

High School Students' Gender Role Perceptions Regarding Various Professions

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Abstract

This survey study aims to determine the gender role perceptions of high school students regarding several professions. 724 female (56.9%) and 548 male (43.1%) formed the sample of a total of 1272 high school students. The "Gender Role Perceptions regarding Various Professions Questionnaire" was used to determine the gender role perceptions of high school students based on various professions. The findings demonstrated that high school students perceived the professions of *teacher*, *doctor*, *lawyer*, *psychologist*, and *dentist* suitable for both male and female gender equally (neutral occupations). High school students perceived the professions of district governor (public administration), military officer, policeman, engineer, judge, prosecutor and architect as predominantly male occupations. On the other hand, students perceived the professions of nurse and dietician as mainly female occupations. The study findings demonstrated that high school students classify various professions as strictly male or female professions. These results demonstrated the significance of school psychological counselors who provide counseling services to students during the career selection process to raise awareness of the students by organizing group guidance activities on gender role perceptions and possible outcomes of various professions.

Keywords: gender role perception, professions, choice of profession, high school students.

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Introduction

Today social gender inequality still prevails at a great extent, and it is of utmost importance that women should gain a seat in various areas of business life for the improvement and sustainability of the quality of life of the society. A general examination of the salaries of male and female employees in the professional life demonstrated that male-dominated occupations are better paid and perceived as being higher in status than female-dominated occupations (Buschor, Kappler, Frei & Berweger, 2014). Despite the widespread acceptance that women's participation in the labor force is an important factor for sustainable progress, the women's share in the workforce has been declining gradually in Turkey. Female participation in labor force was around 34.1% in 1990, however it declined to 27.9% in 2002 and to 23.3% in 2004 (Korkmaz, Alacahan, Cesim, Yücel & Aras, 2013). By 2015, however, female participation in labor force raised slightly to 32.1 (TÜİK, 2015). One of the major obstacles preventing women's active participation in the work force is the social gender role perception regarding various professions.

Gender is an important factor in career choices (Hooley & Yates, 2015). Traditionally it has been perceived that females are passive, nourishing, sensitive, emotional, could succeed in home making and social sciences, and could fail in fields such as mathematics and engineering (Özyürek, 2013). Cejka and Eagly (1999) stated that the perception of femininity and masculinity is effective on career choices. The perception of femininity; the perception of being courteous, supportive, helpful, social, polite, and cooperative, shapes women's vocational choices.

Social gender roles for women, starting from early years, are shaped by the traditional messages emanating from families, teachers, and media. Social inhibitions and strict gender roles result in women increasingly assuming the roles of motherhood and home making (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994; Pascall, Parker, & Evetts, 2000; Swarbrick, 1997). The vocational role perceptions of the parents are highly effective in shaping children's vocational gender role perceptions (Hadjar & Belinda Aeschlimann, 2015; Hauser & Garvey, 1983). Parents encourage the male child to take risks in the external world, while they expect the female to engage in malleable activities requiring less risk (Adya & Kaiser, 2005). These types of restrictions could have resulted in women's inclination towards lower status and low-income careers (Hackett, Betz, Casas, & Rocha-Singh, 1992). The fact that males have more risk-taking experience in their early years compared to females could steer them to take risks during the process of career choices, thus advancing in their careers more rapidly (Taylor, Madill, & Macnab, 1990). Another impediment in women's vocational choices is the social perception related to women's duty as mothers. The choice of women for professions that are considered to be unsuitable for their role as a mother harbors concerns about their inability to perform their duties as a mother and responsibilities of raising children (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2001; Houser & Garvey, 1983; Shaw, 1995; Taylor, 1995). Those social perceptions directly or indirectly define the individual's mode of behavior as a woman or a man and in her or his career choices. Females receive confusing and not sufficiently supportive messages from their environment (Bogart & Stein, 1987). These messages could inevitably affect females' self-esteem in a negative way.

Culture has a significant impact on women's efficiency in professional life. The culture, in which the individuals live, determines the roles that should be adopted by women and men in that society (Adya & Kaiser, 2005; Ortiz, 1996; Zuckerman, 1981). Attempts by women to leave the vocational roles assigned to them would have them face various obstructions (Pascall et al., 2000; Rochlen & O'Brien, 2002). General social creed in Asiatic countries such as China, Japan and Vietnam suggests that women should display shy and less-demanding behavioral patterns. These expectations have prevented active contribution of women in professional life in a great extend (Fujitomi & Wong, 1973). For instance, when a female in Turkey wants to become an engineer or engage in commerce, she may receive less encouragement from the community, and she could even be prevented to go beyond the traditional roles cut for females, as implied in traditional statements like "don't try to do a man's job," "be a home maker," or "that's not a female's business."

Chusmir (1983) stated that women are channeled towards the vocations of social work, nursing or teaching that are approved by the society as appropriate for women in contrast to vocations such as engineering, science, law or medicine. In their study, Betz and Hackett (1983) demonstrated that self-efficacy perception of male students was higher than female students in science and mathematics. In his study, Catsambis (1995) stated that women have higher level of anxiety for success in math and sciences than men. In addition, men feel more confident that they would succeed in math and sciences. Similarly Brown (1993) showed that women experience problems in choosing the fields of mathematics, engineering and science, and only 4% of females attending high school choose vocations related to math, as compared to 13% of males. Wheeler (1983) identified that women were inclined towards choosing traditional vocations and had low self-efficacy perception on their career choices. However, certain studies demonstrated that females tend towards math related and scientific vocations more than male students, and others (Steinmeyer, 2003) stated that gender was not effective in career choices and male and female students approach mathematical and scientific fields equally. These findings show that the traditional perceptions towards certain professions have started to change in time. This development will be more significant as the frequency of women that choose outside the socially inscribed careers and succeed would increase. Especially the fact that young women observing the achievements of their peers and taking them as role models would be effective.

Literature review did not reveal any studies on perceived gender roles for high school students in Turkey. Thus, the present study aims to identify the female-male vocational perceptions of high school students and to create awareness on gender and choice of profession. It was also considered that the findings of this study would determine the gender role perceptions of students at a critical age (15-18 years old) on various professions to make a choice for their career so that vocational education programs could be designed to help raise awareness among students about that process.

The aim of this study is to determine gender role perceptions of high school students about various professions. Consequently, the study aims to answer the following question: What are the gender role perceptions of high school students about certain professions?

Method

Design

The present study is a quantitative study conducted using the survey method. Survey design enables the quantitative or numerical description of tendencies, attitudes or views in a population by studying a sample selected within the population (Creswell, 2014). Questionnaire forms (Gender Role Perceptions on Various Professions-GRPVP) were used to collect data in an economic and speedy way as provided by the survey design in the study. Data was collected from high school students using single pass group application method (Fowler, 2009).

Population and Sample

The study was conducted in the province of Malatya located in East Anatolia region in Turkey with a population of 740,643 and officially considered as a metropolis. The population of the study included 15,119 (7312 male, 7807 female) high school students who attended schools in Malatya province, Yeşilyurt district, located at the city center. Due to the accessibility and convenience of the participants, non-probabilistic adequate sampling (Creswell, 2014) method was used. The sample of the study included a total of 1272 high school students, 724 female (56.9%) and 548 male (43.1%), that attended 5 vocational and 6 Anatolian high schools. In the first stage of the study that aimed to determine the occupations preferred by high school students, the application was conducted with 101 males (36.5%) and 175 females (63.5%), a total of 276 students. The second part of the study was conducted with 549 female (55.1%) and 447 male (44.9%) students, a total of 996, to determine the vocational gender role perceptions of high school students.

Instrument

To determine the gender role perceptions of high school students on various professions, GRPVP questionnaire form designed by the author was utilized in the study. To determine the occupations included in the questionnaire, a pilot scheme was conducted with 276 high school students. In the pilot scheme, the students were asked one open-ended question: "Which professions would you like to prefer in the future?" And the following professions were determined based on the student responses: medical doctor (n=51), engineer (n=43), teacher (n=28), policeman (n=25), attorney in law (n=18), architect (n=16), military officer (n=11), dietician (n=10), nurse (n=10), prosecutor (n=10), dentist (n=8), judge of law (n=8), psychologist (n=5), public administrator (n=4) and others (for example: archeologist, veterinary, flight stewardess, musician, bank employer, football player) (n=39). Professions preferred by each student among the 39 participating students were mentioned only once. As a result, only the 14 professions selected more than once were used in the next stage of the study. In the second stage of the study, a different sample group of 996 high school students were asked their perceptions about the rate of preference of these 14 professions by females and males. The vocational gender role perceptions of students for 14 designated professions were determined on a five-point (-2=only for women, -1=mostly for women, 0=equal for women and men, 1=mostly for men, 2=only for men) scale. The negative and positive values used in the evaluations for the survey form did not reflect any positive or negative implications, but only used in mathematical calculations. In the framework of the above scale, the professions in the range of -.50 to +.50 points were classified as neutral (professions that could be performed by females or males equally); the range of -.51 to -2 points as female professions (that could be performed by females only); and the range of +.51 to +2 points as male professions (that could be performed by males only).

Data Analysis

Point averages for 14 professions that were included in the survey form were calculated and plotted on a graph to determine the gender role perceptions of high school students. The graph was designed based on the model by Gottfredson (2005, p. 78), which displayed the female, male and neutral attitudes of students towards certain vocations. In the graph designed for this study, gender role perceptions of high school students reflect the point averages of the student preferences for professions. For instance, in Figure 1, the profession of nursing was rated with the related average ($\bar{x} = -1.11$) and plotted on the right side of the figure. The professions rated by the students as suitable for both female and male gender were described as neutral (their averages were close to zero). As the values disperse towards the left from zero (neutral), they demonstrate that concentration of perceptions for these professions are more suitable for men, while the values disperse towards right from zero (neutral), they reflect that perceptions for these professions are predominantly suitable for women.

Results

Average scores for gender role perceptions of high school students for various professions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Point averages for gender role perceptions of high school students for various professions (n=996)

Professions	Gender	n	\bar{X}	s
Architect	Female	549	.48	.971
	Male	447	.85	1.030
	Total	996	.65	1.014
Dentist	Female	549	.44	.893
	Male	447	.51	1.015
	Total	996	.47	.950
Dietician	Female	549	-.79	.583
	Male	447	-.86	.618
	Total	996	-.82	.599
Engineer	Female	549	1.05	.998
	Male	447	1.15	.963
	Total	996	1.09	.983
Judge	Female	549	.75	.996
	Male	447	.99	.970
	Total	996	.86	.991
Lawyer	Female	549	.11	.675
	Male	447	.34	.799
	Total	996	.21	.743
Medical Doctor	Female	549	.11	.539
	Male	447	.20	.646
	Total	996	.15	.591
Military Officer	Female	549	1.53	.674
	Male	447	1.47	.692
	Total	996	1.50	.682
Nurse	Female	549	-1.08	.651
	Male	447	-1.15	.797
	Total	996	-1.11	.721
Policeman	Female	549	1.09	1.013
	Male	447	1.28	.946
	Total	996	1.18	.988
Prosecutor	Female	549	.78	.997
	Male	447	.91	.990
	Total	996	.84	.996
Psychologist	Female	549	-.23	.652
	Male	447	-.27	.793
	Total	996	-.25	.719
Public Administrator	Female	549	1.55	.745
	Male	447	1.53	.704
	Total	996	1.54	.727
Teacher	Female	549	-.09	.395
	Male	447	-.02	.384
	Total	996	-.06	.392

Table 1 displays average scores for gender role perceptions of high school students on certain professions such as; lawyer ($\bar{x} = .21$), dentist ($\bar{x} = .47$), dietician ($\bar{x} = -.82$), medical doctor ($\bar{x} = .15$), nurse ($\bar{x} = -1.11$), architect ($\bar{x} = .65$), engineer ($\bar{x} = 1.09$), public administrator ($\bar{x} = 1.54$), teacher ($\bar{x} = -.06$), policeman ($\bar{x} = 1.18$), psychologist ($\bar{x} = -.25$), military officer ($\bar{x} = 1.50$), judge ($\bar{x} = .86$), and prosecutor ($\bar{x} = .84$).

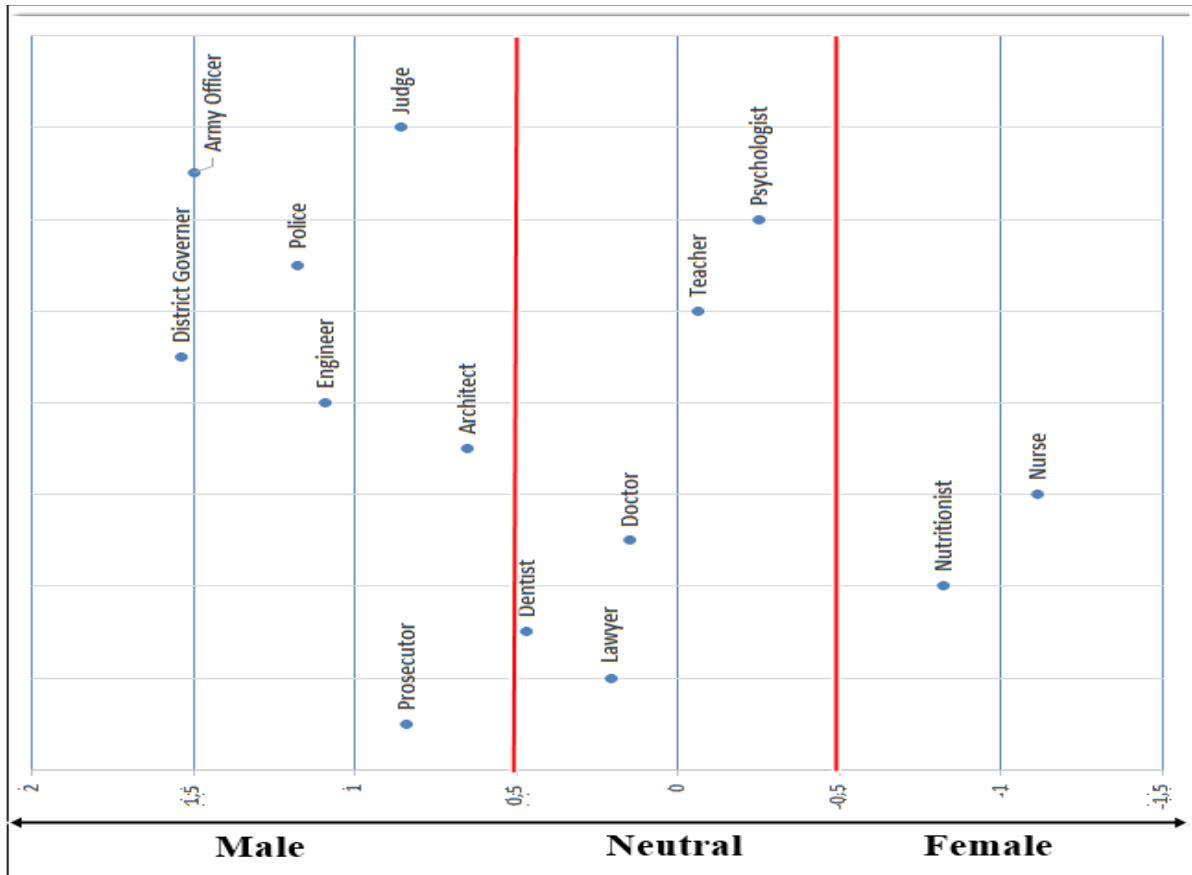


Figure 1. Gender role perceptions of high school students on various professions

Figure 1 demonstrates that teaching, medicine, practice of law, psychology and dentistry were perceived as gender-neutral professions. The students described the professions of district governor, army officer, policeman, engineer, judge, prosecutor and architect as more suitable for men in that order. Students described nursing and nutrition as more appropriate for women, in that order.

Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

The present survey study aimed to determine the gender role perceptions of high school students regarding professions. High school students determined the professions of teaching, medicine, practice of law, psychology and dentistry as professions that could equally be performed by women and men (gender-neutral professions). The students perceived the vocations of district governor, army officer, policeman, engineer, judge, prosecutor and architect as more suitable for men. In addition, students perceived nursing and nutrition as more appropriate for women. High school students considered 7 of 14 professions as male professions and only two professions are female professions. This suggests that gender role perception limits women's occupational alternatives. Graph 1 demonstrated that the gender role perceptions of high school students have led to a strict determination of the limits of various professions as male and female professions. For example, it was observed that the difference between the scores for the perception of district governor as the most masculine profession and the nursing profession perceived as the most feminine occupation was very high (Graph 1). This finding showed that the profession of district governor was a distant choice for a female student, while the nursing profession was a distant choice for a male student. As a matter of fact, male students in Turkey experience various social oppression and manipulations if they select a career as a nurse. These pressures are manifested in the fact that the nursing departments have a very small number of male students.

The professions perceived as the most masculine were district governor (public administration) and military officer. District governor in Turkey is the civilian authority and the senior public administrator in a district, responsible for the general administration, representing the state in the district. Students perceived senior management as a masculine profession. This finding might be considered as the general attitude of a male-dominant society that the administrators should be selected among men. The perception that women should perform as auxiliary staff instead of administration or professions that require leadership (Kadushin, 1976) might result from the fact that men have higher motivation towards top-tier professional vocations than women (Williams, 1994). Another reason for women perceiving senior management vocations as male professions is the fact that women start their careers in more junior posts than men and they face higher obstacles during their ascend in the corporate ladder (Boushey & Cherry, 2003; Day, 1997; Pascall et al., 2000). For instance, in Turkey's highest public office, Parliament of Turkey (TBMM), only 77 (14.37%) of 536 representatives were women in 2014. The fact that the parliament members who occupy the highest public posts are predominantly men reflects the social perception that managerial and administrative occupations should be performed by males.

Military occupations historically were considered as male professions. Military service is mandatory for men in Turkey. Women could become officers, however almost 90% of the military academy quotas are reserved for men in Turkey. The expectation that women should be cleanly, fancy and with good attire in the society results in men preferring military vocations more frequently than women (Colman, 1990). Even though procurement of females as military officers or sergeants have increased during recent years in Turkey, military occupations are generally perceived as reserved for males.

Study findings also demonstrate that high school students perceive the profession of nursing as a female occupation. Even though in recent years' men have started to serve as nurses in Turkey, high school students perceive nursing as a women's occupation. Reverby (1987) states that since nursing is an occupation that does not necessitate expertise and due to its low prestige, it has been perceived as a female occupation. According to Reverby (1987), nursing is perceived as a reflection of women's natural duties of assistance and care and an extension of women's daily chores at home. Similarly, a study by Schollossberg and Goodman (1972) that was conducted with sixth grade students to determine their gender perceptions on professions demonstrated that both genders considered nursing was performed more by women than men.

Another occupation that high school students thought to be performed more by women was the profession of a nutritionist. There is a perception that women consider concepts like nutrition, nutritive regime and diet more closely. The perception that women are interested in aesthetic concerns, weight problems, nutrition problems, cooking and its content more than men could have been the reason behind the high school students' perception that the profession of a dietician was a woman's occupation. Furthermore, in several societies, the perception that it is the mother's responsibility to prepare a healthy diet and general care of the growing and developing children could have led to the consideration of the profession of a dietician as an occupation reserved for women.

In general the study findings demonstrated that male and female students have a neutral attitude regarding only 5 professions (teacher, psychologist, doctor, lawyer, dentist) among 14 professions. Students displayed the highest neutral attitude towards the profession of teaching (near zero). This suggests that for high school students, the teaching profession was perceived as a profession that is highly regarded for both genders and does not involve any limit based on gender. According to high school students, seven professions were male professions and two were female professions except for the professions they considered as neutral. The study demonstrated that both female and male students perceived most of the occupations included in the research as male professions. This finding demonstrates that women usually do not have the opportunity to display their talents within a wide spectrum of occupations in professional life. They could be distanced from various lines of business, in which they could be successful, just because they were not given fair opportunities. Vocational theoreticians (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Super, 1990; Zytowski, 1969) stated

that female career processes are quite different from that of the males, and women's special needs should be considered during the counseling process (Zunker, 2006). These differences should be especially considered for the high school student females who are about to make career choices, and their unrealistic perceptions on social restrictions should be altered. School guidance counselors that provide professional assistance for high school students on their career decisions should restructure school vocational guidance programs by taking the effects of gender role perception on career selection into account. School guidance counselors should determine the gender role perceptions of students regarding various professions using several measurement tools. Unrealistic gender restrictions by high school students regarding various professions would be limited by taking women who work in predominantly male occupations as a role model and sharing their experiences with female and male students. It was considered that, in changing the gender role perceptions on various professions, male students also could contribute significantly. The perceptions of male students on certain professions as male or female occupations are significantly effective due to the motivation of female students would be accepted by the opposite gender. Thus, the change in perception of male students has a critical significance in changing unrealistic gender role perceptions.

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