

Views of Male University Students About Social Gender Roles; An Example From East of Turkey

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Abstract Social gender roles refer to the roles that are traditionally associated with women and men. Social gender role includes the personal attributes and behaviors which are culturally assigned to women and men. This study was conducted to determine the views of male students at Caucasian University Health School on social gender roles at work, social life, marriage, and family life. The study was conducted on male students studying at Kars Health School, Nursing and Health Officers Department during 2007–2008 academic year. The students were given 24 statements relating to work life, social life, marriage, and family life to determine their views on social gender roles. Results indicated that 30.2% of the male students stated that women could work in a paid job, 56.9% believed in equality of women and men, 44.8% approved honor killing, 40.5% said the girls should receive education as far as they can go, 54.3% said the role of the women was to “provide moral support to their husband and children”, 37.1% stated that husbands could beat their wives under certain circumstances, 52.6% said they witnessed violence in their family

at some stage of their lives, 51.7% said the women’s environment should be decided by the spouses together, 25% said the women should engage in sexual intercourse with their spouses even if they did not want to. Men who thought the role of the women was to do housework/giving birth to children/looking after the elderly members of the house, and who approved honor killing and disapproved working of their spouses, and who did not believe in equality of women and men, were found to support violence to women by men. Moreover, the students who witnessed violence at some stage of their lives supported this view as well. It was considered that the students should be educated on the definition of violence and situations involving violence, and directed to consultant services.

Keywords Gender role · Women’s role · Students · Perception

Gender is a result of complex interactions between biological characteristics and social, cultural, political, ideological and

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economic structures that result in equalities between men and women (Üner 2008). The universal declaration of human rights says: “All women and men have the right to equally benefit from right to live, health and work without any discrimination.” However, from the past to the present day, there has been an inequality model valuing men more than women in many areas of social life. This inequality model is particularly dominant in work and social life, marriage, and the family. The requirement for prevention of the negative effects of inequalities in these areas on women’s social status was first addressed in 1995, at the 4th World Women Conference in Beijing. In this conference, it was concluded that the social gender perspective should be included in all programs and policies in order to attain equality between women and men (World Health Organization WHO 1998). The women who are exposed to social gender discrimination face inequalities in having political, legal, social, and economic rights, in exercising such rights, and owning resources such as land and capital (Üner 2008).

Social gender, which is based on non-biological differences between women and men, and social structuring of the roles undertaken and the relationships, is used to refer to the cultural social role of an individual, psychological internal definitions, and his/her representation. The gender is determined by nature while the social gender is determined by the culture. Further, conceptions about social gender identity are formed at very early ages together with the related sexual attitudes and tendencies (Üner 2008). Social gender is a concept relating to how we are regarded, perceived, considered, and what we are expected to do as women and men by society, rather than the biological differences (Akın and Demirel 2003). Social gender roles are another concept covered by the social gender concept. Social gender roles refer to the roles that are traditionally associated with women and men. Social gender role includes the personal attributes and behaviors (roles) which are culturally assigned to women and men (Dökmen 2004).

In several studies conducted on social gender roles (Basow 1992; Bhasin 2003; Dökmen 2004; Staggenborg 1998) it was found that there were significant differences between women and men, particularly in working, social, marital and family life. When reflections of social gender roles on working life are examined, the roles assigned to women include working in a job with a lower status and payment, and taking permission from their husbands to work. As for social life, there are views, such as women should not go out alone at night, and should not live alone. In the context of family life, women are expected to conceal that they are exposed to violence by their husbands, and engage in housework, raising children, and cleaning the house. In marriage, women are expected not to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage, and raise their status by giving birth to a boy. Men, on the other hand, are assigned the opposite roles in these areas (Atlı and

Özvarış 1998; Bhasin 2003; Çelebi, N 1997; Dökmen 1996; Şenel-Akgün 1993). Consequently, public and political works have been associated with men, and housework and family affairs have been associated with women (Akın and Demirel 2003). The above discriminations have negative effects on women’s social life. Therefore, women have not been able to reach the desired status within the society; many of them have remained behind men, which has resulted in gender inequality. However, in today’s societies where women have higher levels of education and penetrate into working life, the traditional roles undertaken by women and men have started to change in favor of women (Attanapola 2003). The increasing level of education provides a modern perspective in terms of social gender roles, and becomes a determining factor in social gender equality and justice in favor of women. In addition, it is of vital importance that awareness and sensitivity is raised within society regarding social gender roles to provide equality for women and men and raise the status of women. This, as a first step, requires determination of social views on social gender roles. In our society, which has a traditional structure in general, it is important to study the roles assigned to women and men in working, family, marital, and social life from the perspective of university students.

Studying the implications of social roles assigned to women and men on university students is significant in terms of revealing the views of the students about social gender equality in universities that aim to produce intellectual individuals. Moreover, determination of the views of young people on social gender roles may help shape the views of the next generations about social gender roles on the basis of equality. This study was conducted to determine the views of male students at Caucasian University Health School on social gender roles at work, social, marital and family life.

Methods

Participants

The study was conducted with participation of 116 male students out of 191 male students studying at Kars Health School, Nursing and Health Officers Department during 2007–2008 academic years. Data were collected using the questionnaire prepared on the basis of literature (Atlı and Özvarış 1998; Dermen, 2004; Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Directorate General on the Status Of Women DGSW 2001; Gönüllü and İçli 2001; İnanç, 2003; World Health Organization 1998). The first section of the questionnaire consisted of 10 questions relating to descriptive information (age, grade, region where the family lives, the geographical region the family lives, type of location,

family type, educational status of father and mother, profession of father and mother, family income). The second section included 24 statements aiming to determine the views of the students about social gender roles. The statements were related to working (four statements), social (seven statements), marriage life (four statements) and family (nine statements) life.

Before the questionnaire was distributed, the students were informed about the purpose of the study, their verbal consent was obtained, and they were administered the questionnaire. The classes were revisited for the students who were not present during the application of the questionnaire to reach all of the students. The students who did not give consent to the study, and those who were continuously absent, were excluded.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS 11.5 for Windows® software was used for statistical analysis of the data. Mean, standard deviation, and percentages were used in the evaluation of descriptive statistics. In the analytical evaluation, Chi-square test and Fisher’s exact test were used for the comparison of non-parametric data. A $p < .05$ was accepted for significance.

Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics of The Male Students Participating in the Study

For 116 male students participating in the study; the mean age was 22.06 ± 2.10 , 58.2% were living in urban area, and 64.7% had nuclear family structure. Table 1 shows sociodemographic characteristics of the students participating in the study.

Distribution of the Views of Male Students about Statements Relating to Women’s “Working Life”

Results showed that 47.4% of the male students stated that women could engage in some outdoor activities about the house such as shopping, and 30.2% said the women could work in a paid job. When students were asked about the impact of women working, they said it would contribute to the family budget (77.6%), the women would give better educate her children (62.9%), and this would facilitate protection and exercise of women’s rights (52.6%). Further, 39.7% of the male students stated that women would be excessively exhausted and worn if they worked, 31.9% said they would have less time for children, 22.4% said they would pay less attention to their husbands, 17.2% said the family bonds would be weakened, and 12.5% said women

Table 1 Distribution of some sociodemographic characteristics of the male students participating in the study

	Number	Percentage
Age Group (n=116)		
18–19	11	9.5
20–24	97	83.6
25–28	8	6.9
Grade (n=116)		
1.	21	18.1
2.	36	31.0
3.	21	18.1
4.	38	32.8
Location (n=115)		
Village-town	48	41.8
City	67	58.2
Family Type		
Nuclear	75	64.7
Consanguineal	38	32.8
Separated	3	2.6
Father’s Educational Status		
Primary School and Less	71	61.2
Above Primary School	45	38.8
Mother’s Educational Status		
Primary School and Less	101	87.1
Above Primary School	15	12.9
Father’s Profession		
Unemployed	46	39.7
Worker	30	25.9
Officer	17	14.7
Pensioner	23	19.8
Mother’s Profession		
Unemployed	111	95.7
Pensioner	3	2.6
Worker	1	0.9
Officer	1	0.9

would bring their problems at work to home. Also 36.2% of the male students thought women could work in a job of their preference outside home, and 69% thought their spouses should work (Table 2).

Distribution of the Views of Male Students about Statements Relating to Women’s “Social Life”

Data indicated that 40.5% of the male students stated the girls should be allowed to receive education as far as they could, and wanted this mostly (41.4%) because they want the girls to be an asset for the country. Also 4.3% of the students said the girls should not receive any education at all, and 62.1% thought it should be men who decide where the women could go at night. Those who believed in gender

Table 2 Distribution of the views of male students about statements relating to women's "working life"

Statement about "Working Life"	Number	Percentage
Views about Women's Working		
Women may engage in some outdoor activities for house such as shopping	55	47.4
Women can work in a paid job	35	30.2
Women can only do housework	22	19.0
Women can work on fields or gardens	4	3.4
Results of Women's Working		
Contributes to family budget	90	77.6
Women give better education to children	73	62.9
Facilitates protection and exercise of women's rights	61	52.6
Increases life experience, skills and strength of women	58	50.0
Allows women to share the family responsibilities	50	43.1
Women is excessively exhausted and worn	46	39.7
Women need self development and improvement	42	36.2
Women spare less time for children	37	31.9
Women act more understanding and compatible at home	31	26.7
Helps women to do better plan for housework	30	25.9
Women pay less attention to husband	26	22.4
Family bonds weaken	20	17.2
Women reflect their problems at work	15	12.5
Social relations of the family weaken	11	9.5
Students Favoring Women's Working in their preferred jobs outside home		
Students favoring working of their spouses	80	69.0

equality resulted 56.9%, while 44.8% approved of honor killing. When the men were asked the reason for their approving of honor killing, 11.2% of them said they would blame themselves very much if they would not kill, 6.0% said they would be alienated within the society, and 4.3% said this was ordered by religion. Further 57.8% of the men said the crime of rape was the fault of both women and men, 24.1% said it was because of men, and 18.1% said because of women (Table 3).

Distribution of the Views of the Students about the Statements Relating to "Family Life" and "Marriage Life"

About half of the male students participating in the study (54.3%) said that the role of the women was to "provide moral support to their husbands and children", 73.3% said women and men should be equally participating in household spending, and 75% said housework should be shared between the spouses. Approximately 50% of the students said that the women and men should manage the house together, 43.1% said the women should be free to

Table 3 Distribution of the views of male students about statements relating to women's "social life"

Statements about "Social Life"	Number	Percentage
Views about girls' education		
Receive education as far as they could	47	40.5
Graduate from university	38	32.8
Graduate from high school	18	15.5
Graduate from primary school	8	6.9
Should not receive education	5	4.3
Views about benefits of girls' receiving education		
Beneficial to the country and nation	48	41.4
Proper management of marriage and better raising children	36	31.0
Being educated	24	20.7
Having a profession	8	6.9
Those believing in gender equality	66	56.9
Views about Who should decide whether women can go whatever they want at night		
Women	4	3.4
Men	72	62.1
Both	40	34.5
Those approving honor killing		
Reason for approving honor killing		
Blame himself if does not kill	13	11.2
Alienate within the society if does not kill	7	6.0
Ordered by religion	5	4.3
Views about origin of the crime of rape		
Women	21	18.1
Men	28	24.1
Both	67	57.8

choose what political party they would vote for, and 48.3% said women and men should decide together what association and organizations the women would participate.

In addition 37.1% of the study participants said that men could beat their wives under certain circumstances. The reasons provided by the male students were women's not obeying ethical rules (24.1%), women's disobedience to men (5.2%), women's demonstrating inappropriate behaviors to their husbands and families (3.4%), disrespect (2.6%), and not doing housework (1.7%). Further 44% of the sample stated that the women could spend their money as they preferred, 51.7% said the spouses should decide together on the people the women met, and 25% said that women should have sexual intercourse with their husband even if they did not want to (Table 4).

Factors Affecting Violence Against Women

The men who thought the role of the women was to do housework/giving birth to children/looking after the elderly

Table 4 Distribution of the views of the students about the statements relating to “family life” and “marriage life”

Statements on “Family Life”	Number	Percentage
Women’s role		
Providing moral support to husband and children	63	54.3
Organizing social relations of the family	43	37.1
Doing housework, giving birth	7	6.0
Contributing to family budget	3	2.6
Person Deciding on the Household Spending		
Together with the spouse	85	73.3
Men	28	24.1
Women	2	1.7
Everyone should decide by themselves	1	0.9
Those thinking housework should be shared between spouses	87	75.0
Views about who should manage the house		
Women	10	8.6
Men	48	41.4
Both	58	50.0
Views about who should decide on what political party women vote for		
Women	50	43.1
Men	26	22.4
Both	40	34.5
Views about who should decide on associations and organizations the women participate in		
Women	27	23.3
Men	33	28.4
Both	56	48.3
Statements on “Marriage Life”		
Men can beat their wives under certain circumstances	43	37.1
When women disobeys ethical rules		24.1
Disobedience to men		5.2
Behaviors not appropriate to the husband or family		3.4
Disrespect		2.6
Not doing housework		1.7
Those thinking women could spend their money as they prefer	51	44.0
Views about who should decide on whom the women meet		
Women	20	17.2
Men	36	31.0
Both	60	51.7
Those thinking women should have sexual intercourse with husband even if they do not want	29	25.0

members of the house, and who approved of honor killing and disapproved of their spouses working, and who did not believe in equality of women and men, were found to

support violence against women. Moreover, students who witnessed violence at some part in their lives supported this view as well ($p < .05$) (Table 5).

Finally, 52.6% of the men stated that they witnessed violence at some stage of their lives. Forms of violence were physical (26.7%), verbal (22.4%), emotional (0.9%), economic (5.2%), and sexual (3.4%).

Discussion

Studies which determine the traditional and non-traditional perceptions of students about social gender roles (Keith and Jacqueline 2002; Mahaffy and Ward 2002; Rosenkrantz et al. 1968; Trommsdorff and Iwawaki 1989), reported that male students adopted traditional roles in terms of gender roles more than females. The same situation was seen in Turkey also. (Aşılı 2001; Güvenç 1996; Vefikuluçay et al. 2007). Violence is a significant problem in both developed and non-developed societies. According to the registered data, 25–53% of the women are exposed to physical violence (Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Directorate General on the Status Of Women DGWS 2009) in Turkey where men see themselves as holder of power and strength in the family.

Views of Male Students about Statements Relating to Women’s “Working Life” and “Social Life”

It was seen that views of the male students about women’s participation to working life generally supported the prejudices relating to social gender roles. Similar findings were found in other Turkish studies (Vefikuluçay et al. 2007; Yılmaz et al. 2009). The reason for the traditional attitude of the men toward women may be the fact that the social attitudes are in favor of men and this is supported by the society. In Turkey, despite positive attempts and development about women’s participation in working life, the social status of women have not improved at the desired levels. Currently, only 41.5% of women were in work life, 40% were in agricultural sector (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies HUIPS 2009).

Besides working life, this study demonstrated that men had traditional views about decisions on social life of women. Two third of men (62.1%) thought that it should be the men who decide whether women would go at night. Unfortunately, nearly half of the male students approved honor killing (44.8%). The study conducted by Vefikuluçay et al. (2007) also demonstrated the same statement. Because of security problems going out at night, they might think that women can not protect their virginity. Women’s protection of their sexuality is a distinct feature not only in Turkish society but also in patriarchic societies (Kardam

Table 5 Factors affecting violence against women

	Violence (+) Number (%)	Violence (-) Number (%)	X^2	P
Demographic characteristics				
Age				
18–19	4 (36.4)	7(63.6)	0.003	1.000 ^b
20 years old or above	39 (37.1)	66(62.9)		
Mother's Educational Status				
Primary School and Less	39 (38.6)	62 (61.4)	0.799	0.371
Above Primary School	4 (26.7)	11 (73.3)		
Father's Educational Status				
Primary School and Less	29 (40.8)	42 (59.2)	1.119	0.290
Above Primary School	14 (31.1)	31 (68.9)		
Family Type				
Nuclear	31 (41.3)	44 (58.7)	1.654	0.198
Other	12 (29.3)	29 (70.7)		
Mother's Profession				
Has a job contributing to income	3 (60)	2 (40)	1.178	0.358 ^b
Does not have a job contributing to income	40 (36)	71(64)		
Father's Profession				
Has a job contributing to income	19(40.4)	28(59.6)		
Pensioner	7(30.4)	16(69.6)	0.661	0.718
Unemployed	17(37)	29(63)		
Income level				
Mid-low	31 (41.3)	44 (58.7)	1.654	0.198
High	12 (29.3)	29 (70.7)		
Residence				
Rural	22(45.8)	26(54.2)	3.081	0.079
Urban	20(29.9)	47(70.1)		
Social Gender Roles				
Family life				
Decisions affecting the family are taken by:				
Women	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)	6.261	0.044
Men	23(47.9)	25 (52.1)		
Both	15 (25.9)	43 (74.1)		
Household spending is decided by:				
Men	8 (28.6)	20 (71.4)	1.142	0.285
Other ^a	35 (39.8)	53 (60.2)		
Women's role				
Housework/giving birth/looking after elderly ones	7 (100)	–	12.647	0.001 ^b
Moral support to husband and children/organizing social relations/ contribution to budget	36 (33)	73 (67)		
Working Life				
Views about Women's Working				
Work on fields, gardens/housework/shopping	34 (42.0)	47 (58.0)	2.770	0.096
Working in a paid job	9 (25.7)	26 (74.3)		
Views about Wife's Working				
Approve	25(31.3)	55(68.8)	3.742	0.053
Disapprove	18(50)	18(50)		
Social Life				

Table 5 (continued)

	Violence (+) Number (%)	Violence (–) Number (%)	χ^2	P
Views about Girl's Education				
Approve	39 (35.1)	72(64.9)	4.128	0.062 ^b
Disapprove	4 (80.0)	1 (20.0)		
Views about honor killing				
Approve	26(50)	26(50)	6.756	0.009
Disapprove	17(26.6)	47(73.4)		
Views about gender equality				
Believe	19(28.8)	47(71.2)	4.501	0.034
Not believe	24(48)	26 (52)		
Marriage Life				
Undesired sexual intercourse by women				
Approve	12 (41.4)	17 (58.6)	0.308	0.579
Disapprove	31 (35.6)	56 (64.4)		
Witnessing Violence at some Stage of Life				
Yes	29(47.5)	32(52.5)	6.048	0.014
No	14(25.5)	41(74.5)		

^a Women/women-men together/everyone themselves, ^b Fisher's exact test

2004). The men are expected to play active role in protecting their family's honor, while the women are expected to protect their virginity and become good mothers to children (Gönüllü and İçli 2001). In this study, it was hopeful that, most of the students approved that girls should at least receive primary education.

Views of the Students about the Statements Relating to "Family Life" and "Marriage Life"

It was seen that half of the male students had egalitarian views about the statements on family and marriage life. One fourth of the men thought that the women should have sexual intercourse with their husbands even if they did not want. Three fourth of the male students had egalitarian views about sharing housework in marriage life, and half of them said men should decide on spending money and whom the women could meet. This could be interpreted as men adopt traditional views more. It was a dreary result because participants were university students receiving academic education. This might be a result of students' family structures and lives. According to HUIPS 2008 data, the women with five or more children, living in rural areas and the eastern region tended to adopt gender roles, traditional values and attitudes more than other women (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies HUIPS 2009).

Factors Affecting Violence Against Women

In this study, found that the male students accepting the roles of women in family life, social life and working life,

and those who had witnessed violence at some stage of their lives supported the view that violence could be used towards women. Tolerance to violence is the most important barrier on the way of improving women's social status. Turkish national domestic violence study stated that majority of the women who were exposed to violence tended to "normalize" violence as a concept (Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Directorate General on the Status Of Women DGWS 2009).

In literature there are several studies suggesting that women, see violence "right" under certain circumstances. In a rural study conducted in Egypt, 80% of the women (Heise and Garcia-Moreno 2002), and nearly 70% of the women in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru, Somalia, Thailand and Tanzania thought physical violence was justified under certain circumstances (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005). There are not significant differences between the regions in terms of justifiability of beating. The women who approve beating are 11% overall Turkey, and 14% in the eastern region (Altınay and Arat 2008). Approval of any kind of violence was 25% (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies HUIPS 2009). In our study we found this rate was 37.1%. In Altınay and Arat's study, women explained the reasons for physical violence as disobedience (13%), economic problems (14%), marital conflicts (6%), psychological problems (9%). A significant finding of this study was that majority of the women wanted equality in terms of sharing housework, working outside, deciding on financial issues, and education of girls (Altınay and Arat 2008). The reasons for physical violence in our study was found as, women's not obeying to

ethical rules (24.1%), women's disobedience to men (5.2%), women's demonstrating inappropriate behaviors to their husbands and families (3.4%). 25% of the students said that the women should have sexual intercourse with their husband even if they did not want. A significant finding of our study was that men who witnessed violence (especially physical abuse) at some stage of their lives supported violence against women more.

Conclusion

It was significant in this study that nearly half of the male students approved honor killing, supported physical violence against women under certain circumstances and witnessed violence at some stage of their lives. Male students who did not believe in equality of women and men, who witnessed violence at some stage of their lives and who agreed social gender roles such as women's wifery duties, much more supported the view that men could beat their wives. Results showed that male students had traditional views about social gender roles. Although we expect university students as intellectual individuals results showed the opposite. Equality based on social gender roles must be in every section of the society. It was considered that the students should be educated on the definition of violence, situations involving violence and directed to consultancy services.

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