

Changes in gender role attitudes with adolescents' transitions to young adulthood



Gender role attitudes represent beliefs about appropriate behaviours for women and men and girls and boys. Adherence to traditional gender notions of masculinity and femininity may prevent adolescents from realising their aspirations and exercising informed choices in their lives. Adolescents with egalitarian gender role attitudes experience better outcomes in terms of self-efficacy and autonomy as they transition to adulthood.

The UDAYA survey assessed gender role attitudes among study participants and how the attitudes changed as girls and boys transitioned from early to late adolescence and from late adolescence to young adulthood in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. To assess gender role attitudes of boys and girls, the UDAYA survey asked respondents if they believed it was more important to educate boys than girls, whether it was wrong for girls to have male friends, if they thought girls should have a say in decisions about their marriage, whether girls like to be teased by boys, whether giving the kids a bath and feeding them were women's responsibility only, whether boys should partake in domestic work as much as girls, and whether financial decisions for a household were the sole domain of the father/husband.

A larger proportion of girls than boys expressed gender egalitarian attitudes at both waves of the UDAYA survey. A larger proportion of girls than boys, for example, reported that girls should be allowed to decide when they should



marry—61 percent of older girls compared with 54 percent of older boys so reported at wave 1, and by wave 2, while this percentage increased to 69 percent among girls, it remained the same among boys (52%).

Moreover, **expression of egalitarian gender role attitudes improved as younger boys and girls transitioned to later adolescence.** Similar changes were observed among older girls too as they transitioned into young adulthood. **But there was no significant improvement among older boys.**

Older boys and girls who got married during the inter-survey period reported much lower gender egalitarian attitudes than their unmarried counterparts. At the time of the second wave, 63 percent of unmarried boys scored high on the index of egalitarian gender role attitudes as compared with 42 percent of boys who were married in the interim; for girls, these figures were 71 percent and 57 percent, respectively. Importantly, boys and girls who got married in the interim had reported lower scores even before marriage and continued to have poor egalitarian attitudes after marriage. Older girls who were married before the first wave of the survey did not show any significant change in their attitudes by the time of the second wave.

In short, adolescents' perceptions of socially assigned gender seem to be changing. At the same time, it is important to **invest in young adolescents as this is the time to inculcate egalitarian gender role attitudes** and move away from stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. **Programmes that address gender equitable norms cannot be successful without involving gatekeepers, which include parents and adults who influence the lives of adolescents.** There is a need to sensitise these adults to equitable gender norms and thereby persuade them to adopt new notions about gender and egalitarian socialisation practices for boys and girls. **Teachers and healthcare providers play a crucial role in the lives of adolescents.** Sensitisation programmes for this cadre is essential to encourage gender egalitarian attitudes, increase girls' agency, and address these imbalances.