

# Evolving Gender Roles among Korean University Students

Don Reedy, Walailak University, dr.don.reedy@gmail.com

*Gender roles are an important function in society, especially traditionally patriarchal societies like those found in Asian cultures. As the society evolves, however, gender roles can evolve with them. What is traditionally seen as “women’s work” or “a mother’s job” becomes less clear as the lines between the separations of gender roles become blurred themselves. This study investigates the ways gender roles are viewed among Korean university students and how their opinions and attitudes may vary from those of their parents.*

**Keywords:** *Gender roles, Asia, Korea, University students, Patriarchy*

## 1. Introduction

Although not necessarily a strictly patriarchal culture, South Korea has a tradition of gender inequality. It has the highest wage gaps in the OECD (Park, 2012), and the role of women has been seen as primarily a mother and care giver, not a wage earner, even by women themselves (Chun, 2013).

However, due to the enormous economic developments of the country, especially within the past 20 years, have the attitudes of the younger generations changed regarding women’s roles? Increasing inflation, real estate prices, and educational expenses makes it difficult for a family to function on one income alone. Do younger people view this as necessary change? Additionally, how do young women view their own roles in their future families?

## 2. Methods

A survey of Korean university students was conducted, with a total of 677 usable completed surveys analyzed. Ten of the questions asked whether the mother or the father did certain household duties. Sixteen were statements the participants were asked to agree or disagree with. Responses were then separated by gender, with 318 female respondents and 359 male respondents. The average age of the male respondents was 21, and that of the female respondents was 20. Mean, standard deviation, and correlations between variables were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and one-way analysis of variance. The main focus was on differing attitudes regarding their home life and the perceived gender roles as well as any differences between genders. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and post-hoc testing developed by Duncan and Dunnett (T3), were used.

Participant attitudes were then examined through discrete analysis - that is, their responses to survey questions were analyzed both as a group and broken down by gender. Their responses were then compared to the traditional gender roles in Korean society.

### 3. Results and Discussion

In this section, we discuss the results of the study. Following the mixed method of statistical analysis, the Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and post-hoc testing multiple comparison using Duncan and Dunnett (T3) variance. The main objective of this study was on differing attitudes of Korean students regarding perceived gender roles in Korean society. Quantitative and measures for the survey were categorized, analyzed and presented.

#### 3.1 Properties of the Survey Data

We describe the first stage of our survey dataset of sampled Korean students regarding their home life. Table 1 shows the specified variables based on the general characteristics of subjects (age and gender) to report on where it contains statistically significant differences.

Sex	Number	Average Age	Percentage
Male	359	21 years old	53%
Female	318	20 years old	47%

**Table 1** – Sex, number, average age, and percentage of the participants

Table 2 describes answers given to certain questions regarding home life. There were a total of ten questions asked. These questions were asked in order to establish whether traditional gender roles were being followed at home. The percentages were taken from the total number of responses.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Mother</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>Don't know/ No response</b>
Who works to support the family?	Female -3% (N=18)	Female – 9% (N=58)	Female – 35% (N=238)	Female – 1% (N=3)
	Male - 6% (N=39)	Male – 11% (N=69)	Male – 37% (N=248)	Male – 1% (N=3)
Who takes care of the children?	Female -14% (N=98)	Female -1% (N=9)	Female -30% (N=203)	Female -1% (N=8)
	Male - 20% (N=138)	Male - 1% (N=9)	Male - 30% (N=200)	Male - 1% (N=12)
Who cleans the house?	Female -31% (N=209)	Female -1% (N=9)	Female -11% (N=73)	Female -4% (N=27)
	Male - 37% (N=250)	Male - 1% (N=8)	Male - 11% (N=74)	Male - 4% (N=27)
Who does the shopping?	Female -31% (N=207)	Female -2% (N=15)	Female -12% (N=78)	Female -3% (N=18)
	Male - 36% (N=241)	Male - 1% (N=9)	Male - 14% (N=96)	Male - 2% (N=13)
Who cooks?	Female -36% (N=241)	Female -1% (N=9)	Female -7% (N=49)	Female -3% (N=18)
	Male - 43% (N=292)	Male - 1% (N=9)	Male - 5% (N=46)	Male - 2% (N=12)

**Table 2** – Responses to selected questions separated by gender of respondents

The results denoted in Table 2 show that there is a certain type of gender equality in terms of wage earning (72% of total respondents said both mother and father worked to support the family) and child care giving (60% of combined respondents stated that both mother and father took care of the children). However, significant gaps are apparent in terms of domestic chores such as house cleaning (68% said the mother alone cleaned the house), shopping (67% said the mother took care of the household shopping), and cooking (79% stated that only the mother cooked).

Participants were then asked to agree or disagree with 16 statements. These statements focused primarily on perceived gender roles in Korean society as well as established Korean family traditions. The results are shown in Table 3.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Don't know/ No response</b>
Children should live with their parents or in-laws after marriage.	Female – 6% (N= 42)	Female – 33% (N=222 )	Female – 8% (N= 52)
	Male – 9% (N= 59)	Male – 33% (N= 223)	Male – 11% (N= 77)
The mother and the children should do all the housework	Female – 30% (N= 202)	Female – 14% (N= 92 )	Female – 4% (N= 24)
	Male – 39% (N= 263)	Male – 10% (N= 66)	Male – 4% (N= 30)
The mother should stay at home (not work) to raise the children	Female – 3% (N= 20)	Female – 39% (N= 264)	Female – 5% (N= 34)
	Male – 7% (N= 49)	Male – 40% (N= 267)	Male – 6% (N= 43)
It's better to have a male boss than a female boss	Female – 10% (N= 69)	Female – 27% (N= 185)	Female – 9% (N= 64)
	Male – 14% (N= 93)	Male – 28% (N= 191)	Male – 11% (N= 75)
A wife does not need to work if the husband had a good job	Female – 5% (N= 36)	Female – 39% (N= 266)	Female – 2% (N= 16)
	Male – 13% (N= 96)	Male – 31% (N= 213)	Male – 7% (N= 50)
A woman should quit her job after she gets married	Female – 0% (N= 0)	Female – 45% (N= 307)	Female – 2% (N= 11)
	Male – 2% (N= 16)	Male – 46% (N= 310)	Male – 5% (N= 33)

A woman should quit her job if she becomes pregnant	Female – 5% (N=31 )	Female – 39% (N= 266)	Female – 3% (N= 21)
	Male – 13% (N= 86)	Male – 32% (N= 216)	Male – 8% (N= 57)
A woman must get married to be successful in life	Female – 4% (N=26 )	Female – 40% (N= 270)	Female – 3% (N=22 )
	Male – 13% (N=91 )	Male – 32% (N= 215)	Male – 8% (N= 53)
A man must get married to be successful in life	Female – 7% (N= 46)	Female – 36% (N= 242)	Female – 4% (N= 30)
	Male – 19% (N= 129)	Male – 28% (N= 191)	Male – 14% (N= 98)
A son should receive priority in the household	Female – 1% (N=6 )	Female – 45% (N= 302)	Female – 1% (N=10 )
	Male – 4% (N=26 )	Male – 44% (N= 296)	Male – 5% (N= 37)
A family is not complete without children	Female – 17% (N=113 )	Female – 27% (N= 184)	Female – 3% (N= 21)
	Male – 28% (N= 191)	Male – 19% (N=126 )	Male – 6% (N= 42)

**Table 3** - Selected responses concerning attitudes regarding traditional Korean family values and conventions

As shown in Table 3, there were certain disparities between the sexes in certain responses, in particular attitudes towards the relationship between marriage and life success and pregnancy or child bearing related to a woman's career and family completion. However, on the whole, both sexes were generally of the same mind with the majority of responses, with no significant differences reportable between male and female responses.

Surprisingly, and out of character with the theme of gender equality seen in the majority of the responses, both male and female participants agree that the mother and the children should take care of the household chores. Why this seemingly contrarian attitude exists amidst the other more gender equal responses is unknown.

### 3.2 Discussion

In terms of a rapidly evolving society, there can be very few better examples than South Korea. From a rural agrarian population to a modern evolved economic powerhouse in just 50 years, South Korea has undergone an almost unimaginable transformation.

Attitudes among the respondents are evolving and modernizing from the traditional Korean viewpoint as well. As discovered by this research, most do not wish to live with the older generation after marriage, most do not see marriage as a necessity, and most do not see having children as a requirement. These are all traditionally very important in Korean familial settings (Chun, Park, Slote, Sung). According to the respondents, both males and females have a fairly balanced attitude towards gender equality, both in the home and the workplace.

However, as the results of this research show, there are still certain gender differences existing in the participants' home life. While both parents participate in child rearing and wage earning, the mother does the shopping, cleaning and cooking in the majority of households. This seems to confirm that the mother must have two jobs, one outside the home and one within. Perhaps while seeking gender equality in the workplace, a mother must still be fettered by familial responsibilities that the father does not have.

As to whether these attitudes will continue to grow and develop as the participants age remains to be seen. It will be interesting to see how different responses might be when the next generation enters university.

### 4 References

1. Park, Min-young, (2012, January 12). Korea's gender pay gap biggest in OECD. *The Korea Herald* <http://www.asianewsnet.net/news-39655.html> Retrieved 5/31/2015
2. Korea's gender wage gap biggest in OECD. (2014, June 10) *The Korea Herald*. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140610001201> Retrieved 5/31/2015
3. Chun, Ye Eun (2013, December 23). Why Korean Women Opt Out. *World Policy Journal Blog*. World Policy Institute. Retrieved 5/31/2015
4. Park, Insook Han and Cho, Lee-Jay. (1995). Confucianism and the Korean Family. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 26 (1), 117-134
5. Slote, Walter H. and De Vos, George A. (1998) Confucianism and the Family. New York: State University of New York Press
6. Sung, Kyu-taik. (1995). Measures and Dimensions of Filial Piety in Korea. *The Gerontologist*, 35(2), 240-247