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Cultural Perceptions of Gender Roles and their Influence on Career Choices in Religious Communities in United Kingdom



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Cultural Perceptions of Gender Roles and their Influence on Career Choices in Religious Communities in United Kingdom



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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to analyze cultural perceptions of gender roles and their influence on career choices in religious communities in United Kingdom.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Cultural perceptions of gender roles in religious communities in the UK strongly influence career choices. Women are often expected to prioritize family over career, limiting their professional aspirations, especially in conservative religious groups. Men, on the other hand, are typically encouraged to pursue leadership and high-status careers. However, there is a growing shift, with more women entering the workforce, particularly in fields like healthcare and education. This reflects the tension between traditional gender norms and modern career opportunities in religious settings.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social role theory, cultural capital theory & expectancy theory expectancy may be used to anchor future studies on the cultural perceptions of gender roles and their influence on career choices in religious communities in United Kingdom. In practice, religious communities can take concrete steps to create environments that support equal career opportunities for men and women. From a policy perspective, religious institutions can implement gender-inclusive policies that promote equality in career choices.

Keywords: *Cultural Perceptions, Gender Roles, Career Choices*

INTRODUCTION

Career choices in developed economies, like the United States and the United Kingdom, often reflect gender-specific occupation rates, career satisfaction, and work-life balance. In the U.S., gender-specific occupations have seen a shift, though traditional patterns still persist, with women concentrated in healthcare, education, and administrative roles, while men dominate fields like engineering and IT (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). According to recent data, women make up 76% of healthcare workers, yet only 14% of the engineering workforce, illustrating the gender disparity in certain sectors (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Career satisfaction is also linked to gender, with women in the U.S. reporting slightly lower job satisfaction than men, particularly due to challenges balancing work and family responsibilities (Kaufman, 2019). In the UK, similar patterns exist, with women being more likely to work part-time to accommodate family responsibilities, while men have higher full-time employment rates (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Work-life balance continues to be a key issue, as women are more likely to experience job strain due to unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities.

In developing economies like India and Brazil, gender-specific occupation rates and career satisfaction are influenced by cultural norms and economic development. In India, gender disparities persist in employment sectors, with women predominantly in agriculture (around 60% of female workers), whereas men dominate industrial and service sectors (International Labour Organization, 2020). Career satisfaction for women is often lower, as many face discrimination and limited career growth opportunities, especially in higher-paying sectors like finance and engineering (Chatterjee & Kaur, 2019). Similarly, in Brazil, women are concentrated in lower-paying sectors like retail, healthcare, and education, with men dominating higher-paying fields such as technology and finance (IBGE, 2021). Work-life balance in both countries tends to be skewed toward women, who often juggle full-time employment with domestic responsibilities, leading to lower career satisfaction and higher stress levels. These gender disparities are compounded by limited access to childcare and other support systems, which further hinder women's career progression and work-life balance.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, gender-specific occupation rates are strongly influenced by traditional roles, and career satisfaction is shaped by socio-economic conditions. In Kenya, women are concentrated in agriculture (representing 60% of the agricultural workforce) and services, while men dominate industries such as construction and finance (World Bank, 2019). Women's career satisfaction is often lower in Kenya, where they face barriers such as limited access to higher education, fewer job opportunities, and societal expectations surrounding domestic roles (Mutiso & Oduor, 2020). In Nigeria, the gender gap in employment persists, with women significantly underrepresented in technical and scientific fields, while they dominate sectors like education and healthcare (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Work-life balance remains a critical issue in both countries, with women disproportionately affected by unpaid care work, limiting their career advancement and job satisfaction. However, progress is being made, as more women enter the workforce, and governments are increasingly focusing on policies that support women in the labor market.

Cultural perceptions of gender roles significantly shape career choices, often dictating the types of professions deemed "appropriate" for men and women. In many societies, traditional gender roles

prescribe that men are suited for leadership, technical, and high-paying roles, while women are often expected to take on caregiving or nurturing roles, which tend to be lower-paying and more service-oriented (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These perceptions influence gender-specific occupation rates, with women disproportionately represented in fields such as education, healthcare, and administrative work, while men dominate engineering, technology, and finance (Smith, 2018). Moreover, cultural norms surrounding caregiving responsibilities can create significant barriers to career satisfaction for women, as they are often expected to balance both work and home responsibilities, resulting in lower job satisfaction and higher stress levels compared to men (Fagan, 2017). Additionally, societal expectations around "ideal" work-life balance may discourage women from pursuing more demanding or higher-paying careers that might conflict with family obligations, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting career progression (Baxter, 2019).

These cultural perceptions also directly impact work-life balance, with women bearing the greater share of domestic and childcare responsibilities, which in turn affects their career choices and satisfaction. In many cultures, women are encouraged to take on part-time roles or positions with flexible hours, often at the expense of career advancement and earning potential (Vlasblom & Schippers, 2019). The pressure for women to maintain a balance between work and family, influenced by cultural expectations, limits their opportunities for career advancement, as they are less likely to seek promotions or high-stress jobs (Baker & Hill, 2018). In contrast, men are generally encouraged to focus on career development and professional growth, contributing to the gender pay gap and unequal representation in leadership positions (Goldin, 2014). These cultural perceptions, rooted in deeply ingrained societal beliefs about gender roles, continue to shape career trajectories, gender-specific occupation rates, and overall career satisfaction for both men and women.

Problem Statement

The cultural perceptions of gender roles in religious communities significantly influence career choices, often reinforcing traditional expectations that limit individual opportunities and career satisfaction. These communities, shaped by longstanding religious doctrines and cultural norms, tend to assign specific roles to men and women, with men generally encouraged to pursue careers in leadership, business, or technical fields, while women are often directed toward caregiving, teaching, or service-oriented professions (Chaudhury & Duflo, 2020). These gendered career trajectories can contribute to unequal participation in the workforce and gender segregation in high-paying or leadership roles, affecting economic equality and job satisfaction (Fagan & Walthery, 2018). Moreover, cultural expectations within these communities regarding family responsibilities can limit women's access to professional advancement, as societal pressures often prioritize their roles as mothers or homemakers (Baker & Hill, 2018). Despite efforts to promote gender equality, these ingrained cultural perceptions continue to shape career aspirations and create barriers for both men and women, with significant implications for work-life balance, career choices, and economic development (Smith, 2021).

Theoretical Review

Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987)

Social Role Theory posits that gender roles are socially constructed based on expectations about how men and women should behave in various contexts. It argues that these roles are deeply influenced by societal norms, including religious beliefs, which dictate appropriate behaviors for each gender. In religious communities, this theory is particularly relevant as religious teachings often reinforce gendered expectations, such as women being caregivers and men being providers or leaders. Social Role Theory helps explain why men and women in these communities might pursue specific career paths based on these cultural norms. This theory is instrumental in understanding how religious doctrines shape career choices, as it links societal roles to professional decisions (Eagly, 2018).

Cultural Capital Theory

Cultural Capital Theory suggests that individuals possess resources like skills, education, and cultural knowledge that influence their social mobility and career outcomes. In religious communities, this theory can be used to explore how gendered cultural capital—such as women being more likely to receive education in caregiving and men in leadership—shapes career choices. The theory highlights the importance of how cultural values within these communities' influence opportunities for both genders, as religious norms may limit women's access to certain professions or leadership roles (Bourdieu, 1986)

Expectancy Theory Expectancy

Theory posits that individuals make decisions based on their expectations of outcomes and rewards. In religious communities, this theory can help explain how gender expectations influence career choices, as women and men may prioritize certain careers based on perceived rewards (e.g., social approval, religious acceptance) rather than purely personal ambitions. Religious teachings often define what is considered “rewarding” in career choices, affecting individual decisions (Vroom, 1964)

Empirical Review

Chaudhury and Duflo (2020) explored the role of gendered cultural norms in shaping career choices within religious communities in India. The study aimed to examine how religious perceptions of gender roles influence women's decisions to pursue certain careers. Using qualitative interviews with women from both conservative and more liberal religious communities, the researchers found that religious beliefs strongly shaped career paths, with women often encouraged to focus on domestic roles, such as caregiving, rather than leadership positions in professional fields. The study showed that women in conservative religious communities were significantly less likely to consider high-status careers compared to those in more progressive settings. The researchers noted that these cultural expectations were reinforced by both religious teachings and societal norms that prioritize women's roles as mothers and caretakers. Furthermore, the findings suggested that women often internalized these cultural expectations, limiting their career aspirations. They also found that women who tried to challenge these norms faced strong social resistance, which further hindered their career progression. The study recommended that

religious institutions actively engage in promoting gender equality and reinterpreting religious doctrines to encourage women to pursue diverse career paths. Moreover, it suggested that educational programs should focus on challenging traditional gender roles, helping to break down the societal barriers that restrict women's career choices. The research emphasized that religious communities could play a pivotal role in creating a supportive environment for women's career advancement by addressing gender biases in religious teachings. Chaudhury and Duflo (2020) concluded that religious communities must shift their cultural perceptions to promote equal opportunities for both men and women in all sectors of the economy, thereby fostering gender equality and broadening career options for women. Their findings underscore the need for a more inclusive approach in religious settings to empower women to make career choices based on their interests and abilities rather than cultural expectations.

Fagan and Walthery (2018) investigated how gendered roles within religious communities in the U.S. and Europe influence career satisfaction and work-life balance. The researchers aimed to understand the intersection between religious teachings and the career choices of men and women in various religious settings. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews with participants from different faith-based communities. The findings indicated that women in more conservative religious communities, particularly those that emphasized traditional gender roles, faced greater challenges in balancing work and family obligations, often taking on part-time or flexible roles to accommodate family responsibilities. In contrast, men in these communities were encouraged to prioritize full-time, high-status careers, resulting in greater career satisfaction and professional success. Additionally, the study revealed that women in more progressive religious communities experienced less pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and had more opportunities to pursue careers in leadership or high-paying fields. However, even in these communities, women still faced barriers related to societal expectations of their roles as mothers and caregivers, which limited their career satisfaction. The study recommended that religious organizations promote gender-inclusive policies, such as encouraging women to take leadership roles and advocating for better work-life balance policies within faith-based institutions. It also suggested that religious teachings should be re-examined to challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender equality. Fagan and Walthery (2018) concluded that religious communities could play a transformative role in improving work-life balance and career satisfaction for women by reshaping cultural perceptions of gender roles. By fostering an inclusive environment where both men and women are encouraged to pursue diverse careers, religious institutions can contribute to greater gender equality in the workforce.

Baker and Hill (2019) examined the impact of gender roles on career satisfaction and work-life balance among individuals working in religious organizations. The purpose of this study was to explore how religious teachings and gender expectations within religious communities shape career choices and satisfaction. The researchers used a qualitative approach, conducting in-depth interviews with both male and female employees in various religious organizations in the U.S. and Europe. The findings revealed that women in religious settings were more likely to experience lower career satisfaction compared to their male counterparts, primarily due to the pressure to

conform to traditional gender roles, such as managing both work and family life. Women in religious communities often faced additional expectations around caregiving and homemaking, leading to greater stress and dissatisfaction with their careers. In contrast, men were encouraged to pursue full-time careers, which typically resulted in higher career satisfaction and professional achievement. The study also noted that women in religious organizations often felt overlooked when it came to leadership positions or career advancement opportunities. The researchers recommended that religious organizations implement policies that promote gender equality in the workplace, such as offering more flexible career paths, leadership training for women, and support for working mothers. Baker and Hill (2019) also suggested that religious teachings should be revisited to challenge traditional gender roles and to emphasize the importance of supporting women's career aspirations. They concluded that by promoting gender-inclusive policies, religious organizations could help improve work-life balance and career satisfaction for both men and women, leading to a more equitable and supportive environment within religious communities.

Smith (2021) investigated the impact of cultural perceptions of gender roles within religious communities in Latin America on career progression and job satisfaction. The study aimed to examine how religious doctrines and societal norms shaped the career choices of men and women in these communities. Using survey data collected from religious communities across several Latin American countries, the researchers found that women were more likely to pursue careers in caregiving, education, or healthcare, while men dominated higher-paying roles in leadership, technology, and business sectors. The study also revealed that women's career progression was often hindered by the cultural expectation that they would prioritize family responsibilities, which limited their opportunities for career advancement. Additionally, women reported lower job satisfaction, as they felt pressured to balance their professional lives with their roles as caregivers, leading to stress and burnout. Smith recommended that religious institutions implement policies that encourage women's participation in leadership roles and provide more support for work-life balance, including flexible work hours and childcare options. They also suggested that religious teachings should evolve to challenge traditional gender roles and promote greater career equality. The study emphasized the need for a shift in cultural perceptions within religious communities to allow women to pursue diverse career paths without facing societal or religious backlash. The researchers concluded that creating an inclusive environment that promotes equal opportunities for both men and women could significantly improve career satisfaction and job progression in religious settings.

Mutiso and Oduor (2020) analyzed how gender roles, shaped by religious teachings, influence career choices among women in Kenya. This study aimed to explore how religious beliefs and gender norms in Kenyan religious community's impact women's career decisions. The researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with women from different religious backgrounds, analyzing how their faith influenced their career aspirations and choices. The study found that women in more conservative religious communities were more likely to pursue careers aligned with traditional gender roles, such as teaching, nursing, and caregiving, while those in progressive communities had more freedom to explore diverse career options, including leadership and

business roles. The study also highlighted that women in conservative religious settings often faced significant barriers to career progression, as societal expectations emphasized their roles as wives and mothers. Mutiso and Oduor (2020) recommended that religious leaders engage in discussions about gender equality and career development, emphasizing the importance of empowering women to pursue careers based on their abilities and interests. They also suggested that religious institutions could play a key role in promoting gender equality by offering educational programs that challenge restrictive gender norms. The research concluded that shifting cultural perceptions within religious communities could enable women to explore a broader range of career opportunities, ultimately contributing to greater gender equality in the workplace.

Leung and Taylor (2018) examined the influence of Protestant teachings on career paths in African American communities in the U.S. The study aimed to explore how religious values within Protestantism shaped career choices and perceptions of gender roles. The researchers used both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to collect data from African American Protestant congregations. The findings showed that while Protestant teachings provided support for career choices, they also reinforced traditional gender roles, particularly for women, who were often expected to prioritize family and caregiving roles over professional ambitions. The study also highlighted that men in these communities had more freedom to pursue high-status careers, while women were encouraged to take on lower-paying, nurturing roles. Leung and Taylor recommended that Protestant communities should engage in discussions about gender equality and career opportunities, especially for women, to help dismantle traditional gender barriers. They also suggested that religious leaders could play a critical role in broadening career perspectives by emphasizing the value of professional achievements alongside familial responsibilities. The study concluded that greater awareness of gender equality in religious teachings could open doors for women to pursue more diverse and fulfilling careers.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gap: While the studies by Chaudhury and Duflo (2020), Fagan and Walthery (2018), and others have explored how cultural and religious norms shape gender roles in career choices, there is a significant conceptual gap in understanding how these perceptions evolve over time. Specifically, the long-term impact of changing religious beliefs on gender roles and career outcomes remains underexplored. Although some studies highlight how conservative religious teachings limit women's career paths, they do not fully examine how newer interpretations of

religious doctrines could challenge or reshape these norms. Additionally, there is limited research on the role of younger generations within religious communities and how they perceive gendered career roles compared to older generations. Understanding how religious beliefs are fluid and how their reinterpretation can influence gendered career paths is crucial for deeper conceptual clarity. Furthermore, the intersection of religious beliefs with other societal factors, such as race and socioeconomic status, is not sufficiently addressed in current studies.

Contextual Gap: While research has been conducted in different religious settings across the world, there is still a gap in understanding the nuanced effects of local cultural factors within specific religious communities. For instance, Fagan and Walthery (2018) found differences between conservative and progressive religious communities in the U.S. and Europe, but these differences have not been explored in non-Western religious contexts. Most studies have focused on large, organized religious groups, but the experiences of women in smaller or more localized religious communities remain understudied. Additionally, the extent to which religious teachings intersect with local economic conditions, such as rural versus urban settings, or educational opportunities, is not adequately addressed. There is also a lack of research on how religious institutions can create context-specific policies to enhance gender equality in career choices and opportunities.

Geographical Gap: Most research on gender roles and career choices within religious communities has focused on Western countries, particularly the U.S. and Europe, with limited attention given to non-Western religious settings. While studies like those by Mutiso and Oduor (2020) explore the impact of religious gender norms in Kenya, many other regions, especially in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, remain underexplored. The unique challenges faced by women in religious communities in these regions, where religion and tradition play a dominant role in everyday life, need further investigation. Furthermore, the comparative analysis between different religious traditions within the same geographical context, such as comparing the experiences of women in Islamic, Christian, and Hindu communities in South Asia, is limited. More cross-cultural, global research is needed to address the varying effects of religious perceptions on gendered career choices worldwide.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, cultural perceptions of gender roles within religious communities have a profound impact on career choices, often reinforcing traditional expectations that limit opportunities for both men and women. Religious teachings, societal norms, and expectations about family roles frequently steer women into caregiving or part-time positions, while men are encouraged to pursue leadership or high-status careers. Despite varying levels of conservatism across different religious communities, these cultural norms can significantly affect career satisfaction, progression, and overall work-life balance. While some religious communities have started to challenge these traditional norms, especially in more progressive settings, the resistance to change remains a significant barrier in conservative communities. The research highlights the importance of reinterpreting religious teachings to promote gender equality and career diversity, ensuring that both men and women have equal opportunities to pursue careers based on their interests and abilities, rather than being limited by restrictive cultural expectations. By addressing these

perceptions and fostering inclusive environments, religious communities can play a transformative role in supporting gender equality and empowering individuals to reach their full career potential.

Recommendations

Theory: Theories such as Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) and Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) provide valuable insights into how gender roles in religious communities shape career choices. Social Role Theory suggests that societal expectations, including those rooted in religious beliefs, define specific roles for men and women, influencing their professional aspirations and opportunities. Cultural Capital Theory highlights the impact of access to education, mentorship, and social networks on career success, emphasizing how women in religious communities often face barriers to gaining the necessary resources to pursue non-traditional careers. Together, these theories suggest that gendered expectations within religious contexts can restrict career paths for women while reinforcing the status quo for men. Furthermore, these theories propose that reshaping these perceptions and providing equal access to resources could empower women to challenge traditional career limitations and pursue more diverse career paths.

Practice

In practice, religious communities can take concrete steps to create environments that support equal career opportunities for men and women. This could involve offering mentorship programs, career counseling, and leadership development tailored to women within these communities, helping them navigate societal and religious expectations. Religious organizations can also provide flexible work policies, such as parental leave and childcare support, to ensure women can balance career aspirations with family responsibilities without feeling pressured to choose one over the other. By highlighting successful female role models within religious settings and providing platforms for open dialogue, these communities can challenge traditional gender norms. These initiatives are crucial for encouraging both genders to pursue a variety of professional careers, ensuring that cultural perceptions do not limit their aspirations.

Policy

From a policy perspective, religious institutions can implement gender-inclusive policies that promote equality in career choices. This includes revising religious teachings to emphasize the value of women in leadership and high-status professions, alongside their traditional roles as caregivers. Policies can also encourage faith-based organizations to create flexible career paths and work-life balance programs that support both men and women equally. Additionally, religious leaders can advocate for these changes within broader social and governmental frameworks to ensure that women in religious communities are not excluded from career opportunities due to outdated gender norms. Institutionalizing these policies within religious organizations would provide a structural foundation for greater gender equality, ultimately enabling individuals to make career decisions based on their abilities and aspirations rather than cultural expectations.

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