SHORT REPORT

Gender-role attitudes of university students: a cross-sectional study from Türkiye

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Abstract

Objective: This study aimed to determine the attitudes of freshmen university students from different faculties of the same university towards gender-roles and to analyse the effect of their socio-demographic characteristics and studying in different faculties on these attitudes.

Methods: The cross-sectional study was conducted with the participation of 1080 students studying in the first year of five different faculties of Erciyes University between January-February 2020. The data were collected via face-to-face interview method, using a questionnaire including "Gender-Roles Attitude Scale (GRAS)" and sociodemographic characteristics of the students. In the analysis of the data, frequency, percentage and mean values were used for descriptive statistics, and Pearson chi-square, one-way ANOVA test and T-Test were used for comparative analysis.

Results: The mean GRAS score of the students was 147.7±27.7. While medical students had the highest GRAS scores,Theology students were found to havesignificantly lower scores compared to all groups. Amongsociodemographic characteristics,being female, mother'slevel of higher education and nuclear family were found to be associated with higher scale scores, while low economic level and having only mother or father as the decision-maker in their family were found to be associated with lower scale scores.

Conclusion: Increasing the education levels and employment rates of women will contribute to the development of egalitarian gender-role attitudes of individuals. In order to reveal the effect of religion on gender roles more clearly, there is a need for new studies that will enable more detailed analyzes to be made.

Keywords: Gender Role, University Students, Gender Role Attitudes

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INTRODUCTION

While 'sex', as a biological concept, refers to the genetic, biological, physiological characteristics and differences that a person possesses as a woman or a man, 'gender' refers to the values and judgments of how society considers, accepts, and perceives men and women, as well as expectations of society from men and women[1]. Gender roles include the behaviours (roles) and social factors that are culturally appropriate for women and men[1].

Attitudes towards gender-roles are divided into two as egalitarian and traditional attitudes. In the egalitarian attitude, roles are shared equally between men and women in their family, social and professional lives. Nevertheless, in the traditional attitude; in addition to being primarily responsible for household chores and family-related matters, it is appropriate for women to be employed in a lower status, earn less income, and have a lower level of education than men. In societal life, women are expected not to go out alone in the evenings, and in family life, women are expected to keep it confidential if they are subjected to violence by their spouses, to take care of children, cleaning and other similar tasks at home. In marriedlife, women are assigned roles such as not engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage, and raising their status by giving birth to male children. Men, on the other hand, are expected to provide for their families, to perform physically demanding tasks at home, to protect and care for their spouses and children emotionally, and to be emotionally stronger, courageous, tough, and rational.

The best indicator of whether these gender stereotypes, which are widespread in society today, will continue in the future is the evaluation of young people's thoughts on this issue. Certain studies conducted to investigate the attitudes of university students towards gender role showed that whilemale students had more traditional views about working life and married life, students from both genders had more egalitarian views about social life and family life[2]. In a study conducted with university students in Türkiye; predictors that affect students' gender-role attitudes were defined as gender, department of education, parents'education levels, income levels, family types, and employment status of the mother[3]. In addition, studies have emphasized that the adoption of traditional gender-roles in students increases the possibility of approval of physical violence, and that students studying in medical fields have more egalitarian attitudes than those studying in other departments[3].

One of the remarkable determinants of gender-role attitude is religion. It is stated in many religions, including Christianity and Islam, that a woman's primary responsibility is to take care of her husband and children and that they are often considered to beless-valued than men. Although it is known that there are ideas to support equality in terms of religion, it is generally claimed that these philosophical and religious arguments do not support such equality[4].

University education is defined as an important milestone for young people. The first year of higher education is a period in which the support provided by family and close friends are suddenly cut off, students acquire important new ideas and experiences challenging their previous knowledge and beliefs, and develop new attitudes where they

gain self-determination, problem-solving skills and behaviors.In the literature review, when the GRAS scores of first-year university students were compared to those of upper-class students, no difference was found between students' grades and GRAS scores[5,6].

In this study, it is aimed to evaluate the gender-role attitudes of the students studying in the first year of different faculties of the same university and the factors that may be related to these attitudes.

METHODS

This descriptive, cross-sectional study was planned to be conducted with first-year students studying at five different faculties (Law, Medicine, Theology, Communication and Education) of Erciyes University (Kayseri, Central Anatolia, Türkiye) who are expected to have different gender role attitudes. The population of the research consisted of 1485 students studying in the first year of these five faculties. Sample calculation was not made for the research, it was planned to include the entire universe in the study.

A questionnaire consisting of two parts and 61 questions was applied to the students who volunteered to participate in the research. On the day the study was conducted, the students were visited in their classrooms, and they were informed about the study. The questionnaire forms were distributed to those who volunteered and collected back after 20 minutes. Students who were not in the classroom that day were excluded from the study. While the first part of the questionnaire consists of 23 questions about the students and their families' sociodemographic characteristics and genderism, the second part consists of the Gender-Roles Attitude

Scale (GRAS) developed by Zeyneloğlu et al.[7] The five-point Likert type scale consists of 38 questions. For the students' egalitarian attitude statements regarding gender roles (1, 4, 8, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27);5 points are givenif the answer is'strongly agree'; 4 points if 'agree'; 3 points if 'neither agree nor disagree'; 2 points if 'disagree'; and 1 point if the answer is 'strongly disagree'. However, the traditional attitude statements regarding gender roles (2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 24, 25, 28-38) were scored in the opposite way to the above-mentioned scoring. According to this results of scoring, the highest score to be obtained from the scale is 190, while the lowest score is 38. While a high score from the scale indicates that the student is close to adopting an egalitarian attitude towards gender roles, a low score indicates that the student is close to adopting to the traditional attitude towards gender roles[7].

Ethical approval from the Erciyes University Clinical Research Ethics Committee (No:2020/124 Date:12.02.2020) and administrative permissions from the deans of the relevant faculties were obtained for the research.

The research was completed with the participation of 1080 students studying in the first year of five faculties (the rate of reaching the universe: 72.7%). 320 students who were absent on the day of the study and 85 students who did not agree to participate in the study were excluded from the study.

SPSS version 25 package program was used to analyse the data. The conformity of the data to the normal distribution was examined with the kurtosis-skewness values and histogram, and it was observed that they were normally distributed. Descriptive data were expressed

in numbers and percentages. Pearson chi-square was used to compare categorical data, and one-way ANOVA test and T Test were used to compare numerical data. Games-Howell analysis was used in the post hoc analysis since the variances were not homogeneous. The value of p<0.05 was considered significant in statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Of the students, 30.1% weremedical students, 60.2% were women, 97.3% were single, 76.4% had spent most of their lives in the city centre, and 50.6% were living with their families (Table 1). 53.8% of the students expressed their economic status as medium. While 29.5% of the students' mothers were primary school graduates, 22.9% were high school graduates, 22.7% higher education graduates, and 43.1% of the students' fathers were higher education graduates (Table 1). 70.6% of the students' mothers were housewives.

The mean of the students' GRAS scores was 147.7±27.7 (min= 43, max= 190), and it can be said that the students were closer to the egalitarian attitude in general.

Table 1. Comparison of students' sociodemographic characteristics and GRAS scores			
Characteristics (n=1080)	n	%	Mean ±SD
Gender			
Male	430	39.8	137.3±26.8
Female	650	60.2	154.5±26.2	*p<0.001*
Marital status			
Not married	1051	97.3	147.8±27.9
Married	29	2.7	140.8±19.4	*p=0.066*
Longest lived place			
Urban	825	76.4	147.7±28.6
Rural	255	23.6	147.7±24.9	*p=0.996*
Economic status of the family			
Good	459	42.5	148.1±29.1
Moderate	581	53.8	148.1±26.2	*p=0.013*
Bad	40	3.7	135.0±31.1
Mother's educational status			
Less than high school	588	54.4	144.7± 27.3
High school and more	492	45.6	151.2±27.8	*p<0.001*
Father's educational status			
Less than high school	343	31.7	146.2±24.9
High school and more	737	68.3	148.3±28.9	*p=0.214*
Family type			
Nuclear	977	90.5	148.2±27.6
Not nuclear	91	8.4	141.0±27.1	*p=0.016*
The person who makes the decisions in the family			
Only mother or only father	314	29.1	138.8±28.5
Together	766	70.9	151.3±26.6	*p<0.001*

Table 1. (countinued) Comparison of students' sociodemographic characteristics and GRAS scores

Faculty *	n	%	
Medicine [a]	325	30.0	153.1±27.6
Law[b]	157	15.0	145.4±25.6
Theology[c]	120	11.0	137.5±20.0
Communication[ab]	162	15.0	148.3±25.1 ***p<0.001***
Education[b]	316	29.0	146.7±31.3
Total	**1080**		**147.7**±27.7

T-test was used for dual comparisons, one-way Anovawas used for triple and more comparisons.
*Different letters indicate significant difference between groups. Games-Howell analysis was used in the post hoc analysis.

Among the socio-economic characteristics, being female, mother's higher education level, and having a nuclear family were associated with higher scale scores, while low economic status and having only the mother or the father as the decision-maker in the family were associated with lower scale scores (Table 1).

There was a significant difference between the students' faculties and GRAS scores. In post hoc tests; it was observed that the students studying in the faculty of theology got lower scale scores than the other students (Table 1).

Although the GRAS scores of the students who answered 'male' to the question 'Which gender would you like your children to have?' were found to be lower, the difference was not significant. While female students stated more often than male students that 'they are afraid of gender inequality', 'they were exposed to gender inequality' and 'there is no gender equality in education in Türkiye', male students stated more often than female students that 'gender is important in career planning'(Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of the students' answers to genderism questions with their genders

Question	Gender			
	Male*		Female*	
	n	%	n	%
Do you think there is gender equality in your own family?	295	68.6	415	63.8
	p=0.107			
Have you received any gender related education?	133	30.9	161	24.8
	p=0.026			
Do you think there is gender equality in education institutions in Türkiye?	211	49.1	263	40.5
	p=0.005			
Have you been exposed to gender inequality at any point in your life?	152	35.3	371	57.1
	p<0.001			
Are you afraid of facing gender inequality in your career?	156	36.3	452	69.5
	p<0.001			
Do you think gender is important in choosing a career?	264	61.4	295	45.4
	p<0.001			

*: 'Yes' answers are shown as numbers and percentages, Chi-square test was used for the analysis

DISCUSSION

In this study, gender-role attitudes and related factors of first year students studying in five different faculties of a university were evaluated.

Students' mean GRAS score of was found to be

147.7±27.7 at the study. When compared with similar studies in the literature conducted on university students, it is noteworthy that the students' mean GRAS score was higher[5, 8,9]. Zeyneloğlu et al. claimed that getting a score of 95 or higher on the scale can be interpreted as an egalitarian attitude[7]. Accordingly, it can be said that the students who receive higher education have egalitarian gender role attitudes.

In the study, female students' GRAS scores were found to be higher than those of male students'. Many studies in the literature support that women's gender perceptions and gender-role attitudes are more egalitarian[2,8]. The reasons for the difference between gender perceptions and attitudes of women and men may stem from the fact that the roles assigned to men provide them with advantages. Situations such as violence, to which women are exposed, may reactively lead them towards an egalitarian attitude.

No relationship was found between the place where the students lived for the longest time and their gender attitudes in the study (Table 1). There are also studies that reported no relationship between the students' GRAS scores and their place of residence as supported by this very research[5]. The development status and socio-cultural structure of the place where they live are undoubtedly effective on individuals. In this study, because the places students live were not analysed in detail, there might not have been any relationship between the place the students live and their GRAS scores.

In the study, while it was found that the GRAS scores of the students whose mothers had higher education levels were higher, no relationship was found between their fathers'

education level and their GRAS scores (Table 1). Although there were different claims in the literature between the individuals' fathers' education level and their gender-role attitudes, individuals' mothers' having higher education and being employed were usually associated with a more egalitarian gender role attitude[3,6]. It can be stated that increasing women's education levels and employment rates will contribute to the development of egalitarian gender-role attitudes of individuals.

It has been observed that students with nuclear family structure have a more egalitarian gender role attitude (Table 1). Different results were obtained in different studies comparing family structure and gender role attitudes[3,6]. The differences of individuals in nuclear family and extended family structures may explain this effect. For example, there are higher rates of employed mothers in nuclear families. Therefore, as mentioned above, mothers' being employed were usually associated with a more egalitarian gender role attitude[3,6]. In extended families, however, the number of elderly individuals is higher, and as age progresses, the perception of gender attitudes may change. In a study conducted with healthcare professionals, it was observed that those over 35 got higher scores from GRAS, but it should be noted that this study did not include the elderly as it was conducted only on active workers[8].

In the literature, gender related education has been found to be effective in the development of gender-role attitudes contrary to ours[6]. Ergin et al. found that medical school students who participated in gender related education had more egalitarian gender-role attitudes than those who did not[6]. The fact that gender education was not questioned in terms of

content, trainers, methods, etc. in the study may have caused the education to appear ineffective.

In the study, it was observed that the mean GRAS scores of the students with low economic status were lower. However, different results have been reported on this subject in the literature. In addition to studies reporting that middle-income people have the highest mean GRAS scores[3], there are also studies reporting that those with lower economic status have higher mean GRAS scores[5].

It was observed that the mean GRAS scoresof the students who grew up in families where family members made decisions together was higher than thoseof the students who grew up in families where decisions were made by a single parent. This result suggests that family relations and parental behavior models are effective in the development of young people's gender role attitudes.

The mean GRAS score of students studying in medical school was higher than other students (153.1±27.6) (Table 1). In the study by Ergin et al.[6] on medical students, the mean GRAS score of the students was 158.7±21.7, similar to our study. Uçar et al.[3] found that the GRAS scores of undergraduate students in the field of health were higher than other faculties. It can, therefore, be stated that the gender-role attitudes of those educated in the field of health are more egalitarian. In the study, the mean GRAS score of theology students were found to be significantly lower than those of other faculties (Table 1). As in many areas of social life, the teachings of religion have also taken a great place in the production and reinforcement of the roles of gender. Belonging to different religious belief systems, different interpretations and applications of religious

rules are held responsible for individuals' different perspectives on gender[10]. The reinforcing effect of religion on traditional gender stereotypes is controversial in the literature. There are also studies showing that tradition is more effective than religion in maintaining existing gender norms[9]. In addition, there are studies indicating that female students of Theology Faculty are inconsistent and undecided on many issues related to gender and have both traditional and modern approaches[10].

Limitations

The study was conducted in only one university and its results cannot be reflected to all university students. However, the study was conducted on 1080 students from five different faculties and provided the opportunity to compare the gender-role attitudes of university students studying in different faculties.

CONCLUSION

University students had generally egalitarian gender-role attitudes, but the GRAS scores of theology faculty students were lower than the others. Being awoman, having a mother with higher education level and being a member of a nuclear family were associated with a more egalitarian attitudes; nevertheless, low economic level and having a family with only one decision maker (mother or father) were associated with less egalitarian attitudes. Increasing women's education levels and employment rates will contribute to the development of egalitarian gender-role attitudes of individuals. In order to reveal the effect of religion on gender roles more clearly, there is a need for new studies that will enable more detailed analyses to be made.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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