

WHEN GENDER ROLES MEET CAREER PLANS: A STUDY AMONG MIZO EMERGING ADULTS IN AIZAWL

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ABSTRACT

Changing gender roles and women's increasing workforce participation have challenged traditional expectations regarding work and family responsibilities. Thus, this study examined gender differences in gender role attitudes and the associations between gender role attitudes and parenting-oriented and partner-oriented career planning among 150 Mizo emerging adults aged 18–29 years in Mizoram, India. Participants completed the Traditional Egalitarian Sex Role Scale and the Planning for Career and Family Scale. Independent-samples *t* tests, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression analyses were conducted. Women reported significantly more egalitarian gender role attitudes than men, $t(148) = -4.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.81$. Gender role attitudes were not significantly associated with parenting-oriented career planning, $r(148) = .108$, $p = .190$, but showed a weak negative association with partner-oriented career planning, $r(148) = -.187$, $p = .022$. Regression analyses further indicated that gender role attitudes negatively predicted partner-oriented career planning after controlling for gender, although the model explained only 5% of the variance. Neither predictor significantly predicted parenting-oriented career planning. These findings suggest that gender role attitudes relate differently to distinct dimensions of career planning. Future research should investigate how cultural norms, family expectations shape career and family planning among emerging adults using larger samples.

Keywords: gender role attitudes; career and family planning; emerging adulthood; gender differences; Mizo

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society has seen a shift in employment, with women's participation in the labour force increasing. This change has challenged the traditional division of gender roles, where men were expected to be breadwinners and women were mainly responsible for household and caregiving duties. As women's participation in education and employment has increased, expectations and attitudes about the roles of men and women have also begun to change, although traditional beliefs continue to persist (Bertrand, 2020). These beliefs about roles, responsibilities, and behaviours considered appropriate for men and women are referred to as gender role attitudes (Eagly & Wood, 2016). They range from traditional views that emphasise different roles for men and women to egalitarian views that support more equal and flexible roles. They are shaped by social and cultural experiences and can influence important life decisions, including education and career aspirations (Nadeem & Khalid, 2018).

GENDERED SOCIALIZATION AND CAREER-FAMILY PLANNING

Young adults' gender role attitudes are shaped partly by the social environments in which they grow up. From an early age, young people may receive messages about what is considered appropriate for

men and women, both within the family and through the wider social environment (Rudnak et al., 2023). Traditional gender norms tend to place greater emphasis on men's involvement in paid work and women's responsibility for family and household roles. Such expectations can influence how young adults imagine their own futures. They may begin to consider their future career and family roles and responsibilities even before entering long-term employment or establishing their own families. The way parents manage and resolve their own work and family responsibilities can provide young people with ideas about how these roles may be balanced in the future (Basuil & Casper, 2012; Meussen & Van Laar, 2016). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that emerging adults' career and family plans develop within a broader social and gendered context.

Evidence from Asian contexts provides insight into the relationship between gender role attitudes and career and family expectations. Adachi (2018), for example, found that among Japanese youth, men were more likely to express a willingness to continue working and devote more time to paid employment. Importantly, women with more egalitarian gender role attitudes were more likely to express a willingness to remain employed after marriage. Similarly, Inoue-Smith (2014) found that Japanese men tended to place greater emphasis on work compared to women, further illustrating the gendered expectations surrounding employment and family roles. Gender role attitudes may also be relevant to expectations concerning intimate relationships. For instance, Yoon and Park (2025) found that gender role attitudes were associated with marriage desires among unmarried women but not among men. Although marriage desire is distinct from career planning, this finding suggests that beliefs about gender roles may be related to how individuals approach decisions concerning future relationships and family life.

GENDER, FAMILY AND CAREER EXPECTATIONS IN THE INDIAN AND MIZO CONTEXT

The broader context in which young people form expectations about family life is also changing. Globally, fertility has declined substantially over recent decades. According to the United Nations (2024), the global fertility rate declined from 3.31 births per woman in 1990 to 2.25 in 2024, and more than half of countries and areas now have fertility below the replacement level of 2.1 births per woman. This reflects a broader demographic shift toward smaller families in many parts of the world. A similar pattern can be observed in India, where the total fertility rate declined from 3.4 children per woman in 1992–1993 to 2.0 in 2019–2021. Importantly, the mean ideal family size in India also decrease from 2.9 in 1992–1993 to 2.1 in 2019–2021 (Rahman et al., 2024). These trends suggest that smaller family preferences have become increasingly common in India. For emerging adults, this changing family context may be relevant as they begin to consider whether, when, and how future parenting responsibilities will fit with their career plans.

In India, gender roles are shaped by both changing social conditions and continuing family and cultural expectations. Although young people are increasingly exposed to education, employment opportunities, and changing ideas about gender, traditional expectations regarding men's and women's roles continue to influence their lives. Evidence from a nationally representative Pew Research Centre survey of approximately 30,000 Indian adults illustrates this coexistence. 43% of the respondents viewed earning income primarily as a man's responsibility and approximately one-third considered childcare primarily a woman's responsibility (Evans et al., 2022). These findings suggest that support for gender equality can exist alongside traditional expectations about men's and women's responsibilities.

Recent research from India further highlights the connection between gender norms, marriage, family responsibilities, and career expectations. Research among Indian adolescents and young adults shows that gender role attitudes are influenced by family, peer, and wider social factors, with young women generally reporting more egalitarian views than young men (Raj et al., 2021). Similarly, a study of university students in Punjab found that mother's education and parenting type were significantly associated with gender-role attitudes (Nath et al., 2024). Recent research also suggests that gendered expectations continue to shape decisions about education, employment and marriage among Indian emerging adults (Verma & Nanglu, 2025). Additionally, Asri and Asri (2026), in their study of gender norms and career expectations among adolescents in urban India, also found that young women commonly expected to work in the future, but expectations regarding women's employment declined around marriage and childbearing. The study also added that concerns about marital conflict were associated with women having higher earnings or education than their husbands.

Mizoram provides an important context for understanding gender role attitudes because its social and family life reflects both traditional expectations and changing gender roles. Mizo women in the previous centuries occupy a low status with strong patriarchal norms imposed on them (Lalhmingliani & Namchhon, 2014). But as time goes on, they began to contribute largely to economic and social activities, yet their participation has not always meant equal roles in decision making in family and public life (Institute for Human Development, 2022). With women occupying more and more public and economic spaces, the attitudes of fathers regarding their role as a parent shift from being merely a provider to an involved father; however, these changes still have patriarchal notions attached to it as involved men are often teased with phrases such as 'thaibawih' (slave of the wife) and 'i nupui i ngam lo' (you fear your wife) which are considered an insult (Burgher & Flood, 2019). Moreover, in terms of media representation, women are often under represented and often subjected with derogatory remarks (Colney et. al, 2024). At the same time, changes in education and employment may be contributing to changing expectations about the roles of men and women. Research among Mizo young adults has also found differences in gender role attitudes between men and women, suggesting that gendered beliefs continue to be relevant among the younger generation (Lalhminglangi & Lalfakzuali, 2024). Examining these attitudes is therefore important for understanding how young people view their future educational, career, and family roles.

EMERGING ADULTHOOD AND CAREER-FAMILY PLANNING

Making career decisions becomes particularly important during emerging adulthood, a period between adolescence and adulthood when individuals are engaged in identity exploration and experience increasing independence. During this period, individuals begin to make choices about their future careers, relationships, and family lives (Arnett, 2023). The Planning for Career and Family Scale provides a particularly relevant framework for investigating how individuals anticipate integrating career and family roles. The scale was developed to assess whether future family and romantic relationship responsibilities are considered when making career decisions. The instrument identified two dimensions, which measured a person's willingness to incorporate parent responsibilities (parent oriented) and partner responsibilities (partner oriented) when choosing a career (Ganginis et al., 2013). This distinction is crucial because career decisions may be influenced by different aspects of anticipated family life (Hu et al., 2026). An individual may consider childcare responsibilities when choosing a career while giving less consideration to the needs of a future partner, or vice versa. Thus, career and family planning may represent multiple related considerations rather than a single continuum between career and family orientation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH GAP

Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) provides a framework for understanding how gender-related beliefs may influence individuals' perceptions of work, family, and interpersonal roles. The theory proposes that individuals develop cognitive schemas about gender through socialization, which influence how they organize and interpret information related to appropriate roles and behaviours for men and women. These schemas may range from relatively traditional views of gender roles to more egalitarian views in which work and family responsibilities are seen as less dependent on gender. Applied to career and family planning, gender role attitudes may influence how emerging adults anticipate and organize their future work, family, and relationship roles. Individuals with more traditional gender role attitudes may be more likely to view career and family responsibilities according to conventional gender expectations, whereas those with more egalitarian attitudes may be less likely to rely on gender-based distinctions when considering their future roles. Thus, gender schemas may be relevant to how young adults incorporate anticipated parenting and partnership responsibilities into their career planning.

Existing literature does not establish that egalitarian gender role attitudes necessarily lead to more egalitarian career and family plans. Rather, it suggests that gender role attitudes may be one factor shaping how individuals imagine their future work and family lives. Although gender role attitudes, and work and family expectations have received considerable research attention, relatively less attention has been given to the specific association between gender role attitudes and the ways in which emerging adults anticipate incorporating future family and relationship responsibilities into their own career planning, particularly in the Indian context. Much of the existing research has focused on women's employment, career advancement, work-family conflict, marriage intentions, or actual experiences of balancing work and family. Comparatively less is known about how young adults, before entering these life stages, anticipate incorporating future parenting and partner related responsibilities into their career plans.

There is also a contextual gap concerning young adults in India, and more specifically the population represented in the present study. Although large scale evidence indicates that traditional and egalitarian gender expectations coexist in India, much of the existing research on career and family expectations has been conducted in other countries or among specific groups, such as employed women or specialized student populations. At the same time, India has experienced a substantial decline in both fertility and ideal family size, indicating that emerging adults are forming their expectations about parenthood within a changing family context. Examining these constructs among emerging adults in Aizawl, Mizoram, may therefore provide useful insight into how gender role attitudes are related to anticipated career and family decisions within a particular Indian sociocultural context. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine whether gender role attitudes are associated with future career planning in relation to family and intimate relationships, while distinguishing between parenting-oriented and partner-oriented career planning; the study also examines whether men and women differ in their gender role attitudes. The study empirically examines whether individuals' beliefs about gender are reflected in the way they anticipate incorporating future parenting and partner-related responsibilities into their careers.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the significant gender differences in gender role attitudes.
2. To examine the association between gender role attitudes and parenting oriented career planning.

3. To examine the association between gender role attitudes and partner oriented career planning.

HYPOTHESES

- H1. There are significant gender differences in gender role attitudes.
- H2. Gender role attitudes are significantly associated with parenting-oriented career planning.
- H3. Gender role attitudes are significantly associated with partner-oriented career planning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample

The study was conducted in Aizawl, Mizoram among Mizo emerging adults aged 18–29 years. A two-stage sampling procedure was used. In the first stage, educational institutions in Aizawl were treated as sampling clusters, from which two private schools and three colleges were randomly selected. In the second stage, eligible individuals within the selected institutions were recruited based on their availability and willingness to participate. Thus, the sampling procedure involved random selection of institutions at the cluster level, followed by convenience-based recruitment of participants within the selected institutions.

College students and private-school teachers were included because these settings provided access to individuals within the target age range. Including both groups also allowed the study to include emerging adults from educational and occupational settings rather than restricting the sample to college students. Participants who were Mizo, aged 18–29 years, available during the data collection period, and willing to participate were included after providing informed consent. The final sample consisted of 150 participants.

Measures

1. Traditional Egalitarian Sex Role (TESR) Scale (Long & Larsen, 1988): It consists of 20 items with a likert scale ranging from completely agree to completely disagree. Higher values indicate egalitarian attitude while, lower values indicate traditional attitude. The reliability of the scale is Cronbach alpha 0.796
2. The Planning for Career and Family Scale (Ganginis et. al., 2013): It consists of 24 items with a likert scale ranging from strongly disagree-1 and strongly agree-4. The scale has 9 reversed scored items and higher score indicated higher consideration for future family when deciding on a career. The reliability of the scale is Cronbach alpha 0.826

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The normality of the continuous variables was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test and boxplots. The data were then analysed using the final sample of 150 participants. The participants were aged 18–29 years ($M = 22.82$, $SD = 3.19$). The Planning for Career and Family Scale was assessed using its two dimensions, parenting and partner orientations, along with the total scale score. The mean score for the parenting-oriented dimension was 33.45 ($SD = 4.31$), while the partner-oriented dimension had a mean score of 26.77 ($SD = 4.60$). The total score had a mean of 60.23 ($SD = 6.96$). The sample consisted of 65 males (43.3%) and 85 females (56.7%), and the mean score for the Traditional Egalitarian Sex Role (TESR) Scale was 64.11 ($SD = 8.39$).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the Variables (N = 150)

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	150	22.82	3.19
Planning for Career and Family Scale (Total)	150	60.23	6.96
Parenting-oriented career planning	150	33.45	4.31
Partner-oriented career planning	150	26.77	4.60
Traditional Egalitarian Sex Role (TESR) Scale	150	64.11	8.39

Levene's test indicated that the assumption of equal variances was met, $F(1, 148) = 0.24, p = .622$. Then, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in gender-role attitudes. As shown in Table 2, women ($M = 66.86, SD = 8.11$) had higher gender role attitude scores than men ($M = 60.51, SD = 7.37$). This difference was statistically significant, $t(148) = -4.94, p < .001$, having a large effect size, i.e, Cohen's $d = 0.81$. This suggested that women showed more egalitarian and liberal gender role attitudes compared to men, supporting hypothesis 1. The finding is consistent with previous research showing a similar gender difference, including among young people in India (Patel et al., 2021; Lalmingsangi & Lalfakzuali, 2024). Traditional gender expectations may be more personally relevant to women because they directly influence different areas of their life such as education, employment, family responsibilities, and future life choices, thus greater awareness of these expectations along with higher education may therefore encourage women to view gender roles more flexible and support more egalitarian views. Thus, the higher egalitarianism observed among women in the present study may reflect their greater engagement with and awareness of gender role expectations, rather than disadvantage alone.

Table 2
Gender Differences in Gender-Role Attitude

Gender	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	t (148)	p	Mean difference	Cohen's d
Male	65	60.51	7.37	-4.94	<.001	-6.35	0.81
Female	85	66.86	8.11				

Note. Mean difference = male minus female. Cohen's d is the standardized mean difference.

Pearson product-moment correlations examined associations between career-related consideration of partners, future children, and gender role attitudes (Table 3). Consideration of future children when making career decisions was not significantly associated with gender role attitude, $r(148) = .108, p = .190$, rejecting hypothesis 2. This suggests that gender role attitudes may not directly translate into how emerging adults consider future parenting when making career decisions. Career planning may involve multiple considerations beyond gender role beliefs, including anticipated family responsibilities, career demands, and expectations about balancing work and family roles. Research among emerging adults similarly suggests that work and family planning is influenced by factors such as self-efficacy and family experiences rather than by a single personal attitude (Basuil & Casper, 2012). In addition, the decline in ideal family size observed in India may reflect broader changes in young people's expectations about family formation and parenthood. However, these broader changes do not necessarily imply reduced consideration of future children in career planning. Thus, individuals

with more egalitarian gender role attitudes may still consider future children when planning their careers without necessarily holding traditional views about the division of parenting responsibilities.

In contrast, greater consideration of a partner when making career decisions was significantly and weakly negatively associated with gender-role attitude, $r(148) = -.187$, $p = .022$, indicating that greater partner consideration was associated with relatively less egalitarian gender role attitudes. Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported. The negative association between partner-oriented career planning and gender-role attitudes suggests that participants with less egalitarian attitudes tended to place greater consideration on their partner when making career decisions. This may reflect the influence of traditional expectations linking relationship and gender roles with career choices. Research has shown that gender norms can extend across work and family domains and shape young adults' expectations about their future career and family roles (Meeussen et al., 2016). Similarly, Peake and Harris (2002) found that gender, career traditionality, and marriage plans were related to young adults' planning for multiple work and family roles. However, the weak association may reflect the combined influence of several factors, including family expectations, cultural norms, and the difficulty of moving away from socially established expectations regarding marriage and gender roles. Considering a partner when making career decisions should not, in itself, be interpreted as traditional, as egalitarian individuals may also consider their partner's career and needs when making joint decisions. Thus, the finding indicates a modest association between gender role attitudes and partner-oriented career planning, highlighting the need for further research to examine how family expectations, cultural norms, and other relational and personal factors interact with gender role attitudes in shaping emerging adults' career and family planning.

Table3
Associations Between Career-Related Considerations and Gender-Role Attitude

Variables	r	p
Parenting oriented career planning	.108	.190
Partner oriented career planning	-.187	.022**

Note. N = 150. r = Pearson's correlation coefficient.

As shown in Table 4, the regression findings differed across the two career-planning subscales. Gender role attitude did not significantly predict parenting-oriented career planning after controlling for gender. However, it was a significant negative predictor of partner-oriented career planning. This suggests that the association between gender role attitudes and career planning may vary depending on the dimension of career planning being considered. The model for partner-oriented career planning was statistically significant, although it explained only 5% of the variance. Therefore, the finding should be interpreted cautiously, and other factors may also contribute to partner-related career considerations.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Career-Planning Subscales from Gender and Gender Role Attitude

Predictor/Model Statistic	B (parenting-oriented)	SE	β	p	B(partner-oriented)	SE	β	p
Gender	1.12	0.71	0.13	0.14	1.21	0.80	0.13	0.13
Traditional Egalitarian Sex Role (TESR) Scale	0.030	0.04	0.59	.50	-0.13	0.04	-0.23	0.007
R ²	.026				.050			
Adjusted R ²	.013				.037			
F	1.966			.144				.023

Note. N = 150. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. Parenting- oriented and partner- oriented are the two career-planning subscales. Each model included gender and Traditional Egalitarian Sex Role (TESR) Scale as predictors.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the complex relationship between gender role attitudes and emerging adults' career and family planning. Women reported significantly more egalitarian gender role attitudes than men, while gender role attitudes were not significantly associated with parenting-oriented career planning. A weak negative association was found between gender role attitudes and partner-oriented career planning, suggesting that participants with less egalitarian attitudes tended to give greater consideration to their future partners when making career decisions. Overall, the findings indicate that gender role attitudes alone may not fully determine how emerging adults plan for future family and relationship roles. Career and family planning may instead reflect the combined influence of personal, relational, family, and cultural expectations. Further research is therefore needed to examine these factors more closely, particularly within the changing social and cultural context of young adults in India.

The findings have implications for career guidance and counselling among emerging adults. Career planning may benefit from considering anticipated family and relationship roles alongside occupational goals, particularly as young people negotiate changing gender expectations. Greater awareness of gender role beliefs may also help young adults reflect on how family and cultural expectations influence their career decisions. Families and educators may similarly support more flexible approaches to future work and family roles by avoiding rigid gender based expectations.

The present study was conducted among emerging adults residing in an urban area. Therefore, their beliefs and expectations may differ from those of people living in rural areas because of differences in their social environment, lifestyle, and cultural experiences. In addition, the study included only educated students pursuing higher education, so the views of people with different educational backgrounds may not be fully represented. The sample size was also relatively small, which may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized to the wider population. Future research should include more diverse urban and rural samples and examine family, relational, and cultural factors that may shape career and family planning. Longitudinal research could further clarify how gender role attitudes and career and family considerations develop as emerging adults enter employment, form long term partnerships, and transition into parenthood.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest

Author's contribution

The first author is responsible for collecting, analysing and writing the report, while the second author helps in supervising the process

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