

Awareness and Attitude towards Gender Equity among Adolescents Attending Colleges in Urban Area of Tirupathi, Andhra Pradesh.

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Abstract:

Background: Gender equity is a fundamental aspect of ensuring equal opportunities and rights for every child, irrespective of their gender. During adolescence, individuals undergo significant physical, emotional, and social changes, making it a pivotal period for the development of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to gender. India has been ranked low on various indices that measure gender equality. Worldwide, nearly 1 in 4 girls in the ages of 15 and 19 - neither employed nor in education or training (compared to 1 in 10 boys). In this background the present study was conducted to find and create awareness and attitude towards gender equity among college going adolescents in urban area of Tirupathi.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among college going adolescents aged 16-19 years in four government colleges in urban area of Tirupathi, Andhra Pradesh from December 2021 to February 2022. Details on socio demographic characteristics and history Gender norm attitudes, gender equity were collected by personal interview using a pretested, semi-structured questionnaire. Descriptive data was summarized in percentages and Chi-square test was used to test the association.

Results and conclusion: A total of 263 students participated in the study with mean age of 18.15±1.01 years, majority being females (54%). Significant difference was observed in attitudes of boys and girls regarding gender equity. A significant improvement is noted in gender norms and attitude post health education, and also various acts pertaining to gender equity.

Keywords: Gender Equity, Gender Norms, Adolescence, Legislations.

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Introduction

Gender attitudes are defined as an individual's perceptions, beliefs, or support of gender norms. [1] Gender attitudes can be equitable or inequitable depending on the gender norm.

Adolescence (defined as ages 10–19 years) is one of the most critical periods of human development, as health and well-being at this age impacts long-term outcomes. [2] Further, construction of gender attitudes and perceptions of gender norms also occurs during this stage of human development

Gender norms are often defined as culturally shared expectations about the characteristics that men and women should possess and how they should behave. This includes socially acceptable rules about roles, traits, behavior status, and power associated with masculinity and femininity in a culture. These gender norms are the strongest factors influencing an adolescent's gender-related attitudes.

Gender inequalities remain prevalent in many parts of the world and continue to undermine the achievement of positive health outcomes. According to the Global Gender Gap Report, while no country has fully closed the gender gap, India fares particularly poorly.

Gender equity is a fundamental aspect of ensuring equal opportunities and rights for every child, irrespective of their gender. During adolescence, individuals undergo significant physical, emotional, and social changes, making it a pivotal period for the development of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to gender. [3] However, this phase also highlights the pronounced challenges faced by adolescent girls due to societal expectations and norms surrounding gender roles. These challenges include bearing a disproportionate burden of domestic work, facing pressure to marry early, risks of early pregnancy, and exposure to sexual and gender-based violence. Despite global efforts,

gender inequality persists, depriving girls of their rights and perpetuating cycles of poverty, exclusion, and violence. Nevertheless, various initiatives, such as legal reforms, education programs, and health interventions, aim to promote gender equity and empower adolescent girls. [4,5,6] By addressing the root causes of gender inequality and empowering girls to reach their full potential, these efforts strive to create a more just and inclusive society where every child, regardless of gender, has equal opportunities to thrive.

India has been ranked low on various indices that measure gender equality — including economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; political empowerment; and legal protection — due to multiple factors such as high levels of women discrimination in India as well as various discriminatory social norms, laws and cultural practices. Some of the key areas or examples of gender inequality in India where women face discrimination include less access to education and employment, under-representation in political positions, poorer health and nutrition than men, and the most obvious violence against women. Worldwide, nearly 1 in 4 girls in the ages of 15 and 19 - neither employed nor in education or training (compared to 1 in 10 boys) some 1 in 20 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 – around 13 million – have experienced forced sex.

There are limited studies exploring gender norms and gender equity in adolescence, especially in Andhra Pradesh and hence this study is undertaken to elicit the awareness and attitude towards gender equity.

Aims and Objectives:

1. To explore the awareness and attitudes towards gender equity among the adolescents.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of health education on gender equity by comparing baseline and follow up assessment

Material and Methods:

Study Design: Community based Cross-Sectional Study

Study Period: Study carried out from December 2021 to February 2022.

Study Setting: In randomly selected 4 different colleges across different streams (60 students from each college)

Study population: Adolescents of aged 16-19 years were selected for study.

Inclusion criteria: Adolescents of age 16-19 years attending selected colleges in urban area of Tirupati were included in the study.

Exclusion Criteria: Those who filled incomplete questionnaires.

Sample size: Based on pilot study prevalence of gender violence is 32%. $Q=68$. relative error = 20% of $P = 20 * 32/100 = 6.4$. Non response rate = 10%

On applying 4 PQ/ d2, the minimum sample size is 237.

Sampling technique Out of 12 government colleges (all with co-education), 4 different colleges across different streams namely government polytechnic college, government veterinary college, S. V. government arts college and Sri Venkateswara medical college were selected randomly by simple random sampling method. In each selected college, all the students aged 16-19 years were numbered serially and from them 60 students selected randomly by using computer generated random number method.

Study methods Ethical approval was obtained from institutional ethical committee at Sri Venkateswara medical college, Tirupathi. After getting prior permission from the principal of the respective colleges, the students were informed about the study. After taking written informed consent, the students were subjected for personal interview by using a pretested, semi-structured questionnaire which contains socio-demographic information and questions related to Gender norm attitudes, gender equity, household family decisions and legislations related to legal rights and women protection. Statistical analysis was done by using Epi - info 7.1.3 software. Frequency and percentage distribution were used to analyze the demographic variables and patterns of gender attitudes and gender equity, knowledge regarding legislations related to adolescents. Chi-square test was applied to find association between pre- test and posttest responses.

Results

Table 1 shows the socio demographic characteristics of the study participants. A total of 263 students were participated in the study with a mean age of 18.15 ± 1.01 years. Majority of students were aged 19 years (52.5%) followed by 18 years (20.2%). The proportion of females (54%) was slightly higher than males (46%). About 61.6% of fathers and 42.5% of mothers had high school and above level of education. Majority of fathers (35.4%) were clerks/shop-owners/farmers by occupation and 57% of mothers were homemakers. Nearly 56% of the study subjects belongs to middle class according to modified B. G. Prasad socio-economic classification. Around 90% of students were living in the family size of 4-6 members.

Table 1: Distribution of study subjects according to socio-demographic attributes, (n=263).

Age (Years)	
16	20 (7.6)
17	52 (19.8)
18	53 (20.2)
19	138 (52.5)
Gender	
Male	120 (46)
Female	143 (54)
Educational status of father	
High school and above	162 (61.6)
Middle school	32 (12.2)
Primary school	38 (14.4)
Illiterate	31 (11.8)
Educational status of mother	
High school and above	112 (42.5)
Middle school	35 (13.3)
Primary school	47 (17.9)
Illiterate	69 (26.2)
Occupational status of father	
Professional	50 (19.0)
Semi professional	17 (6.5)
Clerical-Shop-Farm	93 (35.4)
Skilled	29 (11.0)
Semiskilled	12 (4.6)
Unskilled	7 (2.7)
Unemployed	55 (20.9)
Occupational status of mother	
professional	26 (9.9)
semi professional	6 (2.3)
clerical-shop-farm	46 (17.5)
skilled	13 (4.9)
semiskilled	9 (3.4)
unskilled	13 (4.9)
unemployed	150 (57.0)
Socio-economic status	
Upper class	60 (22.8)
Upper middle class	64 (24.3)
Lower middle class	83 (31.6)
Upper lower class	38 (14.4)
Lower class	18 (6.8)
Family size (total no. of family members)	
Less than 4	18 (6.9)
4-6	239 (90.8)
7 and above	6 (2.3)

Table 2: Distribution of Gender norm attitudes among study subjects.

S. No.	Variable Name	Pre-test %			Post-test %		
		M	F	total	M	F	total
1	Boys should have more education than girls	77.6%	22.4%	25.5%	47.8%	52.2%	23%
		34.6%	65.4%	74.5%	41.6%	58.4%	77%
		Disagree					
2.	Girls sent to school only if they are not needed to help at home	65.1%	34.9%	16.3%	40%	60%	17.5%
		41.8%	58.2%	83.7%	43.6%	56.4%	82.5%
		Disagree					

3	boys should be more educated than girls is so that they will look after their parents when they are older Agree Disagree	65.9% 36.5%	34.1% 63.5%	31.2% 68.8%	47.2% 41.5%	52.8% 58.5%	26.5% 73.5%
4	Girls and boys should do same amount of household work Agree Disagree	63.3% 86.7%	36.7% 13.3%	76% 24%	35.5% 67%	64.5% 33%	76% 24%
5	Boys should get health services over girls Agree disagree	53.5% 42.7%	46.5% 57.3%	27% 73%	48% 41%	52% 59%	25% 75%
6	Girls are not allowed to roam outside during night Agree Disagree	55% 42.1%	45% 57.9%	27% 73%	51% 40%	49% 60%	25.5% 74.5%
7	Girls should be allowed to wear whatever they want without being harassed. Agree Disagree	36.7% 68%	63.3% 32%	71.5% 28.5%	37% 59%	63% 41%	73% 27%

Table 3: Distribution of Gender norm attitudes and gender equity attitudes among boys and girls.

S. No.	variable	Chi square value	P value S= Significant
1	boys should have more education than girls	37.02	P < 0.05; S
2	Girls sent to school only if they are not needed to help at home	7.87	P < 0.05; S
3	boys should be more educated than girls is so that they will look after their parents when they are older	19.64	P < 0.05; S
4	If there is a limited amount of money to pay for tutoring, it should be spent on boys first.	30.03	P < 0.05; S
5	Women should leave politics to the men	11.55	P < 0.05; S
6	woman can really rely on in her old age is her sons	9.18	P < 0.05; S
7	In a question of children's health, best to do whatever the father wants	7.18	P < 0.05; S
8	Girls should have just the same chance to work outside the homes as boys.	10.27	P < 0.05; S
9	Changing diapers, giving a bath, and feeding kids is the mother's responsibility	5.16	P < 0.05; S
10	A man should have the final word about decisions in his home	7.20	P < 0.05; S
11	Girls and boys should do same amount of household work	19.57	P < 0.05; S

Table 4: Distribution of Knowledge regarding legislations among study subjects

S. No.	Variable	Pre-test (n=263)		Post-test (n=200)	
		Yes%	(n)	Yes %	(n)
1	Compulsory education provided up to 8 th class	4.2	(11)	23	(46)
2	legal age for marriage for boys – 21 years	75.3	(198)	87	(174)
3	legal age for marriage for girls - 18 years	57	(150)	77.5	(155)
4	time limit for abortion is 20 weeks	14.8	(39)	17	(34)
5	Under POCSO act, Children less than 18 years are being covered.	43	(113)	54.5	(109)
6	Punishment for persons fails to do mandatory reporting is 6 months imprisonment+ Fine	0.8	(2)	13.5	(27)
7	police personnel should report to the child welfare committee within 1 day.	44.1	(116)	56.5	113
8	child sexual abuse case must be disposed with in 1 year	45.2	(119)	58.5	117

Discussion

The mean age in this study was 18.15 years.

Zarina Mohd Zain, et al. reported most of the respondents were female (46.2%). In the present study also most of the respondents are female (54.4%) [7]

From the findings it can be concluded that most of the students understand on the issue of gender equity and their knowledge and attitudes are improved after health education session on gender equity.[8]

Gender discrimination in India continues to harm the lives of girls. The mindset and attitudes that exist within communities and schools, consciously and subconsciously, become an obstacle in a girl's life. Adolescence is a key developmental stage as both boys and girls begin to be influenced by social expectations and begin to recognize the restrictions on their behaviors due to their gender.[9]

Dalal, Lee et al reported that Left untouched, inequitable gender attitudes persist into adulthood, and perpetuate disparities that exist from gender inequality, such as violence, poverty, lower education, employment, health and a lack of safety for women and girls.[10]

Neelima TM, Abin Abraham et al, a study conducted in Kottayam district, Kerala found that almost 48% students have the knowledge on what is POCSO Act.[11]

In present study 67.3% students have the knowledge on what is POCSO Act.

Conclusion

From this study we can conclude that there is significant difference in attitudes of boys and girls regarding gender equity.

In this study during pre-test awareness level regarding legislations is low and after providing health education awareness levels has been increased. So with repeated health education sessions we can bring out change in their attitudes in support of gender equality and also rights.

Limitations: The study subjects might not have revealed the true picture either due to hesitation or fear of school / college authorities. As most of the study subjects has not revealed the details of the person responsible for violence, the data was not included in the results.

Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee

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