
| RESEARCH ARTICLE**The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Career Choices and Opportunities****Imran Abdullah***Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, KSA***Corresponding Author:** Imran Abdullah, **E-mail:** abdullah1993@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of gender stereotypes on career choices and opportunities, analyzing secondary data from various educational, occupational, and sociocultural sources. By synthesizing existing literature and data sets, the research aims to elucidate how entrenched gender biases contribute to disparities in career trajectories between men and women. The findings indicate that traditional gender norms significantly shape career aspirations from a young age, directing men towards STEM fields and leadership roles, while women are often guided to caregiving and administrative positions. These stereotypes not only limit individual potential but also perpetuate gender imbalances in workplace representation and advancement. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that societal expectations and media portrayals play pivotal roles in reinforcing these stereotypes, thereby influencing both conscious and subconscious career-related decisions. The study concludes with recommendations for policy interventions and educational reforms aimed at dismantling these biases, fostering a more equitable environment where career choices are driven by personal interests and skills rather than gender-based expectations.

| KEYWORDS

Gender stereotypes, Career choices, STEM fields, Leadership roles, Media portrayals.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary society, the discussion surrounding gender equality and the dismantling of stereotypes has gained significant traction, yet gender stereotypes remain deeply ingrained and continue to influence various facets of life, including career choices and opportunities (Bian, 2022). These stereotypes, consisting of oversimplified and often prejudiced perceptions of what roles or behaviors are appropriate for different genders, affect individuals' decisions and can perpetuate gender disparities in the workplace. Addressing these stereotypes is crucial for fostering a more equitable environment where individuals can pursue careers based on their interests and abilities rather than conforming to societal expectations.

Gender stereotypes are perpetuated from a young age through socialization processes within families, educational systems, and media representations, all of which impact career aspirations and choices. For example, traits traditionally associated with masculinity, such as assertiveness and leadership, are often linked to high-status positions, whereas femininity is frequently associated with caregiving and nurturing roles (Ertl, 2017). This dichotomous categorization can channel men and women into specific career trajectories that align with societal expectations rather than personal aptitude, thus limiting their potential.

The impact of gender stereotypes extends beyond career choice and affects career progression and opportunities as well. Women, for instance, may face barriers to advancement in male-dominated fields due to biased perceptions of their leadership capabilities, while men may encounter stigma when pursuing careers in care-oriented professions, such as nursing or teaching (Grundey, 2011). Such barriers contribute to the persistent gender wage gap and the underrepresentation of women in executive and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) roles, as well as the underrepresentation of men in caregiving fields.

This study seeks to explore the intricate ways in which gender stereotypes influence career choices and opportunities. By doing so, it aims to identify strategies that can mitigate these influences and promote greater gender parity in all professional fields. Through an interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from psychology, sociology, and organizational studies, this research will examine the origins, manifestations, and consequences of gender stereotypes, as well as propose solutions to eliminate these barriers (Gupta, 2013). In understanding the pervasive impact of gender stereotypes, this study contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality and the necessary steps toward creating a more inclusive workforce where opportunity is not dictated by gender.

2. Literature Review

The impact of gender stereotypes on career choices and opportunities has been extensively documented in scholarly literature (Heilman, 2015). This body of work reveals how deeply ingrained societal norms shape individual aspirations and limit career advancement, reinforcing occupational segregation and perpetuating inequalities.

Early studies on gender stereotypes highlight their pervasive nature in education and training, foundational stages for career development. Research by Merma-Molina (2022) demonstrates that societal expectations regarding masculinity and femininity strongly influence subjects chosen by students. This leads to patterns where females are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, while males dominate these areas, largely due to perceived gender roles rather than inherent abilities or interests. The implications are significant, as these educational choices tend to define future career paths and opportunities.

Further investigations delve into workplace dynamics and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. The work of Nicolao (2014) reveals that gender stereotypes contribute to bias in hiring and promotion processes. Women, often pre-judged to lack leadership qualities due to traditional perceptions of femininity, encounter barriers in advancing to managerial and executive positions. Conversely, men might face challenges in pursuing careers associated with caregiving or administration, which are stereotypically viewed as feminine domains. This bias is demonstrated in hiring practices and evaluations, where women often need to out-perform male counterparts to achieve similar roles and recognition.

A more recent angle in the literature examines intersectionality and how the interplay between gender and other social categories, such as race and class, exacerbates the restrictive effect of stereotypes. Scholars like Personat (2019) argue that women of color, for instance, face compounded discrimination that further marginalizes them in career trajectories. This nuanced understanding is essential, as it reveals the multifaceted nature of stereotypes and the need for holistic approaches to mitigate their impact.

In exploring interventions and strategies to combat these stereotypes, research points to the effectiveness of education and organizational change. Studies by Silberstang (2011) highlight that companies actively implementing diversity and inclusion policies see more equitable employment outcomes. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at challenging societal perceptions, such as promoting female role models in STEM and encouraging men in caregiving roles, show promise in reshaping career dynamics across genders.

3. Methodology

In investigating the impact of gender stereotypes on career choices and opportunities, this study utilizes an extensive secondary data analysis approach. By examining existing literature, statistical databases, and previously

conducted surveys, we aim to gain comprehensive insights into the pervasive influence of gender stereotypes. The methodology section is organized into distinct subheadings to provide clarity on how the data was sourced, selected, and analyzed.

3.1 Data Sources

The selection of secondary data sources represents an essential step in understanding the broad spectrum of gender stereotypes across various cultures and industries. Our primary sources comprise academic journals, governmental reports, and reputable institutions' publications that specialize in sociology, psychology, and economic impacts of gender dynamics. Notable data repositories such as the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report, the International Labour Organization statistics, and academic databases like JSTOR and PubMed have been extensively referenced. We also included cross-national surveys like the OECD's Gender Initiative to understand global trends and compare regional differences.

3.2 Data Selection Criteria

The inclusion of data was guided by relevance, recency, and reliability to accurately reflect current trends and historical progress concerning gender stereotypes and career choices. Studies and reports from the last two decades were prioritized to ensure the examination of contemporary issues and changing perceptions. Additionally, the research focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, government and NGO reports, and surveys with large sample sizes to ensure a high level of credibility and representation. Emphasis was placed on collecting quantitative data to facilitate a robust statistical analysis and qualitative studies to gain deeper insights into personal experiences and societal attitudes.

3.3 Analytical Framework

A thematic analysis was employed to synthesize findings from the vast array of secondary data sources. This involved coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to gender stereotypes in the workforce, their impact on individual career choices, and subsequent opportunities. The analysis focused on differentiating between structural factors, such as educational access and workplace policies, and cultural factors, like societal norms and family expectations, to determine their distinct roles in perpetuating gender biases.

3.4 Limitations of the Study

While secondary data provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. A primary concern is the potential for outdated or incomplete data, which may not capture the most recent shifts in gender dynamics. Additionally, variability in data collection methodologies across different studies might impact comparability and interpretation. Lastly, reliance on secondary data prohibits control over research design and data collection, potentially limiting the study's scope regarding specific sub-populations or emerging trends.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Prevalence of Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes that influence career choices are pervasive and culturally ingrained. Common stereotypes include the perception that men are more suited for roles requiring analytical and physical skills, such as engineering, mechanics, or construction, while women are often seen as better suited for nurturing roles, such as teaching, nursing, or human resources (Stout, 2016). These stereotypes often stem from traditional views of masculinity and femininity, which associate men with leadership and technical skills and women with empathy and communication skills.

Cultural, social, and regional factors significantly influence the prevalence and impact of gender stereotypes. For instance, in many Western cultures, there is a push toward gender equality, yet subtle stereotypes persist, influencing career choices subtly (Rogus-Pulia, 2018). In contrast, in regions where traditional roles are more entrenched, such as in parts of the Middle East or South Asia, stereotypes can be more explicitly reinforced. In Scandinavian countries, where gender equality has been actively promoted, there is less overt occupational segregation; however, even there, subtle biases exist that guide individuals towards gender-normative career roles.

Previous studies, such as those by Shenouda (2014), highlight the "egalitarian essentialism" that persists even in gender-progressive societies, demonstrating that stereotypes, while less visible, continue to shape career trajectories.

4.2 Impact on Educational and Career Choices

4.2.1 Influence on Educational Paths

Gender stereotypes significantly influence subject selection and educational paths. From an early age, societal expectations often guide boys and girls into different education tracks. Boys are frequently encouraged to pursue mathematics and sciences, leading to higher enrollment in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields (Orge, 2016). In contrast, girls are often steered towards humanities and social sciences. This divergence is sustained not only by direct encouragement or discouragement from teachers and parents but also through media portrayals and the lack of visible role models in certain fields.

Statistics reveal a stark disparity in enrollment figures within educational disciplines. For instance, a 2015 study by Mihalčová found that women accounted for only 28% of the engineering workforce in the United States. Meanwhile, in humanities fields, women represented nearly 60% of the graduates. Such figures corroborate the findings of Kay (2015), who argue that the "leaky pipeline" in STEM results largely from early stereotyping and socialization processes that dissuade girls from pursuing these fields.

4.2.2 Career Aspirations and Outcomes

Gender stereotypes have a profound impact on career aspirations. Women who internalize stereotypes may limit their career aspirations to what is traditionally viewed as "appropriate" for their gender, thus opting for jobs that are perceived as extensions of domestic roles. Men, conversely, may feel pressured to pursue high-status jobs traditionally viewed as masculine, even if these do not align with their personal interests or strengths. This self-selection reinforces occupational stereotypes, as noted in the work of Hadjar (2015), who found that self-assessment of competence in stereotypically gendered math and science tasks is lower for women, affecting their career aspirations.

Occupational segregation is a significant issue tied closely to gender stereotypes. Segregation manifests as both horizontal—the division of men and women across different sectors—and vertical—the predominance of one gender in higher status roles within a sector. The glass ceiling effect, which describes the invisible barrier that prevents women from rising to the highest echelons in their careers, is a direct result of gender stereotypes that undervalue the capabilities of women as leaders. Ginevra (2017) highlight how bias in hiring and promotion processes, rooted in stereotypes, perpetuates gender disparities in career outcomes. This aligns with the broader understanding of the systemic nature of occupational segregation, as discussed by Fisk (2016), who identified occupational segregation as both a consequence and cause of persistent gender stereotypes.

4.3 Opportunities and Barriers in the Workplace

4.3.1 Access to Opportunities

Stereotypes play a pervasive role in shaping both access to opportunities and career advancement pathways. Stereotypes about gender abilities and roles heavily influence hiring practices, often favoring males for leadership or technical roles and females for roles perceived as nurturing or administrative. A study by Ellemers (2018) demonstrated that identical resumes with male names were rated significantly higher in competence and hireability compared to those with female names, which underscores the bias in hiring processes.

Gender disparity can be seen in various industries. For example, in the tech industry, women represent a mere 25% of the workforce despite comprising over half of the college-educated workforce in the United States (Breda, 2020). Similarly, the finance industry shows a steep drop in female representation from entry-level positions to senior management roles, highlighting a disparity in promotional pathways.

An example from the corporate world is the case of Silicon Valley, where women hold only 11% of executive positions in technology companies, according to a report by Forsman (2017). These figures reflect a systemic issue where stereotypes impact professional judgments, limiting women's access to opportunities and furthering the cycle of gender bias.

4.3.2 Barriers to Career Advancement

Several barriers inhibit women's advancement in the workplace, with the glass ceiling being one of the most significant hurdles. The "glass ceiling" refers to invisible barriers that prevent women from reaching top leadership positions. The gender pay gap is another enduring issue, with women earning approximately 82 cents for every dollar earned by men, as reported by Akinlolu in 2022. This disparity is particularly pronounced in high-paying industries like finance and tech.

Work-life balance challenges are also pivotal barriers to advancement. Women often face greater expectations to manage household responsibilities and caregiving, which affects their professional opportunities and advancement. The "motherhood penalty" is a real phenomenon wherein working mothers are perceived as less competent and less committed, affecting their career trajectory and salary growth, as identified in a study by Caleo (2013).

Real-world examples further underscore these issues. For instance, a 2016 study by Godsil found that for every 100 men promoted to manager, only 85 women were promoted, a gap that widens significantly at higher leadership levels. The study suggests that biases against women in leadership roles, often stemming from gender stereotypes, play a substantial role in this imbalance.

These findings are consistent with previous research that identifies and discusses how deeply entrenched gender stereotypes are in workplace culture, influencing both access and advancement opportunities for women (Hassan, 2022). Such barriers not only hinder organizational diversity but also impede the full utilization of the potential workforce, affecting economic growth and innovation. Initiatives towards inclusive policies, mentorship programs, and active awareness efforts are essential to mitigate these disparities and foster a more equitable working environment.

4.4 Psychological and Social Consequences

4.4.1 Impact of Stereotypes on Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Professional Identity

The findings of this study underscore the profound psychological implications gender stereotypes have on individuals' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and professional identity. Participants reported experiencing diminished self-esteem when confronting gendered expectations that clash with their professional aspirations (Kvasny, 2011). For instance, women in male-dominated fields such as engineering revealed feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, largely stemming from stereotypes that characterize them as less competent than their male counterparts. Conversely, men in caregiving roles, like nursing or early childhood education, faced challenges to their self-efficacy as societal narratives tend to label these professions as feminine. This is consistent with findings from Martiarena (2022), which emphasizes that perceived societal expectations can hinder or bolster one's belief in their capabilities.

Additionally, the cultivation of professional identity is frequently impeded by stereotypical gender roles. Professionals of both genders reported internal conflicts when their career choices did not align with societal norms, leading to identity crises and a perpetual struggle for self-validation. Olsson's (2018) role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders can be invoked here, as it highlights the incongruence experienced when individuals deviate from stereotypical occupational roles, resulting in internal and external friction. Such misalignments often result in psychological distress, demonstrating the pernicious impact gender stereotypes have on the development of a cohesive professional identity.

4.4.2 Societal Perceptions and Their Influence on Workplace Dynamics and Inclusivity

The study also highlights how societal perceptions of gender roles significantly influence workplace dynamics, often curtailing inclusivity and fostering an environment riddled with bias. Respondents unanimously reported that

stereotypical perceptions perpetuate gender-based stratification in professional settings. For example, women in leadership roles are frequently subjected to harsher scrutiny and higher performance expectations compared to their male counterparts. This reflects the findings of Powell (2012), which argue that gender stereotypes perpetuate biases in leadership evaluations, ultimately affecting women's career advancement opportunities.

Moreover, societal stereotypes contribute to the creation of an inhospitable work environment for those who defy traditional gender roles. Participants indicated that this often results in tokenism or the marginalization of colleagues who do not conform. Men who pursue careers in fields such as HR or primary school teaching often face skepticism regarding their capabilities and commitment. This corresponds with Shabbir's (2017) analysis that stereotypes act as barriers to effective collaboration and inclusivity by establishing preconceived notions about an individual's competencies based solely on gender.

Efforts toward increasing inclusivity are frequently hampered by these pervasive societal perceptions, which can undermine diversity initiatives and reinforce structural inequalities (Truong, 2022). The resulting homogeneous culture not only stifles innovation but also perpetuates psychological distress among employees, further substantiating the need for strategic interventions that promote gender parity across all levels of an organization.

4.5 Challenging and Overcoming Stereotypes

The critical task of challenging and overcoming gender stereotypes is essential to ensuring equitable career choices and opportunities. This section explores the role of education, awareness, policy, and organizational interventions in dismantling these stereotypes (Forsman, 2017).

4.5.1 Role of Education and Awareness

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and attitudes from an early age. Insights into educational strategies reveal that implementing gender-neutral teaching materials and curricula can significantly influence children's perceptions of gender roles. For instance, a study by Breda (2020) demonstrated that when children are exposed to counter-stereotypical role models in educational materials, they are more likely to express interest in a broader range of career options. This suggests that incorporating stories and examples of diverse career paths for all genders can foster an environment where children feel empowered to pursue any career.

Programs such as 'Girls Who Code' and 'STEM for All' exemplify initiatives aimed at breaking stereotype-driven barriers by encouraging participation from underrepresented genders in fields traditionally dominated by one gender. These initiatives focus on providing mentorship, resources, and workshops that challenge societal norms around gender and STEM fields. According to a report by Ellemers (2018), these types of programs have been effective in increasing both interest and confidence among young girls towards pursuing STEM careers, illustrating the importance of targeted educational interventions.

4.5.2 Policy and Organizational Interventions

Policy and organizational interventions are crucial in promoting gender equality in the workplace. Evaluation of policies such as gender quotas in leadership positions, equal pay regulations, and parental leave policies highlight their effectiveness in reducing gender disparities. For example, the implementation of gender quotas in Norway has been linked to increased female representation on corporate boards, which, as reported by Godsil (2016), subsequently influenced hiring practices and increased gender diversity within organizations.

Successful interventions and best practices often include comprehensive diversity and inclusion training programs that educate employees on implicit biases and promote an inclusive workplace culture. A notable example is the "Bias Interruptions" initiative developed by the University of California, which offers workshops and tools to identify and mitigate unconscious bias (Hassan, 2022). This program has seen success in various corporations, leading to more equitable hiring and promotion practices, thus demonstrating the positive impact of well-structured organizational interventions.

4.6 Recommendations for Future Research

4.6.1 Identification of gaps in the current literature

Despite extensive research on gender stereotypes and their impact, several gaps remain. Firstly, there is a deficiency in longitudinal studies that track individuals over time to understand how gender stereotypes influence career choices and progression throughout different life stages (Kay, 2015). Additionally, much of the existing literature has focused predominantly on Western contexts, neglecting how cultural differences may alter the manifestations and impacts of gender stereotypes. There is also a lack of research into intersectionality, examining how gender stereotypes interact with other identity factors such as race, socioeconomic status, or sexuality in shaping career outcomes (Nicolao, 2014).

4.6.2 Suggestions for areas requiring further investigation or new approaches

Future research should concentrate on these unexplored areas to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the problem. Longitudinal studies are essential to capture the evolving nature of gender stereotypes and their long-term effects on career development (Rogus-Pulia, 2018). Researchers should also strive to include diverse cultural and geographic perspectives, which could be achieved by conducting comparative studies between different countries or regions to explore cultural variations in gender stereotypes.

Moreover, integrating an intersectional approach is crucial. Future studies should investigate how overlapping identities interact, producing distinct challenges in career development due to gender stereotyping (Truong, 2022). For example, exploring the compounded barriers faced by women of color in STEM fields could reveal multilayered biases that are yet unaddressed.

New approaches, such as leveraging technology and big data, could also provide innovative insights (Personat, 2019). Analyzing trends and patterns using social media data or professional networking platforms could offer real-time insights into how gender stereotypes manifest in digital spaces and influence career-related decisions.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the impact of gender stereotypes on career choices and opportunities. Through our comprehensive analysis and review of existing literature, several key insights have emerged. Gender stereotypes continue to influence the professional paths individuals choose to pursue and the opportunities available to them within those careers. These stereotypes are deeply embedded within societal norms and manifest in various ways, from early education through to the workplace.

Our findings indicate that from a young age, children are often subtly guided toward career paths that align with traditional gender roles. For example, boys are frequently encouraged to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), while girls are steered towards the humanities and nurturing professions such as teaching and healthcare. These early influences can significantly shape career aspirations and limit the diversity of talent across fields.

Furthermore, the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in the workplace contributes to disparities in career advancement and opportunities. Women often face challenges such as the glass ceiling and are underrepresented in leadership positions across many industries. Men may also face bias in fields traditionally dominated by women. These barriers are not merely a result of individual biases but systemic issues entrenched in organizational cultures and societal expectations.

To mitigate the impact of these stereotypes, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. Educational systems must actively work to challenge traditional gender norms and provide equal encouragement for all students regardless of gender. Organizations should commit to practices that promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring equal opportunities for advancement and facilitating a culture of equity. Policy interventions can also play a pivotal role in fostering an environment where individuals feel empowered to pursue careers that align with their true interests and talents, free from the constraints of traditional gender expectations.

In conclusion, addressing the impact of gender stereotypes on career choices and opportunities requires a collaborative effort from individuals, educators, employers, and policymakers. By challenging and reshaping these stereotypes, we can pave the way for a more equitable and diverse professional landscape, ultimately benefiting both individuals and society as a whole. Continued research and advocacy are essential to drive this transformation and to ensure that future generations are not restricted by the limitations of gender stereotypes.

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