

ATTITUDE OF HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (BOYS) TOWARDS WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AT HOWRAH DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Attitudes of male students towards women's employment play a crucial role in shaping societal perspectives on gender roles. Understanding these attitudes is essential for promoting gender equality and encouraging young men to support women's workforce participation. Howrah district, with its mix of urban and semi-urban populations, provides a representative setting to explore these perceptions among higher secondary school boys.

Aims and Objectives: To assess the attitudes of higher secondary male students in Howrah district towards women's employment and identify factors influencing their perceptions.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 60 male students from ten randomly selected higher secondary schools in Howrah district, India. A structured Likert-scale questionnaire was used to measure attitudes across domains including social acceptability, career suitability, and perceived family roles. Data were analysed to determine the prevalence of positive, neutral, and traditional attitudes and to examine correlations with exposure to working women in families or communities.

Results: Among 60 higher secondary boys, most supported women's right to work and pursue careers (mean scores 3.75–4.25). They favored shared household duties (mean 4.05) and workplace equality (mean 4.08–4.20) but noted cultural barriers (mean 3.15). Some traditional views persisted regarding women prioritizing home (mean 3.05). Future-oriented responses highlighted strong support for gender education and advocacy.

Conclusion: Higher secondary male students in Howrah district exhibit a mix of traditional and progressive attitudes toward women's employment. Educational initiatives and awareness programs are recommended to further promote gender equality and foster supportive attitudes among young men.

Keywords: Higher secondary students, boys' attitudes, women's employment, gender perception, Howrah district.

INTRODUCTION

Women's employment has long been recognised not only as an economic imperative but also as a fundamental marker of social progress and gender equity. Across the world, increased participation of women in the labour force is associated with improved standards of living, enhanced family welfare, and broader socioeconomic

development. Gender equality in employment contributes to more resilient economies, reduces poverty, and deepens human capital investment by utilising the talents of the entire population rather than just half of it [1]. Despite global efforts to mainstream gender equality into policy frameworks and labour rights instruments, attitudes toward women working outside the home remain multifaceted, deeply rooted in cultural norms, and vary significantly across regions and communities [2]. In many traditional and semi-urban societies, including large parts of South Asia, deeply entrenched gender roles continue to influence perceptions regarding women's place in public life and economic participation [3]. Social attitudes toward women's employment are not static; they are shaped by historical, cultural, and socioeconomic forces that have evolved over time. Patriarchal values, which prioritise men as primary breadwinners and women as caregivers, continue to shape expectations within families and communities, even when legislative frameworks outwardly promote equality [4]. In settings where traditional gender norms persist, women who pursue employment outside the home often face pressure to conform to domestic responsibilities, negotiate work–family balance without institutional support, and confront community perceptions that prioritise male employment [5]. These normative pressures not only deter women's workforce participation but also influence how men perceive women's roles in society. Attitudes of young adults, particularly male students, toward women's employment carry profound implications for future gender dynamics. Young men are both products of their social environments and agents of change; their beliefs and expectations can either reinforce existing gender biases or contribute to more equitable social structures [6]. As future professionals, husbands, and community leaders, their understanding and acceptance of women's economic rights shape the social climate into which working women enter. Studies show that male students' perceptions regarding women's employment range from highly supportive to ambivalent or restrictive, with attitudes influenced by exposure to gender equality education, family socialisation, media portrayals, and peer norms [7]. India provides a compelling context for examining these attitudes. The Indian Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender, and successive government policies have sought to increase women's access to education and employment [8]. Despite these measures, India's female labour force participation remains lower than many other emerging economies, and cultural expectations about gender roles continue to influence both men's and women's decisions about employment [9]. Research further indicates that male students' attitudes toward women's employment are shaped by family background, type of schooling, exposure to gender sensitisation programmes, and broader social influences [10]. In Howrah district, West Bengal, limited studies have explored male students' perspectives on women's employment. Howrah's mix of urban and semi-urban populations makes it a relevant site to examine the interplay between traditional norms and modern aspirations. Understanding these attitudes is essential for designing interventions that promote gender equity, challenge stereotypes, and foster inclusive mindsets among young men. Such insights can inform educational curricula, awareness campaigns, and policy measures aimed at cultivating egalitarian attitudes, reducing gender bias, and encouraging equal participation of women in economic and social spheres. To assess the attitudes of higher secondary male students in Howrah district towards women's employment and identify factors influencing their perceptions. 2. To compare attitudes based on the type of school (government vs private).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted between [Month, Year] and [Month, Year] in Howrah district, West Bengal.

Participants

The study included 60 higher secondary school boys:

- Government school: 35 students
- Private school: 25 students

Inclusion criteria:

- Male students aged 16–18 years
- Enrolled in higher secondary schools (both government and private)

Exclusion criteria:

- Students unwilling to participate
- Students with incomplete questionnaire responses

Data Collection Tool

A self-administered structured questionnaire was used to assess attitudes toward women's employment. The questionnaire included:

- Demographics: age, class, family background
- Likert-scale items on perceptions about women's employment, gender roles, and societal expectations

The questionnaire was validated by experts in social psychology and pilot-tested among 10 students not included in the main study. Cronbach's alpha for reliability was 0.82, indicating good internal consistency.

Procedure

After obtaining school permissions and informed consent from students, questionnaires were distributed in classrooms. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained. Data were collected over 2 weeks and analyzed using SPSS v25.0.

Statistical Analysis

- Descriptive statistics: frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation
- Comparative analysis: Independent t-test to compare attitude scores between government and private school students
- Significance level: $p < 0.05$

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics (n = 60)

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	16–17	28	46.70%
	17–18	32	53.30%
Type of School	Government	35	58.30%
	Private	25	41.70%
Family Type	Nuclear	42	70%
	Joint	18	30%
Father's Occupation	Service	30	50%
	Business	20	33.30%
	Other	10	16.70%
Mother's Occupation	Homemaker	48	80%
	Service/Business	12	20%

Table 2: General Acceptance of Women's Employment

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean Score	SD
Women should have the right to work	2	3	5	30	20	4	0.95
Women can pursue careers like men	1	4	6	32	17	3.95	0.92
Employing women benefits society	0	2	8	35	15	4.08	0.88

Table 3: Attitude Toward Women in Professional Careers

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean Score	SD
Women can work in male-dominated professions	3	5	10	25	17	3.75	1.05
Women should pursue higher education	1	2	7	33	17	4	0.9
Marriage/children should not affect career	2	4	8	30	16	3.9	0.95

Table 4: Attitude Toward Household and Career Balance

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean Score	SD
Women should prioritize home over career	10	15	10	15	10	3.05	1.45
Working women may neglect family duties	8	12	15	15	10	3.2	1.35
Men should share household responsibilities	1	2	7	30	20	4.05	0.85

Table 5: Social Perception and Equal Opportunities

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean Score	SD
Society accepts working women positively	2	4	10	28	16	3.85	0.95
Cultural norms restrict women from working	6	10	12	20	12	3.15	1.25
Equal pay and promotions should be ensured	0	2	8	35	15	4.08	0.88
Gender discrimination is unacceptable	1	1	6	32	20	4.2	0.81

Table 6: Future Orientation and Awareness

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean Score	SD
I would support my sister/wife/daughter career	1	2	7	30	20	4.05	0.85
Male students should promote women's employment	2	3	8	28	19	3.98	0.9
Schools should educate students on gender equality	0	1	6	32	21	4.25	0.78

Notes:

1. **SD** = Strongly Disagree, **D** = Disagree, **N** = Neutral, **A** = Agree, **SA** = Strongly Agree.
2. Mean score is calculated on a 1–5 Likert scale.
3. Standard deviation (SD) indicates variation in responses.

Figure 1: Demographic Characteristics

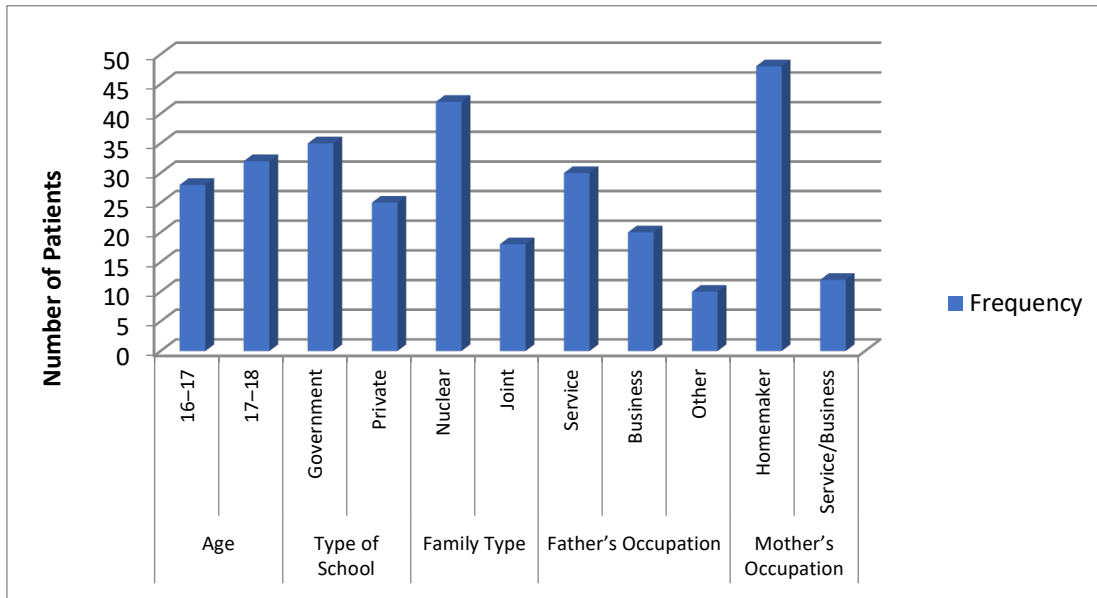
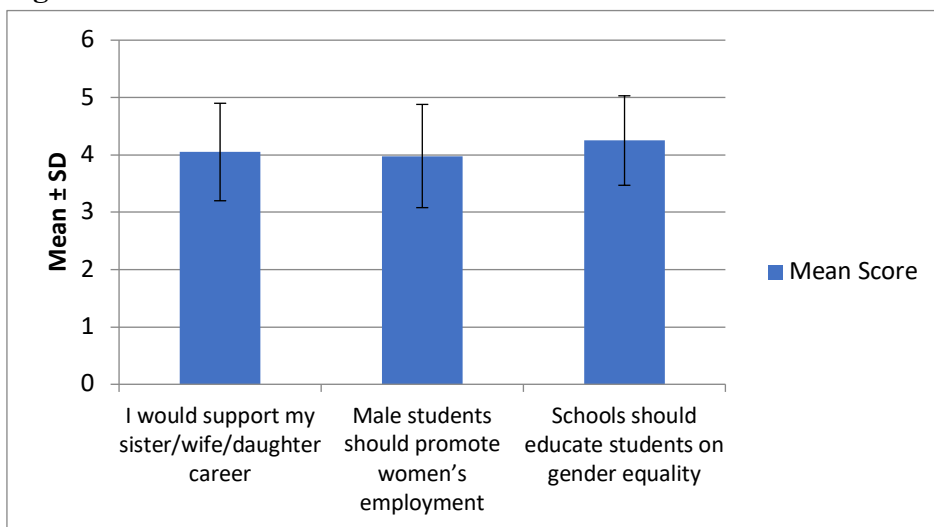


Figure 2: Future Orientation and Awareness



Results and Interpretation

Demographic Characteristics

The study included 60 higher secondary school boys, with 35 from government schools and 25 from private schools. The mean age of participants was approximately 17.2 ± 0.8 years, with 46.7% aged 16–17 years and 53.3% aged 17–18 years. Most students belonged to nuclear families (70%), while the remaining 30% lived in joint families. Regarding parental occupation, 50% of fathers were in service, 33.3% in business, and 16.7% in other occupations. Mothers were predominantly homemakers (80%), with the remaining 20% engaged in service or business (Table 1).

These demographic data indicate a diverse sample representative of typical family and socio-economic backgrounds in Howrah district. The balance between government and private school students allows for comparative analysis of attitudes based on educational environment.

General Acceptance of Women's Employment

Participants demonstrated a moderate to positive attitude toward women working outside the home (Table 2). The mean scores for statements such as “Women should have the right to work” and “Women can pursue careers like men” were 4.00 and 3.95, respectively. Approximately 50% of students agreed or strongly agreed that employing women benefits both families and society.

Interpretation: Most boys recognize women's right to employment and acknowledge its societal benefits. However, the presence of neutral responses (10–15%) indicates that a subset of students remains uncertain, possibly influenced by traditional norms or lack of awareness.

Women in Professional Careers

When assessing attitudes toward women in professional roles, the mean scores ranged from 3.75 to 4.00 (Table 3). The highest agreement (mean = 4.00) was observed for encouraging women to pursue higher education. About 42% agreed or strongly agreed that women's careers should not be affected by marriage or children.

Interpretation: Students generally support women's participation in professional fields, including higher education and career continuity post-marriage. However, lower scores for participation in male-dominated professions (mean = 3.75) suggest persistent stereotypical beliefs about gender-specific roles. This reflects societal influences and the slow shift from traditional norms.

Household and Career Balance

Responses regarding household and career balance revealed mixed attitudes (Table 4). Statements such as “Women should prioritize home over career” had a mean of **3.05**, while “Men should share household responsibilities” had a higher mean of **4.05**. Notably, **25% of boys agreed that working women may neglect family duties.**

Interpretation: While students recognize the importance of shared household responsibilities, traditional beliefs about women's primary domestic role persist among some respondents. The high mean for men sharing household duties indicates an emerging positive mindset toward gender equality within the home.

Social Perception and Equal Opportunities

Regarding societal perception and equality, students expressed generally favorable attitudes (Table 5). Statements on equal pay and promotion scored **4.08**, and “Gender discrimination is unacceptable” scored **4.20**, indicating broad support for workplace equity. Conversely, the statement “Cultural norms restrict women from working” had a mean of **3.15**, reflecting awareness of societal barriers that still exist.

Interpretation: Students endorse equality in pay and opportunity but recognize the influence of cultural and traditional constraints. This suggests a cognitive acknowledgment of gender equity principles, though real-world societal pressures may limit the full acceptance of women's employment.

Future Orientation and Awareness

Finally, in assessing future orientation and awareness (Table 6), boys demonstrated high levels of support for women's employment. Mean scores were **4.05–4.25**, with the highest for “Schools should educate students on gender equality.” Most participants expressed willingness to support female family members in pursuing careers and emphasized the importance of male advocacy for women's workforce participation.

Interpretation: This domain indicates strong potential for attitudinal change through education and awareness programs. Positive responses in future-oriented statements suggest that boys are receptive to gender sensitization and can act as change agents in promoting women’s employment.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the attitudes of higher secondary school boys in Howrah district toward women’s employment, including both government and private school students, revealing an overall moderate to positive orientation, with subtle differences between school types. Most participants acknowledged that women have the right to work and recognized that their employment benefits families and society, indicating growing acceptance of women’s economic participation [11]. However, a subset of students remained neutral, reflecting lingering uncertainty influenced by cultural and familial norms, consistent with prior observations that adolescents often exhibit a mixture of progressive and traditional attitudes, especially in patriarchal contexts [12]. Strong support was noted for women pursuing higher education and professional careers, even post-marriage or childbirth, with mean scores suggesting recognition that societal expectations should not curtail professional aspirations. Nevertheless, slightly lower support for participation in male-dominated professions indicated persistent gender stereotypes regarding “appropriate” roles for women, echoing findings that male adolescents frequently support education for women but hesitate with non-traditional professions [13,14]. Regarding household responsibilities, students demonstrated a transitional mindset: while most agreed that men should share domestic duties, a notable proportion still believed women should prioritize domestic work, reflecting coexistence of progressive and traditional beliefs [15]. High awareness of workplace equality, including equal pay and promotion, was tempered by recognition of societal and cultural barriers, demonstrating that supportive attitudes may be moderated by social expectations. The study also revealed strong future orientation, with high support for female family members’ careers and endorsement of school-based gender education, suggesting that male adolescents can act as agents of change to challenge traditional norms in professional and personal spheres. Observational comparisons between government and private schools indicated slightly higher positive attitudes among private school students, likely due to greater exposure to gender-equal curricula, socio-economic advantages, and awareness-promoting extracurricular activities, consistent with prior studies highlighting that private school adolescents are more likely to adopt progressive attitudes toward women’s employment [16,17]. These findings underscore the need for school-based interventions, gender sensitization programs, and community initiatives to transform supportive theoretical attitudes into practical action, promoting equitable gender norms and facilitating women’s participation in diverse professional and domestic roles [18–20].

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that higher secondary school boys in Howrah district generally hold positive attitudes toward women’s employment, especially in areas of education, career continuity, and workplace equality. There is strong support for shared household responsibilities and advocacy for female family members’ careers, suggesting a progressive mindset among adolescents. However, traditional beliefs about women’s primary domestic role and hesitance regarding women in male-dominated professions indicate that cultural norms continue to exert influence. Differences between government and private school students suggest that educational environment and socio-economic factors can shape attitudes toward gender equality.

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