

GENDER ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURAL TRANSFORMATION AMONG SECONDARY STUDENTS: A REFLECTION OF CHANGING NEPALESE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores gender attitudes and behavioural transformation among 315 secondary students from Gurbhakot, Bheriganga, and Lekbeshi Municipalities in Surkhet District, Nepal. The main goal was to examine how adolescents' perceptions of gender equality are changing and how these changes reflect the broader transformation in Nepalese society. In this study descriptive cross-sectional study using a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire covering gender attitudes, behavioural transformation, and influencing factors. Quantitative data were analysed using tables and graphs. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage) were used. Qualitative responses were analysed thematically. The findings reveal that 89.9% of respondents support equal access to education for both genders, and 91.8 % agreed that leadership roles should be equally accessible. Behavioural results show that 88.8 % of students often participate in co-educational activities and 73 % regularly challenge gender stereotypes. Parents (46.3%)

and teachers (28.9 %) emerged as the strongest influencers. The results indicate that the youth in Surkhet are driving a significant shift toward gender equality, mirroring Nepal's social modernization.

KEYWORDS: Gender attitudes, behavioural transformation, secondary students, Nepalese society, gender equality

INTRODUCTION

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expectations, and opportunities that societies assign to individuals based on their perceived sex (United Nations, 2020). These gender norms influence how adolescents think, behave, and interact with peers, family, and the broader community. In Nepal, traditional patriarchal values have historically shaped the expectations of males and females, impacting educational participation, leadership opportunities, and domestic responsibilities. However, social change, educational reforms, and increased awareness of gender equality have led to gradual shifts in gender attitudes among adolescents, resulting in behavioural transformations that reflect broader societal change. Studying secondary students' gender attitudes and behaviours provides insight into these evolving norms and highlights the potential for a more equitable society.

Gender attitudes represent the set of beliefs, perceptions, and expectations that individuals hold about appropriate roles and behaviours for men and women in society. In Nepal, where traditional gender norms have historically defined social and cultural structures, education has emerged as a critical agent in transforming gender-based attitudes and behaviours. With increasing access to education, globalization, and media exposure, Nepalese youth today are reshaping notions of equality and inclusion (Acharya, 2021).

Gender attitudes, defined as the beliefs and expectations individuals hold regarding the roles, rights, and behaviours of men and women, significantly influence adolescents' social behaviours and educational engagement (Vyas et al., 2021). In Nepal, traditional patriarchal

norms have historically prescribed distinct spheres for males and females, frequently resulting in unequal educational opportunities, leadership roles, and domestic responsibilities (Sharma & Basnet, 2024). With increasing globalisation, media influence, and policy initiatives, Nepalese society is witnessing shifts in gender norms which are particularly evident among younger generations (Aryal, 2024). Adolescents in the secondary level represent a crucial demographic because their attitudes and behaviours are being shaped during pivotal years of identity formation and socialisation (Lamichhane, 2015). Previous studies suggest that when educational materials, family practices, and peer interactions challenge entrenched stereotypes, behavioural transformations toward more egalitarian gender practices may follow (Pokharel et al., 2023). Recent studies have indicated that younger generations in semi-urban and rural municipalities are more likely to reject gender stereotypes and advocate for equal participation of both sexes in decision-making and leadership (KC & Shrestha, 2020).

Secondary students are at a critical stage of development where attitudes and behaviours are being formed. Studying their gender-related responses offers insight into societal shifts and potential future trends in gender equality.

This study explores gender attitudes and behavioural transformation among secondary school students in Nepal, reflecting the dynamics of a changing society. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 315 students across urban and semi-urban schools. The study investigates students' perceptions of gender equality, their participation in co-educational activities, and the influence of family, school, and media. Results indicate that while traditional gender norms persist, adolescents increasingly exhibit progressive attitudes and behaviours, signalling a gradual societal shift toward gender equality. The study provides recommendations for policy, school curricula, and youth empowerment initiatives.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite global advocacy for gender equality, traditional gender roles continue to influence adolescent behaviour in Nepal. Limited studies focus on how gender attitudes among secondary students translate into actual behavioural transformation. There is a need to investigate:

1. Do students perceive education, leadership, and household responsibilities as equally accessible to both genders?
2. Are students' behaviours consistent with progressive gender attitudes?
3. What roles do family, school, and media play in shaping these attitudes and behaviours?

This study seeks to fill these gaps by examining both attitudes and behaviours of 315 secondary students in study area.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine gender attitudes among secondary school students in study area.
2. To analyze behavioural transformation related to gender roles among students.
3. To explore the influence of family, school, and media on gender attitudes and behaviours.
4. To reflect on how these attitudes and behaviours signify broader societal change.

METHODS

Research Design : In this study descriptive cross-sectional study using a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative).

Population and Sample : 315 secondary school students (Grades 9–12) from Gurbhakot Municipality, Bheriganga Municipality, and Lekbeshi Municipality of Surkhet District. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure gender and location representation.

Data Collection: A structured questionnaire was administered, consisting of: **Section A:** Demographic Information, **Section B:** Gender attitudes (5-point Likert scale), **Section C:** Behavioural transformation (5-point Likert scale), **Section D:** Influencing factors, and **Section E:** Open-ended questions.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analysed using tables and graphs. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage) were used. Qualitative responses were analysed thematically.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 : Demographic Profile of Respondents (Grade 9-12)

Class	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total	Percentage
9	37	11.7	38	12.1	75	23.8
10	40	12.7	40	12.7	80	25.4
11	40	12.7	40	12.7	80	25.4
12	40	12.7	40	12.7	80	25.4
Total	157	49.8	158	49.2	315	100.0

Source: Field study, 2025

Out of the total respondents, 157 (49.8%) were male and 158 (49.2%) were female, indicating a nearly equal gender representation in the study sample. This gender balance enhances the reliability of the findings related to gender attitudes and behavioural transformation, as both male and female perspectives are equally represented.

The class-wise distribution shows that 23.8% of respondents were from Grade 9, while 25.4% each were from Grades 10, 11, and 12. This balanced participation across grades ensures that the data reflects a wide range of adolescent maturity levels and educational exposure, which are critical factors influencing gender perception and behavioural change.

From a socio-educational perspective, the balanced gender and grade composition across

The demographic profile presents of 315 respondents from secondary schools located in Gurbhakot Municipality, Bheriganga Municipality, and Lekbeshi Municipality of Surkhet District. The data shows the distribution of male and female students across grades 9 to 12.

three municipalities reflects Nepal's ongoing progress toward inclusive education. The nearly equal participation of boys and girls suggests that schools in Gurbhakot, Bheriganga, and Lekbeshi have provided equitable access to education—an essential foundation for promoting gender equality and progressive social attitudes.

Gender Attitudes

The following table presents the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' attitudes toward gender equality among 315 secondary-level students from Gurbhakot, Bheriganga, and Lekbeshi Municipalities of Surkhet District. The responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Table 2 : Gender Attitudes – Frequency and Percentage of Responses (n=315)

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Boys and girls should have equal access to education	199(63.2)	84(26.7)	22(7.0)	4(1.27)	6(1.9)
Household chores should be shared equally	121(38.4)	124(39.4)	41(13.0)	19(6.0)	10(3.2)
Leadership roles open to both genders	181(57.2)	109 (34.6)	19(6.0)	4(1.3)	2(0.6)
Girls as capable as boys in STEM	169 (53.6)	111 (35.2)	24 (7.6)	6(1.9)	5(1.6)

Boys helping in domestic work	130(41.3)	119(37.8)	46(14.6)	14(4.4)	6(1.9)
Boys and girls treated equally in decision-making	187(59.4)	102(32.4)	15(4.8)	6(1.9)	5(1.6)
Media influences gender behaviour	93(29.5)	92(29.2)	73(23.2)	33(10.5)	24(7.6)
Boys as primary earners	37(11.7)	39(12.4)	80(25.4)	82(26.0)	77(24.4)
Girls should prioritize family responsibilities	42(13.3)	83(26.3)	89(28.3)	60(19.0)	41(13.0)
Girls participating in sports should be encouraged	172(54.6)	108(34.3)	26 (8.2)	5(1.6)	4(1.3)

Source : Field study, 2025

The data indicate a strongly positive gender attitude among the majority of respondents. A substantial 63.2% of students strongly agreed and 26.7% agreed that boys and girls should have equal access to education, reflecting Nepal's growing commitment to inclusive education and gender equality in schools. This finding aligns with national educational reforms promoting equal opportunities for all genders in secondary education.

Similarly, 77.8% (38.4% strongly agree, 39.4% agree) of respondents supported the view that household chores should be shared equally between boys and girls. This suggests a gradual transformation in traditional domestic role perceptions.

A majority (91.8%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that leadership roles should be open to both genders, indicating progressive attitudes toward leadership equality. Furthermore, 88.8% of students recognized that girls are as capable as boys in STEM subjects, suggesting a positive shift in perceptions about academic competence traditionally associated with male students.

When asked about boys' involvement in domestic work, 79.9% either agreed or strongly agreed, indicating a behavioural shift where male students are more willing to share household responsibilities - a sign of changing gender norms in the family structure of Surkhet.

Regarding decision-making equality, 91.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that both

genders should be equally involved, demonstrating a widespread belief in equitable participation in family and social matters.

Conversely, responses to traditional gender roles were more divided. Only 24.1% agreed or strongly agreed that boys should be the primary earners, while 50.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. This suggests a clear rejection of patriarchal economic roles, reflecting the influence of modern education and social awareness in the study areas.

Similarly, 39.6% agreed or strongly agreed that girls should prioritize family responsibilities, whereas 32.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This indicates that while traditional expectations still exist, a growing number of students challenge such gendered notions.

An encouraging 88.7% supported girls' participation in sports and outdoor activities, emphasizing changing attitudes toward physical freedom and visibility of girls in the public sphere.

Regarding media influence, the responses were more distributed, with 58.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing that media shapes gender perceptions, while 17.1% disagreed. This shows that students are aware of the media's role in shaping gender attitudes but hold mixed views on its impact.

Behavioural Transformation

The following data illustrates the frequency and percentage distribution of responses related to behavioural transformation among 315 secondary

students from Gurbhakot, Bheriganga, and Lekbeshi Municipalities of Surkhet District. The data were collected using a five-point Likert scale

(1 = Never,..., 5 = Always) to measure students' engagement and behavioural practices toward gender equality

Table 3 : Behavioural Transformation - Frequency and Percentage (n=315)

Statement	Always (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
Participate in co-ed activities	158(50.1)	122(38.7)	23(7.3)	7(2.2)	5(1.6)
Share responsibilities equally	118(37.5)	126 (40.0)	51(16.2)	14(4.4)	6(1.9)
Challenge gender stereotypes	99(31.4)	131(41.6)	51(16.2)	23 (7.3)	11(3.5)
Encourage opposite-gender peers	132(41.9)	118(37.5)	41(13.0)	19(6.0)	5(1.6)
Discuss gender equality issues	139(44.1)	121(38.4)	34(10.8)	15(4.8)	6(1.9)
Feel confident in leadership roles	148(46.9)	122(38.7)	25(7.9)	16(5.1)	4(1.2)
Notice behavioural changes in self	118 (37.4)	126(40.0)	51(16.2)	14 (4.4)	6(1.9)
Use social media for gender equality	127(40.3)	108(34.3)	48(15.2)	21 (6.7)	11(3.5)
Comfortable expressing opinions in mixed groups	153(48.6)	111(35.2)	25(7.9)	18 (5.7)	8(2.5)
Observe classmates' behavioural changes	129(40.9)	119(37.8)	41(13.0)	20 (6.3)	6(1.9)

Source : Field study, 2025

The results reveal that the majority of students demonstrated frequent and consistent gender-equitable behaviours , highlighting a significant shift in mindset and everyday actions among Nepalese youth.

A significant proportion of students, 50.1% “always” and 38.7% “often”, reported active participation in co-educational activities such as sports, projects, and group discussions. This indicates strong comfort levels in mixed-gender environments and reflects an emerging culture of gender inclusivity in schools across the surveyed municipalities. Only 3.8% of respondents rarely or never participated, suggesting minimal hesitation toward mixed-gender collaboration.

About 37.5% always and 40.0% often shared responsibilities equally with opposite-gender peers, while 16.2% sometimes did so. This behaviour demonstrates cooperative learning and teamwork practices that break away from traditional gender divisions.

Approximately 31.4% always and 41.6% often reported challenging gender stereotypes in their surroundings. This totals 73% of respondents who actively question traditional norms-signifying a growing generation that is not only aware of gender biases but also willing to confront them. However, 10.8% (rarely or never) still hesitate, indicating a need for continued gender-sensitization programs.

Encouragement toward opposite-gender peers was high, with 41.9% always and 37.5% often

supporting peers' aspirations regardless of gender. This supportive behaviour reflects a positive peer influence environment where students motivate one another beyond traditional gender constraints.

About 44.1% always and 38.4% often discuss gender equality issues with teachers, parents, or peers. These findings indicate that 82.5% of respondents are actively engaged in conversations around equality-showing that schools and homes

have become key spaces for dialogue. Such engagement suggests the influence of school-level awareness programs and inclusive curricular activities introduced by local governments in Surkhet.

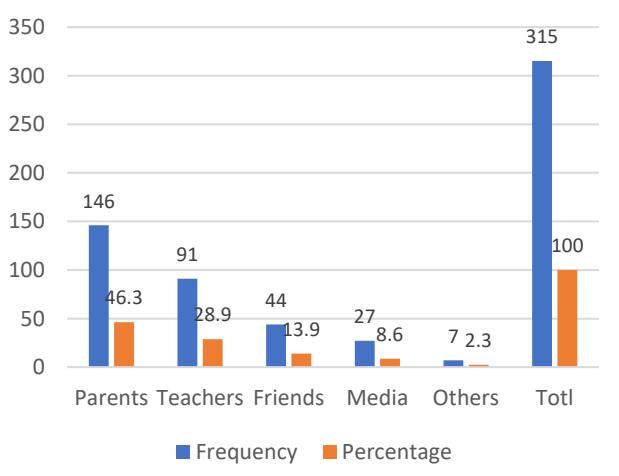
A strong 46.9% always and 38.7% often felt confident in leadership roles, regardless of gender. This reflects an important behavioural transformation, as both male and female students increasingly assume leadership responsibilities, breaking historical gender hierarchies in classroom and community settings.

Around 77.4% (37.4% always + 40.0% often) of respondents noticed behavioural changes in themselves regarding gender roles, and 78.7% observed similar changes in their classmates. This demonstrates that gender transformation is

Influencing Factors of Gender Attitudes and Behavioural Transformation

The following data presents the frequency and percentage distribution of factors influencing gender attitudes and behavioural transformation among 315 secondary students in the study area. The influencing agents considered were parents, teachers, friends, media, and others. Each of these elements plays a distinct role in shaping how students perceive and practice gender equality in daily life.

Chart 1 : Influencing Factors



Sources: Field study, 2025

Parents were identified as the most influential factor, with 146 students (46.3%) acknowledging their parents as key contributors to their gender-

collective and socially reinforced rather than individual-supported by changing educational practices and social norms.

Approximately 40.3% always and 34.3% often use social media to learn about gender equality, while 15.2% sometimes do. This finding shows that digital platforms are an emerging medium for gender awareness among youth, with widespread smartphone access even in semi-urban Surkhet contributing to attitudinal change.

Nearly 48.6% always and 35.2% often expressed comfort in sharing opinions in mixed-gender settings, reflecting mutual respect and confidence across genders. This behavioural trait is a clear indication of the erosion of gender-based hesitation and bias that once limited classroom participation.

related values and behavioural change. This highlights the strong family-based socialization system prevalent in Nepalese households, where attitudes toward gender roles are largely molded through parental guidance. The findings suggest that positive gender attitudes are increasingly being molded at home, indicating that parents in Gurbhakot, Bheriganga, and Lekbeshi are embracing and promoting more egalitarian ideals within families.

Teachers were cited by 91 students (28.9%) as influential in shaping gender perceptions. Schools, therefore, serve as significant platforms for gender sensitization and behavioural learning. Educational institutions in Surkhet have increasingly adopted inclusive classroom practices, school leadership training, and co-curricular programs that emphasize equality and mutual respect between boys and girls. This demonstrates that teachers act as change agents, guiding students to challenge stereotypes and participate equally in academic and leadership roles.

A total of 44 students (13.9%) reported friends as an influencing factor in their changing gender attitudes. Peer interaction and social acceptance among adolescents play a notable role in reinforcing or challenging traditional beliefs. The moderate percentage suggests that while peer groups do affect behavioural transformation,

institutional and familial influences remain stronger in the context of semi-urban Nepalese society.

Media, including television, radio, and social media, influenced 27 students (8.6%). Although this is a relatively smaller proportion, it reflects the growing role of digital and mass communication in shaping youth perspectives, particularly among students with better access to smartphones and internet connectivity. Exposure to global ideas through social platforms may gradually promote gender awareness and progressive behaviours even in less urbanized municipalities.

Only 7 students (2.3%) cited other influences such as community programs, NGOs, or religious leaders. This indicates that while some external organizations are active in promoting gender equality, their outreach and visibility among secondary students in Surkhet remain limited.

The overall total of 315 respondents (100%) shows a clear hierarchy of influence where parents and teachers dominate as primary agents of gender attitude formation and behavioural transformation, followed by peers and media. The findings align with the socio-cultural structure of the study area, where family and school remain the core social institutions for moral and behavioural development.

Formal Gender Education and School Activities

The following data reveals the role of formal gender education and school-based activities in shaping the gender attitudes and behavioural transformations of secondary students in the study area. Education and institutional initiatives are significant social forces that influence how young people perceive gender equality and practice inclusive behaviours in their daily lives.

Table 4 : Formal Gender Education and School Activities (n-315)

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Received formal gender education	Yes	198	62.9
	No	117	37.1
School organizes gender equality programs	Often/Always	126	40.0
	Sometimes	133	42.2
	Rarely/Never	56	17.8
Behavioural change in 2-3 years	Yes	232	73.7
	No	83	26.3

Source : Field study, 2025

Out of 315 respondents, 198 students (62.9%) reported that they had received formal gender education in their schools, while 117 students (37.1%) had not. This indicates that a majority of schools in Gurbhakot, Bheriganga, and Lekbeshi have integrated gender-related content into their curriculum-either through civics, social studies, or extracurricular programs. The inclusion of gender education reflects the implementation of Nepal's national education policy, which emphasizes gender sensitivity and social inclusion in school curricula. However, the 37.1% who have not received such education highlight the unequal implementation of gender mainstreaming across schools, possibly due to resource limitations or lack of trained teachers in rural and semi-urban areas.

The responses show that 126 students (40.0%) stated that their schools often or always organize gender equality programs, while 133 students (42.2%) mentioned such events are conducted sometimes, and 56 students (17.8%) said rarely or never. This indicates that most schools conduct at least occasional activities - such as awareness campaigns, debates, drama, or leadership programs to promote gender equality. The moderate frequency of such programs suggests that schools are becoming active platforms for promoting gender equity and behavioural transformation, but still need to ensure regular and structured implementation. The fact that over 82% of students (combining 'always' and 'sometimes') reported exposure to gender-related programs is an encouraging sign

that gender sensitization is gaining momentum in educational institutions in Surkhet.

A significant 232 students (73.7%) reported noticing behavioural change related to gender equality in the past two to three years, while 83 students (26.3%) said they did not observe such change.

This result reflects a positive transformation among secondary students, showing that a growing majority are adopting more equitable and inclusive behaviours in school and social settings.

The findings from this table align with the broader social transformation occurring in Nepalese society. Government and NGOs interventions promoting gender equity, combined with modern education and community awareness, are reshaping traditional views. The high percentage of students with formal gender education and observed behavioural change reflects a generational shift toward gender-sensitive thinking, particularly among educated youth in rural and semi-urban municipalities.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals a strong shift toward progressive gender attitudes and equitable behaviours among secondary students in Surkhet. Most respondents support equality in education, leadership, and social participation. Behavioural indicators, such as shared responsibilities and co-ed collaboration, highlight the ongoing transformation among Nepalese youth. The findings suggest that formal gender education, school initiatives, and parental influence are major contributors to this change. Therefore, consistent integration of gender-sensitive curricula, community awareness programs, and teacher training are essential for sustaining gender equity in Nepal's social and educational systems.

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