class related to gender awareness. The findings revealed that only 24.1% attended a gender-related course or class, and 75.9% did not attend any course or class related to gender (see table 1).

### Respondents' Mothers' Education

Respondents' mothers' education was measured based on the actual years of schooling. According to the typical categorization of educational attainment in the Bangladesh context, the score was later transformed into four ordinal levels: No schooling, primary (1–5 years of schooling), secondary (6–10 years of schooling), and higher secondary (above 10 years of schooling) (see table 1). Findings indicated that 13.2% of mothers were illiterate, 20.2% completed primary level education, 47.9% of the mothers of the participants completed secondary level education, and 18.7% of mothers were higher educated (see table 1).

### Family Type and Family Residence of the Participants

The study findings showed that 81.3% of respondents were from the nuclear family and 18.7% of students were from joint families. However, lower participation from joint families indicates that

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of the respondents, N = 908 (100%).

Variables	n (%)	Variables	n (%)
Sex		Attended any course or class related to gender	
Female	365 (40.2)	No	689 (75.9)
Male	543 (59.8)	Yes	219 (24.1)
Age (years) M = 19.40, SD = 1.02		Mother's education	
17 to 18 years	177 (19.5)	No Schooling	120 (13.2)
19 to 20 years	635 (69.9)	Primary	183 (20.2)
21 to 22 years	90 (9.9)	Secondary	435 (47.9)
23 to 24 years	6 (0.7)	Higher	170 (18.7)
GPA (SSC+HSC) M = 9.33, SD = 0.59		Family types	
GPA less than 8	18 (2.0)	Nuclear family	738 (81.3)
GPA 8 to less than 9	212 (23.3)	Joint family	170 (18.7)
GPA 9 to less than 10	515 (56.7)	Family residence	
GPA 10	163 (18.0)	Rural area	624 (68.7)
Stream of HSC education		Urban area	284 (31.3)
Science	300 (33.0)	Marital status	
Humanities	453 (49.9)	Unmarried	885 (97.5)
Business Studies	155 (17.1)	Married	23 (2.5)

Note: M = mean, N = total sample, n = sample, SD = standard deviation.

joint families are gradually decreasing in our society. This study further found that mostly 68.7% were from rural areas and only 31.3% students were from urban areas (see table 1).

### Influence of Participants' Educational Attainment on Gender Ideology

Multivariate regression analysis was used to explore the association of educational attainment with gender ideology (see table 2). Before conducting the analysis, assumptions (i.e., normality, linearity, multicollinearity, autocorrelations, homoscedasticity, and independent residuals) were checked. A 28-item gender ideology scale was used to measure the dependent variable gender ideology of the respondents. Sex, age, stream of HSC education, total GPA (HSC+SSC), attendance of any course or class related to gender, respondents' mother's education, family type, and family residence were entered as independent variables into the regression model.

Findings showed that the variables related to participants' educational attainment did not significantly predict gender ideology. However, re-

sults further indicated that respondents' sex, age, and their mothers' education were significant predictors of gender ideology. Age ( $\beta = -0.067$ ,  $t = -2.214$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) negatively predicted respondents' egalitarian gender ideology (see table 2). However, female respondents ( $\beta = 0.419$ ,  $t = 13.319$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and respondents mothers' education [mother's higher education ( $\beta = 0.179$ ,  $t = 3.979$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), secondary education ( $\beta = 0.088$ ,  $t = 1.908$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ), primary education ( $\beta = 0.050$ ,  $t = 1.197$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ), no schooling= ref] positively predicted egalitarian gender ideology (see table 2). Findings further indicated that respondents' lower age was associated with more conservative gender ideology which is align with a previous study in different context (Kulik, 2002). Similarly, mothers' higher education was associated with students' more egalitarian gender ideology. Female students were more likely to hold an egalitarian gender ideology compared to male students, supported by an earlier study in different context (Kulik, 2002). The independent variables explained 24.1% variance for gender ideology [ $R^2 = 0.241$ ,  $F(11, 896) = 25.91$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ] (see table 2).

Table 2: Multivariate regression analysis for gender ideology, N = 908.

Variables	B	SE	Std. $\beta$	t
<b>Egalitarian Gender Ideology</b>				
Sex (Male = ref)	12.665	0.951	0.419	13.319***
Age	-0.973	0.440	-0.067	-2.214**
<b>Stream of HSC Education (Business Studies = ref)</b>				
Science	-0.461	1.306	-0.015	-0.353
Humanities	-1.374	1.233	-0.046	-1.114
GPA (SSC+HSC)	0.490	0.738	0.020	0.664
Attended any course/class related to gender (No = ref)	1.701	1.022	0.049	1.665
<b>Mother's education (No Schooling = ref)</b>				
Primary	1.838	1.536	0.050	1.197 <sup>^</sup>
Secondary	2.624	1.375	0.088	1.908 <sup>^</sup>
Higher	6.793	1.707	0.179	3.979***
Family type (Nuclear family = ref)	1.107	1.136	0.029	0.975
Family Residence (Urban Area = ref)	-1.352	1.026	-0.042	-1.318
<b>Model Summary</b>				
$R^2 = 0.241$	$F = 25.91***$			

**Note:** N = Total Sample, <sup>^</sup> $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , B = unstandardized regression coefficient, SE = Standard Error, Std.  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficient.

Though this study shows that the university students' educational attainment has no significant association with gender ideology which opposes the existing literature in different context (Marcinkowski & Reid, 2019). However, this study illustrates significant positive association between students' mothers' education and their gender ideology. These finding states that students' mothers' higher education promotes students' more egalitarian gender ideology which is align with an earlier study in different context (Kulik, 2002). Findings further indicate that respondents' lower age is associated with more conservative gender ideology that is supported by a previous study in different context (Kulik, 2002). Female students are more likely to hold an egalitarian gender ideology than male students which is supported by some earlier studies (Bhandari & Timsina, 2024; Marcinkowski & Reid, 2019). This study stresses that formal education is not the only factor related to the students' gender ideology; relative education, age, sex, parents' education are also influential factors in constructing the gender ideology of public university students.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that public university students' gender ideology on women's roles, rights, and responsibilities is associated with their sex, age and their mothers' education. The study further claims that there is a sex difference in reporting gender ideology among the university students. Based on the findings, this study argues that mothers' education might be a change agent to reduce conservative gender ideology among the children. The findings of the study on gender ideology among public university students in Bangladesh, carry important practical implications for policy, education, and social development. The influence of mothers' education suggests that efforts to promote gender-equitable attitudes cannot be limited to university curricula alone. Policymakers should invest in adult education and community-based awareness programs that target parents, especially the mothers with lower educational backgrounds. When parents are exposed to ideas of gender equality, they are more likely to transmit progressive values to their children, creating a long-term intergenerational im-

pact. The universities should introduce gender studies across disciplines rather than confining them to specific departments. NGOs and government bodies working on gender issues should design targeted campaigns that consider family background as a key variable. Programs that engage both students and their families - through workshops, media campaigns, or community dialogue - are likely to be more effective in shifting deeply rooted gender ideologies. The research underscores that achieving gender equality requires a multi-layered approach that connects family, education systems, and broader social policy.

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