

Family Influence and Social Conditioning: Exploring Chinese High School Students' Perspectives on Gender Differences

Keyuan Zhou*

The High School Affiliated to Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

Keyuanzhou_59@outlook.com

Abstract. This study examines how family structure and social conditions shape Chinese high school students' perceptions of gender roles and expectations for future gender equality. Conducted through qualitative interviews at a Beijing international school, the research finds that students from egalitarian families tend to have less traditional gender role perceptions, while those from traditional families often reinforce stereotypes. External influences, including peers, societal norms, and media, also significantly impact these views. Despite a general desire for gender equality, many students remain concerned about persistent societal biases. The findings underscore the need for policies that promote gender equality from both family and societal perspectives.

Keywords: Family Structure, Gender Roles, Social Condition, Egalitarian, Societal Norms, Gender Equality.

1. Introduction

The influence of family structure and social conditions on young people's perceptions of gender roles is a critical yet understudied area in Chinese gender studies. The guiding research question is: How do family structure and social conditions influence young individuals' perceptions of gender roles and their expectations for gender equality in future social and professional settings? This research aims to delve into how different family environments and social conditions shape Chinese youths' views on gender and their expectations for equality in adult life. By analyzing qualitative interviews from a diverse sample in The High School Affiliated To Beijing Normal University, a Beijing international school, this study explores the complex interplay between familial influences and societal norms in forming gender perceptions. The hypothesis posits that more egalitarian family dynamics are associated with less traditional gender role perceptions among Chinese youths.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Literature Review

This literature review evaluates the role of tax policies in shaping educational funding and outcomes. Drawing on a range of sources, it examines how various tax systems impact the allocation of resources to education and identifies key factors influencing the effectiveness of these policies. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between taxation and education, highlighting successful strategies and areas requiring further research.

Gender Stereotyping in Family: An Institutional Analysis of Family Factors and Gender Stereotyping

Hussain et al. (2015) conducted a study examining the influence of family on gender stereotyping. This study, based on qualitative interviews, found that gender socialization begins at birth and is perpetuated through family dynamics. The findings underscore the need for educational systems to address gender biases that are ingrained from an early age, suggesting that tax-funded educational reforms should include programs that promote gender equality and challenge traditional stereotypes.

Gender and Family Relations

Murry, Mayberry, and Berkel (2013) explored the relationship between gender roles and family dynamics through multiple case studies. Their research highlighted the concept of "choice rhetoric,"

where societal norms around gender roles influence personal and familial decisions. These insights are crucial for developing tax policies that support educational initiatives aimed at dismantling gender biases, ensuring that both boys and girls have equal opportunities for learning and development.

The Influence of Parental Child-Rearing Gender-Role Attitudes on Children's Development

Chen et al. (2023) investigated the intergenerational differences in child-rearing practices and their impact on children's social and academic development. Their findings indicate that parental attitudes towards gender roles significantly affect children's educational experiences. This study suggests that tax policies should support parental education programs that promote progressive child-rearing practices, which can enhance educational outcomes for children.

The Role of Education in Shaping Gender Norms and Equality

The aforementioned studies collectively emphasize the critical role of education in challenging and reshaping gender norms. Tax policies that allocate resources towards comprehensive educational programs can foster environments where gender equality is prioritized. This includes funding for teacher training, curriculum development, and extracurricular activities that encourage critical thinking about gender roles.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

To maximize the impact of tax-funded educational initiatives, it is essential to consider the following strategies:

Implement Gender-Inclusive Curricula: Develop and fund curricula that address gender stereotypes and promote equality from an early age.

Support Parental Education Programs: Invest in programs that educate parents about the importance of progressive child-rearing practices.

Enhance Teacher Training: Provide teachers with the tools and knowledge to foster gender-inclusive classrooms.

Monitor and Evaluate: Establish mechanisms to regularly assess the effectiveness of educational programs funded by tax policies.

This literature review highlights the importance of integrating gender considerations into tax policies that support education. By addressing gender biases through well-funded educational initiatives, it is possible to create more equitable learning environments that benefit all students. Further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of such policies and to identify additional strategies for fostering gender equality in education.

2.2. Method

In the methodology section of the paper, we mainly adopt a semi-structured research method. The research focus is based on my thesis is aimed at contemporary international high school youth as the theme. Consequently, we choose our international high school students as interview samples. Our interview sample is purposive. Such a purposeful selection of international high school students as samples is to understand how their peers around the social issue of gender equality and their thoughts and thinking about gender equality. Also our sample age is concentrated in the 16-18 year old student group. The data collection we choose is to conduct in-depth interviews with these students. In our interview, we divided the questions into two broad categories. One is to ask whether they think men and women have different attributes, such as qualities and abilities, in their age group. The second is to ask whether the respondents think that men and women will have different social division of labor and responsibilities in adulthood. Based on these two big questions, we further refined the content and asked respondents to give examples of their own experiences of deep love. Our interviews were all conducted in schools, and each interview lasted about 20-40 minutes. We guarantee to obtain the consent of the interviewees during the interview and record the interview with their permission and knowledge. Our interview process is that we will first select suitable interviewees and make an appointment on campus to conduct relevant interviews in a spare classroom. During the interview process, we will gradually guide the interviewees, for example, we designed the ice-breaking and mini-game to relax the interviewees emotions. When the interviewees have doubts about the

interview questions, we will carefully explain the meaning of the interview questions. We have selected on transcription for all interviews. Our data analysis chose qualitative. We chose the method of content analysis to analyze the interview data. In this interview, our samples were selected as three men and three women, and there was no bad guidance or bias during the interview. We admit that we do have some limitations in this interview, for example, our samples are still too small and we haven't conducted pilot testing.

2.3. Findings

In this study, to answer the research question of how family structure and social conditions shape young individuals' perceptions of gender roles and their expectations for gender equality in future social and professional environments, we focus on how family model and parental influences influence contemporary Chinese international high school students' views of sex/gender differences their valuing of gender equality in the future, and their expectations of gender equality in the home, workplace, and society in the future. External factors significantly shape high school students' views on gender equality, including peer and school influences, societal norms, and media exposure. School interactions and gendered practices impact perceptions, while evolving social norms and persistent stereotypes influence expectations. Media, especially the internet, offers both supportive and discriminatory perspectives, affecting students' beliefs about gender equality.

In exploring the desirability of egalitarian gender futures among interviewees, a notable divergence was observed. Four of my participants strongly advocated for gender equality, viewing it as crucial for societal progress, while others two participants were less enthusiastic, influenced by persistent cultural norms.

Regarding expectations for a more egalitarian future, a divide was also evident; Two of my interviewees expressed optimism, fueled by recent advancements and policy changes, whereas another four participants remained skeptical due to enduring societal biases. Additionally, the interviews revealed varied adherence to gender stereotypes, with only one individual displaying significant stereotypical thinking that could hinder their commitment to and expectations for gender egalitarianism, contrasting with those other interviewees who showed minimal stereotypical attitudes and a robust commitment to equality.

1. Family model

The persistence of traditional family models in Chinese society, despite a trend towards egalitarianism, deeply influences individuals to become strongly motivated to pursue gender equality in response to experiencing gender inequity within their own families.

My interviewees family experiences can be roughly divided into two categories. One is the traditional family model, the other is the egalitarian family model. Historically, Chinese society was characterized by a deeply entrenched traditional family model where families predominantly operated within a male-dominated framework. In such a structure, Molly said that women's roles were largely confined to domestic responsibilities such as caring for the family, cooking, and laundry, leading to a significantly diminished social status and respect within the household, including from their husbands. However, the interview indicate that while modern societal progress and changing attitudes have led to a decline in these traditional roles, they have not been completely eradicated. There remains a spectrum of adherence to traditional models, illustrating a transition that is still in progress rather than complete.

For example, my interviewee Esme is a girl who lives in a patriarchal family. Through my interviews with her, I did find that she was influenced by traditional family model. She will be even more extreme and will want to be an egalitarian. Because of she and her mother were not valued in the family, she tried to get rid of this phenomenon. As a result, she became more and more eager to become a qualified egalitarian. In contrast, the egalitarian family model has been becoming widespread in contemporary society, and most of my interviewees' families are also in the egalitarian family model. For example, my interviewee Molly said, "Our family is very equal, both parents need

to share the small things and big things in the family." Children in egalitarian families are happier. They also believe that although there are gender differences, men and women should assume equal social roles and status.

2. Parental influence

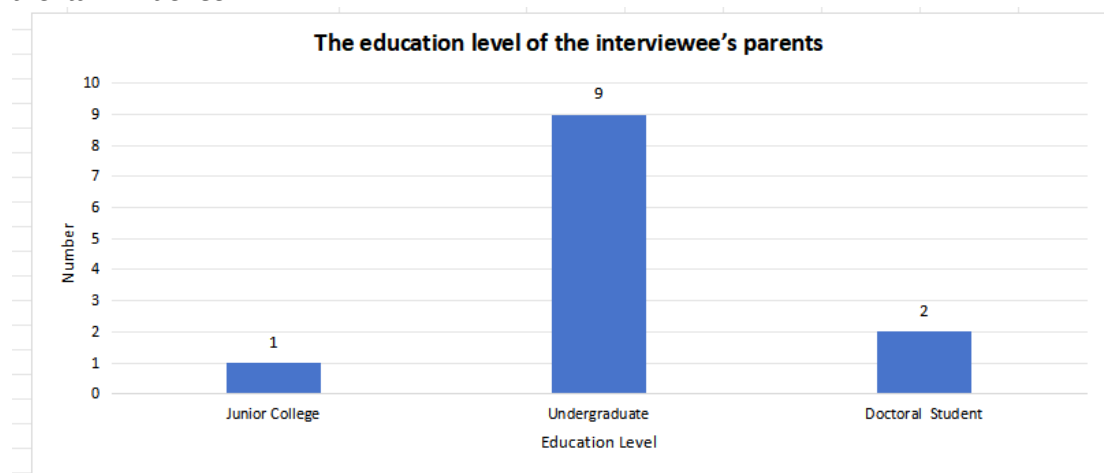


Figure 1: The Education Level of the Interviewees' Parents, self-elaborated

According to the above table, we know that one parent of my interviewee has an education degree of Junior college, nine Undergraduate students, and two Doctoral students. Parental influence is also a key factor in whether contemporary international high school students have a sense of equality. Highly educated parents tend to be more supportive of gender equality. Among my six interviewees, one of them has a mother with a Junior college education level, while most of them have parents with a high level of education. As a result, when conducting my interviews, I found that everyone had a relatively positive view of being an egalitarian. The education level of parents can greatly affect the children's thoughts and views on things. For example, my interviewee Adrian, his mother graduated from college. It is precisely because of her high education level that Adrian's mother always teaches Adrian on interpersonal communication, gender equality and other aspects, and puts forward relevant views.

However, compared with Kathy's mother who is less educated (the one who is at the education level of Junior college), she does not have any views on her child's awareness of equality, and even she will retain some traditional ideas, such as thinking that men and women are different in some specific aspects, and often instilling such ideas to Kathy. Therefore, these findings suggest that the education level of the parents will affect whether the child will become an egalitarian.

3. Interviewees' views on Gender differences in abilities and characteristics

Beliefs in society about biological and psychological differences between men and women are prevalent, although there is great debate on how individuals of either sex actually differ from the other sex in these attributes. Nevertheless, these beliefs about difference are often used to justify the status quo of gender inequality, ignoring the fact that the sexes are likely equally capable and should have equal opportunities and considerations when it comes to key behaviors such as decision-making.

Based on my interviews with six people, I categorize gender differences in abilities and traits into three categories. The first category is the difference between the two sexes in physical, the second category is the difference between the two sexes in internal personality, and the third category, as Suggested by my interviewee Oscar, is the difference between the two sexes in decision-making. In the preliminary interview with the interviewees, I found that all my interviewees mentioned that the differences between men and women included both physical and psychological differences. They all believe that because of biological evolution and other reasons, men are generally taller and stronger than women. In terms of internal personality characteristics, four of my interviewees generally believe that women are more emotional and sensitive, while men are more rational and impulsive. One of my interviewees, Oscar, brought up the gender differences in decision-making. He believes that it is precisely because of this kind of sensibility that women will consider more when making

decisions, and usually make more correct and comprehensive decisions than men, but it is precisely because of their impulsivity and action-orientation men, maybe inclined to make decisions very quickly, but often make mistakes. Therefore because stereotypes persist, some differences between the two sexes may also in terms of personality, which can make the achievement of gender equality more difficult.

4. Views on gender equality and roles

In contemporary society aspirations for gender equality is common, but obviously absolute gender equality cannot be achieved in the short term. Based on my interviewees' answers about gender roles, I found that gender inequality is reflected in gender roles. In many jobs, women are limited. For example, many companies do not consider female executives, and many companies do not choose to continue to offer jobs to pregnant women. Without realizing it, many, including my interviewees, who claim to be gender egalitarians, still accept the idea that some professions are best suited to men and women because of their different attributes. In the future, the social roles of both sexes will include work and family. In the workplace, every gender should have a fair chance at employment. In the family, each gender should share the responsibility of the household.

For example, in Esme's family, because she lives in a traditional family model, she has watched her mother take on various matters in the family. She said she does not wish for such an experience for herself. But in a subtle way, it appears that Esme has been greatly affected. She still believes that women should do housework and take care of children. This led her to reveal in an interview that she was afraid of getting married and having children. Based on the responses of my interviewee, I found that family plays a direct role in influencing perceptions of gender roles. The behavior of the parents in the family will greatly affect whether the child becomes an egalitarian. Therefore, the pattern of the family and the behavior of parents in the family are particularly important for the concept of gender roles in contemporary high school students.

5. External influences on Gender Perception

After further communication with my interviewees, I found that external factors can influence contemporary high school students' views and attitudes towards gender equality. I will divide these external influences into three aspects, which is where contemporary high school students will get social information and change their ideas and opinions. The first aspect is peer influence and school influence. My interviewees were all from an international high school associated with a university, and the vast majority of them spent up to a day on campus. During this period, they are also growing up, and the formation of their concept of gender equality comes more from the communication with classmates and the observation of the "small society" in the school. For example, my interviewee Jayden mentioned that he thought physical education classes in schools were not fair and did not achieve gender equality at all. Schools make it mandatory for women to choose volleyball and for men to choose basketball. Both sexes are treated in terms of "gender stereotypes" in this matter, and they are not free to choose what they prefer but are assigned for no reason.

The second aspect is the social environment, in the current social background, the phenomenon of very obvious gender discrimination is less and less. Society strives to create a very good and egalitarian atmosphere, so most of my interviewees believe that because of this social environment, there will be more egalitarian the future.

Although today's society is no longer as gender-discriminatory as the old society, the problem of gender discrimination has not been completely eliminated. Some old ideas and thoughts will still be expressed in the words and deeds of ordinary people. Three of my interviewees also made it clear that they hope to become egalitarian in the future, but because of their observations of continuing gender stereotypes in the society around them, they have some worries about the future. They recognize many uncertainties about changing gender relations in the future, and wonder if they can actually enjoy the benefits of gender equality.

The last aspect is the influence of media. The most popular activity for contemporary high school students to socialize and a favorite way for them to find information is the internet, where they can express themselves freely and get more opinions from people in society, whether good or bad. The

Internet is a double-edged sword. For example, my interviewee Oscar thinks the Internet is a place with an extremely warm atmosphere. He thinks the people on the Internet are very friendly. Everyone is encouraging women who have been unfairly treated, or calling on women to stand up and be stronger. On the other hand, Kathy, another of my interviewees, believes that the Internet is a very unfair place for women. Women are verbally attacked for being scantily clad, she said, while men get lots of compliments for being scantily clad. These comments reflect some of the many ways external influences like social media can affect high school students' views on gender differences and the possibilities of egalitarian futures.

6. Beliefs about Natural vs. Socially Constructed Traits

Beliefs in either natural factors or social construction process as responsible for observable gender differences will greatly affect high school students' views on gender equality. My interviewees accepted both sets of reasons for gender differences. They believe that natural factors are present from birth, and some different physical characteristics automatically serve to define males and females as belonging to different gender groups. At the same time, they argue that socially constructed traits are constantly formed through individuals' growth in many parts of society. I found that their awareness of natural factors and socially constructed traits influence their rational judgments about the sexes.

When I asked my interviewees about their views on the gender characteristics of men and women in the interview, they all divided the characteristics of men and women into natural factors (that is physiological differences) and socially constructed traits (that is some of the supposedly unique characteristics of men and women that are formed after learning). My interviewees believe that men are generally taller and stronger than women due to natural features of biological evolution.

It is these natural differences that lead to more unequal sexual relationships. Male strength seems to represent a higher level of power than female strength. These rights will protect them at work and at home. Men will find it easier to have a more dominant position in the workplace and at home. And the acquired traits, the socially constructed traits that are influenced by many things in society lead to some differences in personality traits between women and men. For example, my respondents generally believe that women are more emotional and men are more rational. These opinions are based on their constant observation in society. They believe that women generally believe that crying is a good way to vent. Men, on the other hand, can think rationally and control their emotions all the time. However, we have to consider whether this social construction feature is a stereotype of both sexes. Women can be rational, men can be emotional. This stereotype has been instilled into most people's minds inadvertently.

A critical aspect of my research explores whether my interviewees believe that the acquisition of gender-stereotypical traits through learning, observation, or social imposition justifies the differences in social positions, life chances, earnings, and opportunities between men and women. Three of my interviewees saw these traits as unfair social constructs that should not determine one's potential or opportunities, while others accepted them as somewhat natural, suggesting biological and psychological differences might justify distinct societal roles. This divergence significantly impacts their perceptions of gender equality. Four of my interviewees challenge these stereotypes are more optimistic about achieving equality, while other two who see merit in these differences are less hopeful. This dichotomy highlights the complex interplay between individual beliefs and societal norms in shaping attitudes towards gender equality.

7. Expectations of Gender Equality in the Future



Figure 2 Expectations of Gender Equality

In my interview question, I asked interviewees "What are your views on the future of gender equality?" Most of them maintain a more positive attitude towards the problem. For example, they will say that being an egalitarian is an effort of everyone based on family structure and social conditions. However some interviewees also have some concerns about the future. They will think that it is difficult to achieve the goal.

The word cloud above comes from what my interviewees once said in an interview. My interviewees revealed that they all want to be an egalitarian, but they do not all believe gender equality is achievable. They worry that whether it is the family structure or the social environment will continue to influence the thinking of high school students, and it seems impossible to make all people become affirmative. In the future, both at work and at home, gender discrimination is bound to occur again. In the context of the new era, everyone aspires to be an egalitarian and wants others to treat them equally. My interviewees were no exception, and they all mentioned in countless interviews with me that they had high hopes for gender equality in the future. They believe that as long as you have the heart to respect both sexes, you can become an egalitarian. Whether it is at school, at home, at work or in the larger society, maintaining a mindset of being an affirmative person will make it possible for everyone to become a qualified affirmative person in the future. However, the reality must not be as beautiful as imagined. My interviewees have said countless times that they want to be an egalitarian, but their interviews have inadvertently revealed their views on gender stereotypes. Their actions do not correspond to their thoughts. So being an egalitarian in the absolute sense of the word is a very difficult thing to do.

8.Link to Constructivism

Constructivism posits that our understanding of the world is built through reflecting on our own experiences. This framework is particularly relevant when examining gender issues, which are subjects of ongoing investigation and research. Gender equality remains a persistent social dilemma, deeply intertwined with cultural, social, and individual factors. As we continuously reflect on gender behavior and thinking, we become increasingly aware of the necessity to achieve gender equality. However, despite this growing awareness, deeply ingrained gender stereotypes in our subconscious are not easily eradicated.

My research question, "How do family structure and social conditions influence young individuals' perceptions of gender roles and their expectations for gender equality in future social and professional settings?" delves into this complexity. It seeks to uncover how the dynamics within families and broader societal conditions shape young people's views on gender roles. Through this lens, we explore their expectations for gender equality in both personal and professional realms. By understanding these influences, we can better grasp the challenges and opportunities for fostering a more egalitarian society, even as we acknowledge the enduring presence of traditional gender stereotypes.

2.4. Data Analysis

My findings about the formative experiences of interviewees in their families suggest the importance of those experiences for individuals' thoughts about gender equity and the probability of egalitarian relations between the sexes in the future. Students in my sample came from what I have classified as egalitarian and traditional families. As I mentioned in the findings, everyone of my interviewees endorsed the principle of equality in gender relations, though there were variations in the intensity and manner of their expressions. Some strongly believe that they are absolute egalitarians, while others are uncertain about dismissing the effects of apparent differences between males and females for egalitarian futures.

1. Desirability of Egalitarian Gender Relations

Interviewees from traditional families tended to exhibit a stronger and more passionate commitment to egalitarian gender relations. Some interviewees who live in relatively traditional families tend to show a deeper desire to be egalitarians. The idea of the restrictions they experience in the traditional family and the signs that parents show in their lives make them try to break away from such gender stereotypes, which also leads them to be more willing to become an egalitarian. Interviewees from egalitarian families often expressed a more nuanced understanding of gender equality, having grown up in an environment where these principles were naturally integrated into their daily lives.

2. Likelihood of Experiencing Egalitarian Futures

The expectation of achieving egalitarian gender relations in the future also varied among interviewees based on their family experiences. Interviewees living in egalitarian families have high expectations for equality in gender relations in the future. They believe that as long as everyone is conscious and takes action, achieving equality in the future will not be a problem. Conversely, interviewees living in traditional family have more concerns about achieving gender equality in the future. They aspire to be egalitarians in the future, but they know that there will be more issues of gender equality waiting for them in the future.

3. Influence of Family Experiences on Views of Gender Equality

The data suggest a strong relationship between family experiences and views on the desirability and likelihood of gender equality. Interviewees from traditional families showed a profound appreciation for the value of gender equality, driven by a desire to overcome the limitations they observed at home. In contrast, those from egalitarian families valued gender equality as a given but were less likely to express an urgent need for change, as their current experiences aligned with their beliefs.

4. Influence of Parental Education

The levels of parental education appeared to influence the interviewees' views on gender equality significantly. Higher parental education levels seemed related to more progressive views on gender equality. For example, interviewees from highly educated families were taught to be an egalitarian, to be equal in everything they do, and not to be biased against either gender. In contrast, those who come from families with lower levels of education do not have the right guidance on gender from their parents' minds. Such families were reported generally to not address matters of gender equality with their children.

5. Beliefs About Sex Differences: Natural vs. Socially Constructed Traits

A deeper analysis of the interviews revealed that interviewees who believed gender differences were socially constructed were more likely to support the desirability and attainability of gender equality. In contrast, those who believed gender differences were natural had a somewhat vague understanding of gender equality. They felt that biological differences between the sexes, being a result of natural evolution, made some level of inequality inevitable. This belief in natural gender differences seemed to limit their support for achieving full gender equality.

6. Influence of Family Type on Beliefs About Gender Differences

The type of family—traditional or egalitarian—appeared to influence whether students believed in biological versus socially constructed gender differences. Students from traditional families,

believe more in biological differences. This is because parents in traditional families inform interviewees of the difference between men and women, and because interviewees observe the behavior of the female protagonist and male protagonist in the daily life of the family. As Jayden told us, his grandfather said, "Women don't need to work, their job is to have children." In contrast, those from egalitarian families are more belief in socially constructed gender differences. Interviewees living in this family pattern believe that some gender differences are shaped in society, such as workplaces, public places, schools, etc. Also, they often expressed a more nuanced understanding of gender equality, having grown up in an environment where these principles were naturally integrated into their daily lives. For instance, Adrian mentioned that his family members share the burden of everything.

2.5. Conclusion

Conducting this research on the influence of family structures and social conditions on young individuals' perceptions of gender roles has been a revealing experience. The key takeaway is the significant impact that both traditional and egalitarian family models have on shaping students' views on gender equality. It was surprising to learn how deeply rooted these perceptions are, influenced by both direct family interactions and broader societal norms. The experience of conducting this study as a teenager among my peers was enlightening. It provided unique insights into how contemporary high school students navigate and challenge traditional gender stereotypes. It would be interesting to explore how students from different types of schools or regions, particularly those not attending specialized international schools, perceive these issues.

Comparing the experiences and thoughts of teens in China with those from other countries would offer a broader perspective on how cultural contexts influence gender perceptions. This study confirmed some findings from existing literature, such as the role of family and education in shaping gender views, but also challenged the notion that higher education levels among parents always lead to more egalitarian beliefs among their children. Future research should delve deeper into the specific mechanisms through which societal influences and media exposure shape these views. Additionally, understanding how these perceptions evolve as students transition into adulthood and enter professional environments would provide valuable insights into fostering a more egalitarian society.

References

- [1] Chen, I. J., Wang, Y., Sun, Z., Song, Y., Wang, L., & Yang, M. (2023). The influence of the parental child-rearing gender-role attitude on children's social adjustment in single-and two-parent families: the mediating role of intergenerational identity. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1-12.
- [2] Hussain, M., Naz, A., Khan, W., Daraz, U., & Khan, Q. (2015). Gender stereotyping in family: An institutionalized and normative mechanism in Pakhtun Society of Pakistan. *Sage Open*, 5(3), 2158244015595258.
- [3] Koruk, F., Beyazgül, B., & Koruk, İ. (2023). The effect of gender role attitudes on the number of children and child gender preference. *Göbeklitepe Sağlık Bilimleri Dergisi*, 6(13).
- [4] Murry, V. M., Mayberry, L. S., & Berkel, C. (2013). Gender and family relations. *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*, 401-422.
- [5] Zhang, J., Chen, G., Hu, Y., & Gao, Y. (2024). Gender role attitudes and fertility intentions: the mediating role of parental sacrifice and the moderating role of subjective well-being. *BMC psychology*, 12(1), 400.