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Impacts of Stereotypical Gender Role Expectations on Married Female Students: Evidence from the University of Dhaka

Abstract. The topic of women's involvement in development has emerged as a crucial indicator for the successful execution of developmental endeavors in developing nations such as Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh is actively advocating for the mitigation of sociocultural attitudes and practices that hinder women's involvement and competitiveness in economic development and higher education. The education sector has witnessed an influx of women, leading to a significant number of them pursuing college degrees. Consequently, many are married and must balance academic pursuits with household and family responsibilities. The primary objective of this research was to investigate the impact of traditional gender role expectations on married female undergraduate students at the University of Dhaka. A mixed research methodology was employed, involving twenty-two female students and two key informant interviews. The study found that rigid labor divisions based on stereotyped gender roles place excessive strain on women, especially in caregiving and domestic duties, limiting their academic engagement. Unless the patriarchal system of unequal gender role expectations is modified, married female students will continue to face challenges, and their contributions to progress in education will remain constrained.

Keywords: marriage; female students; gender role; stereotypes; expectations.

1. Introduction

The concept of gender can be acquired from early childhood through social interactions involving adults, as well as through the observation of adult behavior and the subsequent reception and reinforcement of particular child behaviors (Massey, 2013). According to MacNaughton (2000), gender is socially constructed,¹ and its formation commences at birth, subsequently progressing and evolving alongside the child. Gender roles encompass a range of behaviors that individuals or collectives adopt in alignment with their biological sex, influenced by the prevailing societal norms and values. According to Whyte (1998), the acquisition of gender role knowledge in young children is a result of active development facilitated by the monitoring of their social environment. This perspective aligns with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory,² which underscores the significance of learning through observation and imitation of behavior. Many communities have long maintained the belief that women have inherent biological tendencies towards nurturing behavior and that traditional gender roles often necessitate their engagement in behaviors that foster care. According to Wingrave (2016), gender stereotypes can result in a culture of discrimination, which is a matter of concern for gender equality organizations. These stereotypes have been acknowledged to have an impact on children's opportunities, academic performance, and well-being, as highlighted by Zero Tolerance (2013). Throughout history, there has been a notable correlation between the broader societal norms surrounding gender roles and the specific duties assigned within marriages (Ogletree, 2014).

Throughout much of the 20th century, there existed a prevailing consensus regarding the husband's and wife's respective responsibilities and roles within the family unit. Notably, it was widely acknowledged that husbands were expected to fulfill the roles of provider and protector. In contrast, wives were expected to assume the duties of responsible homemakers and mothers. Working women adhere to an implicit set of guidelines regarding their home responsibilities within their marital role. It is hardly surprising that society also puts conventional gender role expectations on married female college students. The expectations mentioned above create a diverse array of obsta-

¹ Feminist theorists argue that gender is not biologically fixed but socially constructed through repeated performance, institutional expectations, and cultural reproduction of roles.

² Social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura, explains that individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses through observing others within a social context.

cles in individuals' daily routines, impeding their ability to balance their academic pursuits and personal commitments effectively.

This study aims to assess the veracity of the aforementioned assertion, as well as to identify whether there are any obstacles encountered by married female students enrolled at the University of Dhaka. This study makes three key contributions. First, it centers on married female undergraduates, a population that remains largely invisible in both global and South Asian gender and education scholarship. Existing studies typically focus on unmarried youth, graduate women, or working mothers, leaving a gap in understanding how early marriage intersects with higher education. Second, instead of treating domestic responsibilities, emotional strain, and academic performance as isolated issues, this study examines how these forces operate together to shape students' persistence. This multi-layered approach moves the discussion beyond descriptive accounts of gender inequality. Third, the study shifts attention from family expectations to institutional structures by showing how rigid university policies, such as inflexible attendance requirements and a lack of childcare, can deepen married students' vulnerabilities. By applying Role Congruity Theory to the university context, the study expands the theory's scope and offers a framework for understanding identity conflict among married students in South Asia. Ultimately, the study will provide potential solutions, if applicable, derived from the research findings. Since one of the primary purposes of social research is to find solutions to problems, this study aims to contribute to the literature by shedding light on the significant issue of how traditional gender roles affect married women's educational pursuits and whether they face difficulties in completing their bachelor's degrees.

1.1. Background of the Study

Despite the recognition of the value of women's education, many obstacles stand in the way of women obtaining higher education and contributing their full potential to the improvement of society. Such barriers are even more prevalent among married female students. The gender role expectations of Bangladeshi society tend to put women in a situation where they are expected to be the primary caregivers in the family. Thus, when a girl marries, she is expected to take care of her husband and in-laws and do the household chores. Although marriage might be one of life's most rewarding experiences, students marrying during their undergraduate years face numerous challenges. Marriage duties can increase the burden of schedule management and en-

hance stress levels (Mullings, 2011). Married women confront multiple challenges and leave their studies unfinished due to various social and cultural reasons. Rather than attending classes, married women are expected to look after their homes and kids (Goldin, 2004). A significant proportion of married women want to continue their education after getting married. Still, they face challenges such as security and safety, long-distance travel to academic institutions, and balancing the workload of family engagements, child-rearing, studies, and careers (Kuperberg, 2009; Sathar, Lloyd, & Haque, 2000).

Married female students often encounter significant challenges in fulfilling their academic aspirations due to the presence of multiple concurrent responsibilities vying for their attention. The duties associated with their familial obligations deplete their energy reserves and consume a significant portion of their time. The individuals in question seem to experience physical, emotional, and psychological effects as a result of their simultaneous responsibilities, which seem to emanate from academic stress, fear, anger, and a lack of proficiency. This study investigates the influence of social gender role expectations on married undergraduate female students and their experiences in managing the demands of both their academic and marital responsibilities.

This study aims to assess the influence of stereotypical gender role expectations on married female undergraduate students of the University of Dhaka. To explore the general objective, the specific objectives are to explore the gender role expectations faced by married female undergraduate students and to determine the impact of those gender role expectations on married female students. This study addresses the following research questions:

- How do stereotypical gender role expectations impact married undergraduate female students?
- Are there any challenges married female students face due to their gender roles?

2. The Intersection of Gender Roles, Societal Expectations, and Academic Life

Extensive scholarly investigation into gender roles reveals a persistent tension between domestic expectations and personal aspirations. Gender roles, shaped by cultural, historical, and societal norms, significantly affect individuals' experiences, particularly for women, who often face challenges balancing domestic duties with educational aspirations. Historically, women have been expected to manage home maintenance, child-rearing, and family

health. In the context of Bangladesh, as a society scoring high in masculinity, it maintains distinct, rigid expectations: men are conditioned to be assertive providers, while women are socialized into nurturing roles. Marriage is frequently viewed not in individual terms but as a relationship where each partner sacrifices autonomy (McQuillan, 2005). For married female undergraduates, this often means fulfilling academic obligations while also meeting expectations tied to their roles as wives and mothers.

Studies from different contexts describe how marriage intensifies women's responsibilities. Research by Ogletree (2014), Mullings (2011), Bird (1979), and others shows that women tend to keep doing most household work even when they are in school or full-time jobs. This often creates stress, fatigue, and conflicts between personal goals and family demands (McRoy & Fisher, 1982; Pittman et al., 2001). *Lasode and Awote* (2014) described role contagion³ from juggling employment, school, and family responsibilities. Egan (2004) found that individuals often lack the vitality to meet these expectations, leading to high stress levels. However, most of these studies come from Western contexts or look at older women, graduate students, or working mothers. Only a handful examine married undergraduate students, and even fewer look at them in South Asian settings, which is very different from the Western settings where married women often do not have to stay with their in-laws. This creates a gap because the pressures on young married students, many of whom live with in-laws, are not the same as those faced by older or employed women.

In Bangladesh, research on women in higher education has grown, but it still rarely focuses on married undergraduates. Hofstede's masculinity vs. femininity dimension⁴ matters here; Bangladesh's high-masculinity culture⁵ prescribes assertiveness for men and nurturing for women, shaping the roles of married female students. Begum Shuvra et al. (2019), Lin (2016), and Jin

³ *Role contagion* refers to the psychological spillover where stress, expectations, or emotions from one social role (e.g., employee) bleed into another role (e.g., student or caregiver), intensifying emotional burden and reducing role performance across domains

⁴ Hofstede's cultural dimension of masculinity vs. femininity describes the extent to which a society values traditionally masculine traits (like assertiveness and competition) versus feminine traits (like care and cooperation). Bangladesh scores relatively high in masculinity, reflecting more rigid gender role expectations

⁵ According to Hofstede's model, "masculine" cultures emphasize competition, achievement, and distinct gender roles, while "feminine" cultures promote care, cooperation, and flexible role expectations

(2023) discuss challenges faced by women in education more broadly, but they do not examine how marriage reshapes a woman's daily routine, mobility, or mental well-being during her bachelor's degree. Coronel et al. (2010) found that most women received minimal domestic support, yet emphasized organizational culture over gender expectations. Potokri (2010) linked women's academic struggles to cultural traditions but did not address challenges post-marriage. Elizalde (2021) noted that female first-generation students⁶ face pressures to conform to gender roles, though specific duties or impacts were not discussed. Some studies from Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey (Lasode & Awote, 2014; Ali et al., 2011; Sakallı-Uğurlu et al., 2018) describe similar struggles elsewhere, yet the cultural and family structures in those places differ from Bangladesh. For example, the role of in-laws, guest management, and the expectation that a new bride must "adjust" are rarely discussed in international work, even though these are common pressures in Bangladesh.

Studies by Yogev (1981), Bird (1979), and Granello & Navin (1997) revealed that women often take on additional roles without reducing previous ones. However, no studies have examined how these expectations affect married students' academic and psychological well-being. Anderson (2014), Kitsa & Mudra (2019), and Irene et al. (2019) emphasized cultural values that tie women to domestic roles and expect self-sacrifice. Meeussen et al. (2022) showed that women face undervaluation in paid labor alongside high caregiving expectations, yet did not address academic settings.

Another missing area involves emotional and psychological strain. Authors like Dryden (1999) and Meeussen et al. (2022) show how gendered divisions of labor affect women emotionally, but they do not link this directly to academic outcomes. This is important because anxiety, guilt, or exhaustion can directly shape how a student attends class, completes assignments, or stays motivated. In addition, almost no studies evaluate how universities respond to these issues. Some mention family support, but institutional support, such as childcare, flexible policies, or counseling for married students, is almost absent in the literature. This makes it unclear whether the burden married female students carry is only a domestic issue or if universities also contribute by not offering structural support.

⁶ First-generation students are those whose parents did not complete higher education. In many societies, they face unique pressures, including adherence to traditional gender roles, as discussed by Elizalde (2021) and Potokri (2010).

2.1. Gender Norms and Educational Access in South Asia

Unlike in Western contexts where role conflict might be viewed through an individual lens, South Asian studies highlight that marriage often functions as a “patriarchal bargain”. Across South Asia, research shows that girls and young women still face pressure to prioritize duties at home over personal goals. Large-scale analyses, such as those by Bussolo et al. (2024), point out how expectations about respectability, obedience, and family roles shape women’s decisions long before they enter the labor force. Similar patterns appear in Pakistan (Firdoos et al., 2023; Gul et al., 2025) and India (Hiremath, 2024), where cultural scripts continue to define what a “proper” woman should do. Firdoos et al. (2023) note that in Pakistan, cultural expectations compel women to prioritize marital adjustment over educational attainment. This echoes older findings by McQuillan (2005) but places them in a modern regional context: women are expected to sacrifice autonomy for family stability. These studies are valuable, but they mostly examine general gender inequality rather than the lived experiences of young married students trying to complete a university degree, which this current research aims to address.

Marriage often becomes the turning point where gender expectations intensify. Some recent South Asian studies are beginning to look at this intersection. Abdullah et al. (2024) show that married female students face academic setbacks when domestic responsibilities suddenly expand. Their participants described a constant tension between university work and home expectations, yet the study did not examine how institutional practices might worsen this conflict.

In Bangladesh, family structures, particularly in-law households, play a unique and often decisive role. Hasan et al. (2025) discuss the influence of family beliefs on girls’ educational access in Pakistan, yet they do not explore how in-laws specifically shape a married student’s daily routine. Many South Asian women live with extended families after marriage, but most research still assumes a nuclear household model. As a result, important forms of pressure, managing guests, maintaining harmony with a mother-in-law, and performing domestic labor to “prove” oneself, remain largely absent from academic discussions.

Several studies explore the emotional side of gendered expectations. Tabkhi et al. (2025) show that many female students associate marriage with anxiety and reduced freedom. Saha (2024) and Tarannum (2024) describe emotional exhaustion among South Asian women abroad, especially first-generation or

married students who feel torn between academic work and family expectations back home. These works are insightful, but they focus on graduate or international students. The emotional burden on married undergraduate students in South Asia, particularly in public universities, remains under documented. Most existing research acknowledges stress but does not connect it clearly to academic motivation, attendance, or long-term persistence.

While the recent surge in literature provides excellent data on the South Asian region generally, focusing heavily on Pakistan and India, there is a scarcity of research specifically addressing the *Bangladeshi* context at premier institutions like the University of Dhaka. Most existing local studies, such as Begum Shuvra et al. (2019), discuss challenges in higher education broadly but do not deeply investigate the specific causal link between traditional gender stereotypes and academic persistence among married students. The focus of most existing papers is on family responsibilities, overlooking how rigid institutional structures and social support can amplify or moderate students' struggles.

Furthermore, student mothers and married women often fall into a policy "blind spot" in Bangladeshi universities, which are largely designed for unmarried students with few family obligations. This study aims to fill that gap. Few, if any, have focused on institutions like the University of Dhaka, which draws students from diverse backgrounds. By focusing specifically on the lived experiences of married undergraduates at the University of Dhaka, it moves beyond general regional trends to analyze how specific local dynamics, such as the lack of campus daycare or rigid attendance policies, interact with traditional gender expectations to constrain women's potential. This current study seeks to fill a gap by examining how married students navigate their academic lives while fulfilling traditional roles as wives, mothers, or daughters-in-law roles which may significantly impact their academic perseverance and mental well-being. Addressing this topic could open further inquiry into how modifying entrenched gender norms may support women's right to higher education.

In sum, while existing literature explains how gender norms shape women's lives generally, it does not capture the everyday balancing act of being married, being a young woman, and being an undergraduate student in Bangladesh. This study makes these hidden tensions visible and demonstrates why they deserve serious academic and policy attention.

3. Eagly & Karau's Role Congruity Theory

The theoretical framework for the research includes the role congruity theory of Eagly & Karau (2002). The Role Congruity Theory⁷ explains the societal expectations placed upon women to fulfill certain roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). It helps clarify the challenges and biases women face when pursuing roles that conflict with stereotypical gender expectations, particularly in leadership. The theory argues that gender stereotypes persist because of a perceived mismatch between the feminine gender role and positions of authority. Cabrera et al. (2009) argue that men and women acquire different skill sets through their socially assigned roles, with women taking on household responsibilities and men engaging in paid employment. These abilities are then culturally validated and reinforced.

Gender roles are deeply rooted in society and consist of both descriptive and prescriptive expectations regarding how women and men should behave (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). The theory emphasizes that societal assumptions link certain roles, like caregiving or leadership, to specific genders. Role Congruity Theory is therefore useful for understanding how traditional gender expectations shape the experiences of married female students. It highlights how these women may struggle to pursue education while meeting the societal demands of marriage and domestic life. When individuals deviate from prescribed gender roles, they may face resistance or exclusion, making them feel out of place within academic or professional environments.

4. Method

This study employs a qualitatively driven mixed-methods design to examine the impact of stereotypical gender role expectations on married female undergraduate students at the University of Dhaka. The research is primarily explanatory and exploratory, prioritizing the rich, contextual data from in-depth interviews to understand students' lived experiences. This qualitative core is complemented by an exploratory, small-sample survey. Given the study's focus on depth over breadth, the survey was not designed for statis-

⁷ Role congruity theory suggests that prejudice arises when there is a mismatch between gender stereotypes and perceived role expectations, particularly when women occupy roles traditionally associated with men.

tical generalization but to provide descriptive data that illustrates the prevalence of themes within the sample and complements the narrative findings. The use of mixed methods in this manner allowed for both a deep understanding and a structured overview of how married female students navigate traditional roles while pursuing higher education.

4.1. Participants

A purposive non-probability sampling method⁸ was adopted. Married and unmarried female undergraduate students were selected from various faculties based on their marital status and accessibility. Eleven married and eleven unmarried students participated. It was challenging to assemble a larger sample at the university selected for the study due to time constraints and technical limitations. The small sample size, however, is consistent with the study's qualitative focus and exploratory nature, where the goal is to gather in-depth information from information-rich cases rather than to create a statistically representative sample. Participants living with parents, in-laws, or in student halls were included to reflect diverse living conditions. While the number of married respondents was limited, their insights provided rich and nuanced perspectives on the dual pressures of academic and domestic life. Data from unmarried students were used primarily for comparison to assess how gender role expectations differ by marital status.

Qualitative data were gathered through two key informant interviews with married students representing different stages of academic and marital life; one with a child and one navigating divorce. The selection of key informants aimed to showcase variation in marital roles, family structures, and academic stages.

4.2. Procedure

Primary data were collected using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, while secondary data were obtained from academic literature, books, and existing studies. Two separate Google Forms were designed; one for married and one for unmarried female students, containing a combina-

⁸ *Purposive non-probability sampling* is a sampling technique in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the study's objectives. It does not aim to represent the population statistically but to gather in-depth information from "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2015).

tion of open- and closed-ended questions. The married group answered additional questions on social and institutional support. The interviews with key informants were conducted both in person and by phone. Field notes were taken to capture behavioral insights and reflective observations, which contributed to triangulation and thematic development.

4.3. Measures

Grounded in Eagly & Karau's (2002) Role Congruity Theory, the framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of these expectations on their academic persistence and mental well-being.

- **Independent Variable: Gender Role Expectations.** This variable captures the societal and familial expectations imposed on married women. These expectations are categorized into three dimensions: **Household Responsibility (V1)**: Tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the household; **Family Time (V2)**: Obligations to spend time with family and fulfill ceremonial or relational duties; and **Child and In-Laws Care (V3)**: Responsibilities related to caregiving for children and extended family members.
- **Dependent Variables: Impacts.** The dependent variables measured were: **Academic Persistence (D1)**: The ability to maintain consistent progress in academic life, including attending classes and completing coursework; and **Mental Well-being (D2)**: Psychological health indicators such as anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and life satisfaction.
- **Mediating Variables. Role Congruity** assesses the extent to which married female students perceive alignment between their gendered roles and their academic responsibilities. A mismatch may result in discomfort, disengagement, or lower self-efficacy, affecting both academic persistence and mental well-being.
- **Moderating Variables. Social Support (M1)**: Refers to emotional, logistical, or moral support received from partners, family, or peers. Social backing can buffer the negative impact of gender role expectations. **Institutional Support (M2)**: Encompasses support mechanisms provided by the University of Dhaka, such as flexible academic policies, counseling, or targeted programs. Effective institutional backing can improve outcomes despite societal expectations.

5. Findings & Analysis

5.1. Qualitative Inference

Regarding gender roles around household chores, comparing both married and unmarried women, one found that all agreed their role expectations leaned toward household responsibilities. Female students, married or not, are expected to complete domestic tasks before focusing on studies. Spending time with family is not a strong expectation, and caregiving for family members is not heavily demanded either.

This suggests families mostly expect female members to do chores, but ease up in other roles to help them balance study and home life. Though imperfect, this gives students some space to focus on academics. While not severely disrupting education, these expectations still affect academic persistence and future prospects.

Looking at mental well-being, I found that both married and unmarried students were anxious due to household expectations. This anxiety stems from being compelled to do chores. Yet, most do not stress over dividing time between family and studies. Both groups seem less emotionally involved with family, despite being busy with chores and academics.

This might be because they have a convenient environment in their parents' or in-laws' home that reduces their stress. So, while they feel anxious about the imposed roles, they seem to manage mentally, whether married or unmarried.

There were cases where family support was lacking, creating barriers for female students. One participant said: *"Family members weren't supportive enough of me moving to a different city alone"*. An unmarried respondent added, *"I faced discrimination from male classmates... the stigma of boys and girls spending time together without supervision is no good"*. Another said, *"It can be difficult to keep up with studies, take care of family, and handle financial expenses... and still smile at the end of the day"*. These examples show that gender roles impact perseverance and academic integrity; these were just from unmarried students.

Married students also shared barriers. One participant said: *"I sometimes have to manage in-laws' guests and take exams at the same time"*. Another, already a mother, said: *"Managing a baby is tough... I can't get proper time to*

study". Gender roles imposed by society act as a pull factor,⁹ assigning work that takes time away from academics.

Some unmarried students reported emotional exhaustion. One participant shared: *"People expect me always to be nice and happy even when I'm exhausted"*. Another said: *"A chaotic environment is being created... I am having non-cooperation from members of the family"*. Another participant added: *"I've to be concerned about my attire, appearance, and etiquette a lot more than males while just going to study"*. Trying to balance family, chores, studies, and financial duties takes a heavy mental toll.

Some married students expressed dissatisfaction but said they were coping with support. One of them said: *"Multitasking is tiring sometimes. I feel insecure if I'm incapable of providing everything they think of me to do"*. Another said, *"The Pressure of taking a baby during my study period was really tiring... Expectations of doing household work and taking care of my in-laws always made me anxious and restless"*. Married and unmarried students have different reasons for mental strain. Marriage adds more roles to play. A married respondent said *getting "me time" is difficult due to managing two full-time responsibilities*. Gender roles clearly impact the mental well-being of both married and unmarried students. Society tries to reduce the burden it creates, but the burden still exists.

When asked about the support they expected, most students mentioned mental support from both family and society. Some also hoped for less familial pressure, more financial support, and a shift in societal mindset that softens strict gender roles.

Married female students suggested that the University of Dhaka implement specific support policies for them, like a separate dormitory for married and pregnant students. Many also asked for an affordable, full-time day-care center. Their responses show that there are no married-student-specific policies or functional daycare facilities for student mothers, which must be addressed.

⁹ In this context, "pull factor" refers to the sociocultural forces, such as traditional gender norms and expectations, that attract or pressure women into prioritizing domestic and caregiving roles over educational or professional goals. This usage is adapted from migration theory, where "push and pull factors" are defined as the forces that either induce people to leave a place of origin or attract them to a destination (Lee, 1966). In this study, the concept is applied to the social forces influencing women's life choices rather than geographic movement.

Data Obtained from KII

One KII respondent was married before entering university and conceived during her first year. Her marriage was arranged, and she lives separately with her husband and child. The other was married in her final year, conceived the same year, married her partner, and lived with her in-laws until recently, when the couple began divorce proceedings.

For the first respondent, balancing studies and gender role expectations was difficult. Her in-laws expected her to handle chores and childcare. Though she was not forced into motherhood, she felt unprepared. She said she was okay with marital duties since she did similar work in her parents' house, but having a child too early disrupted her future plans. Her baby's needs often made her miss classes. Living in a nuclear family now, she manages the child alone while her husband works. She got temporary access to a teacher's daycare, which closes at 4 p.m., preventing her from attending evening classes. Her studies were constantly disrupted by concerns over who would care for the baby during class hours.

The second respondent took her final exams while eight months pregnant. She divided her post-marriage experience into three phases.

1. **First two years:** Very supportive husband and in-laws. No gender role pressure, good mental health, no academic barriers.
2. **Next six years:** She received a Ph.D. offer from Europe. Her in-laws pressured her not to go, citing childcare issues. After moving houses, she and her husband could not manage the child due to work. She left the child with her parents and went abroad, which strained the marriage.
3. **Last two years:** While abroad, she discovered her husband was cheating with his parents' approval. Despite social pressure and advice from her own parents to "adjust", she eventually filed for divorce.

She reflected that if she had conformed to traditional gender roles, she would not have been able to pursue her Ph.D. The mental toll from fighting societal and familial expectations left her emotionally drained.

5.2. Quantitative Inference

Two separate surveys were conducted, one for unmarried (n=11) and one for married (n=11) female students, to compare and contrast gender role expectations.

Data Obtained from Unmarried Female Students

Characteristics of the Unmarried Student Sample

The demographic profile of the unmarried respondents was gathered to contextualize their responses. The majority of participants (7 out of 11) were between 24–26 years old, an age range that aligns with the typical marriage age in Bangladesh, making them a relevant group for analyzing pre-marital role expectations. The remaining participants were aged 18–20 (3 students) and 21–23 (1 student).

Regarding their field of study, the students were drawn from two main areas: Social Sciences (6 students) and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) (5 students). This focus was intentional, as respondents living with their parents were prioritized over hall residents, who typically face fewer stereotypical pressures.

I asked several questions on the impacts of gender role stereotypes, like academic persistence and mental well-being, and moved on with them. Let us have a look at the Gender Role Expectations on Academic Persistence first.

► **Role Expectations and Academic Persistence:**

Household Chores: A strong majority of unmarried students reported facing stereotypical expectations regarding household chores. When asked if they are expected to do most of the chores despite being a full-time student, 9 out of 11 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Only one student disagreed, and one was neutral.

Family Time: The pressure to prioritize family time over studying was less pronounced. A significant portion (4 out of 11) disagreed with feeling such pressure, while another 3 were neutral. In contrast, 2 students agreed that they felt pressured, and 2 strongly disagreed.

Caregiving: Expectations to care for family members over academic activities were varied. The most common responses were “sometimes” (3 students) and “rarely” (3 students). Furthermore, 2 students reported they were “never” expected to do this. On the other end, 2 students felt this expectation “often” and 1 student felt it “always”.

► **Role Expectations and Mental Well-being:**

Anxiousness: When asked about feeling anxious from prioritizing household duties over academic work, the responses were evenly split. Ex-

actly 4 out of 11 students reported feeling anxious “sometimes”, while another 4 students felt so “rarely”. Two students felt this “often”, and only one reported “never” feeling anxious.

Stress: The level of stress experienced from the conflict between family and study time was also mixed. The largest group reported feeling this stress “rarely” (4 students). The remaining respondents were distributed across the other categories: 2 students felt it “often”, 2 students “sometimes”, and 2 students “never”. Only one student reported “always” feeling this stress.

Eagerness and Guilt: Most unmarried students disagreed with the statement that they feel overly eager or worried about their family’s care while they are busy with their studies. A clear majority of 7 out of 11 students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this sentiment. Three students remained neutral, and only one agreed. This suggests a minimal mental burden from these specific expectations for the unmarried group.

Data Obtained from Married Female Students

Characteristics of the Married Student Sample

The married student sample also consisted of 11 respondents. The largest age group was 24–26 years old, comprising 5 out of 11 students. The next largest group was 21–23 years old (4 students), with one student from the 18–20 age group and one from the 27–29 age group.

In terms of academic discipline, the students were primarily from Social Sciences (5 students) and STEM fields (4 students), with one student each from Business studies and Liberal Arts/Humanities.

A crucial variable for this group was their living situation after marriage. Of the 9 students who responded to this question, a majority of 6 lived with their in-laws, a factor likely to increase exposure to traditional gender role expectations. The remaining 3 students lived with their own parents.

Let us have a look at the academic persistence of these married female students.

► **Impacts on Academic Persistence:**

Household Chores: This emerged as a significant factor affecting academic life. Over half of the respondents, 6 out of 11, either agreed or strongly agreed that they faced stereotypical expectations to perform most household

chores. In contrast, 4 students disagreed or strongly disagreed with this, and one was neutral.

Family Time: Unlike the pressure of chores, most married students did not feel significant pressure from family to prioritize family time over their studies. A large majority of 8 out of 11 students either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they experienced such pressure.

Caregiving: Similarly, a majority of respondents indicated that the responsibility of caring for children or in-laws was not solely theirs. When asked if they had to provide care while their partner contributed little, 7 out of 11 students disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting a degree of shared responsibility or support. However, 3 students did agree with the statement, indicating this burden still exists for a notable minority.

According to the study's analysis, the expectation to perform household chores had the strongest negative impact on academic persistence among the married students.

► **Impacts on Mental Well-being**

Anxiousness: Balancing studies and household chores was a clear source of anxiety. A majority of 6 out of 11 students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *"Being a student, I am always anxious to balance my studies and the household chores"*. This suggests a direct link between the dual roles and mental strain.

Stress: However, when asked if they felt stressed and depressed for not making enough time for family, the responses were different. The largest group, 5 out of 11 students, disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting that any stress experienced was more related to managing tasks than to guilt over family time.

Eagerness and Guilt: This finding was further supported by responses to a statement about feeling eager or worried about family care while studying. A clear majority of 8 out of 11 students disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating a degree of mental stability and support from their families in this specific area.

► **Analysis of Support Systems**

Social and Family Support: An overwhelming majority of married students, 9 out of 11, reported receiving support or accommodations from their

family or society to help manage their roles. The remaining two students responded with “Maybe”. This indicates that while gender roles are imposed, there is also a corresponding system of social support in place.

Institutional Support: In stark contrast, institutional support was perceived as almost non-existent. A large majority, 8 out of 11 respondents, stated they received no support from the university. Only two students reported receiving any support, and one answered “Maybe”.

► Perceived Effects of Support on Academic and Mental Well-being

The survey further explored how societal and institutional factors influenced academic persistence and mental well-being:

Societal Pressure: Most students felt that society or family did not compel them to prioritize domestic life over education. Nine out of 11 respondents disagreed with the statement that society or family affects their ability to prioritize their studies.

Societal Effect on Academics: When asked about the overall effect of society on their academic persistence, the results were inconclusive. The largest group (6 out of 11) felt the effect was neutral. However, 3 students perceived a positive effect, while 2 perceived a negative one.

Institutional Effect on Academics: The perception of the university’s impact was overwhelmingly neutral. A full 11 out of 11 respondents answered “Neutral” when asked how the institution affected the relationship between expectations and their academic persistence, suggesting the university is seen as absent rather than helpful or harmful in this dynamic.

Support for Mental Well-being: Both societal and institutional support for mental well-being were rated poorly. The majority of respondents disagreed that society (6 out of 11) or the institution (8 out of 11, combining “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree”) takes a supportive role. This highlights a significant gap, particularly from the university.

The findings show a stark contrast. An overwhelming number of students (9 out of 11) felt they received support from family or society. This suggests that while society imposes gender roles, it also provides some mechanisms to help women manage them. Conversely, institutional support was perceived as almost entirely absent, with 8 out of 11 students reporting they received no support from the university.

Relationships Between Support and Student Perceptions

Finally, a cross-analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between the perceived support and its effect on students' academic and mental well-being.

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of Perceived Societal Effect on Academic Persistence and Perceived Societal Support for Mental Well-being

	"Society takes a supportive role in your mental well-being..."		
How has society affected... your academic persistence?	Agree (N=1)	Neutral (N=5)	Disagree (N=5)
Positively	1	3	0
Neutral	0	2	3
Negatively	0	0	2

The analysis indicates a link between support for mental health and perceptions of academic impact. As shown in Table 1, among the **5 students who disagreed** that society supports their mental well-being, none felt society had a positive impact on their academics. This suggests that when students feel their mental health is not supported by society, they are more likely to view society's overall influence on their education as either neutral or negative.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of Perceived Institutional Effect on Mental Well-being and Perceived Institutional Support for Mental Well-being

	"The institution takes a supportive role in your mental well-being..."		
How has the institution affected... your mental well-being?	Agree (N=2)	Neutral (N=6)	Disagree (N=3)
Positively	0	0	1
Neutral	2	5	2
Negatively	0	1	0

The institutional data reinforces the theme of neglect. Most responses fall under “Neutral”, indicating that students see the university as absent rather than actively helpful or harmful. Table 2 shows that **3 of the 11 respondents** found the institution had a negative effect on the relationship between role expectations and their well-being, while only 2 found the effect to be positive, with most remaining neutral.

Thus, it can be concluded from the quantitative analysis that the respondents faced stereotypical expectations of doing most of the household chores, which impeded their academic persistence, as well as them being anxious about whether or not they would be able to balance the activities within the household and their studies, affected their mental well-being. Even in the case of the unmarried female students, the results were pretty much the same. I could not get any groundbreaking evidence as to how the married and the unmarried had different role impacts, except for the ones with children. Having an extra role to play might just create negative impacts of Stereotypical Gender Role Expectations on Married Female Students on their academic persistence and mental well-being.

It can also be concluded that although society is the one that stereotyped these gender roles, and they are the ones extending the hands of support. For this reason, the respondents are positive about the attitude of society, but institutional attention and support are badly needed for the respondents to make their lives way easier than they are right now.

6. Discussion

The general objective of the research conducted was to assess the influence of stereotypical gender role expectations on married female undergraduate students of the University of Dhaka. I was able to assess the influence with the limited time and data they could gather.

The study explored the gender role expectations faced by married female undergraduate students and found that doing household chores was the main expectation from their in-laws. Other responsibilities also existed, but this was the most notable among the sample population. The impact of this expectation was evident; respondents faced a blow to their academic persistence and, more importantly, their mental well-being.

Among all respondents, those who had a child during their studies faced the greatest challenges. These ‘young mothers’ reported that caring for their

children during university disrupted their routines and studies. Managing their child's safety and care during classes was a key issue.

When I began the study, the assumption was that society strongly pressures married students with stereotypical expectations. However, after conducting the survey and KIIs, it became clear that these pressures were not always explicitly enforced. Rather, students internalized these expectations through observation, growing up in households where mothers did domestic work while fathers earned an income. For many, these expectations felt natural or vague. Despite this, the impacts were clear: negative effects on academic persistence and well-being, especially for those with children. Stereotypical gender roles also constrained married female students' ability to pursue higher education.

Regarding academic persistence, the findings suggest that married undergraduate female students struggle to maintain academic progress because of traditional gender role expectations demanding multiple responsibilities. This aligns with studies by Jin (2023) and Lin (2016), which highlight the adverse effects of gender stereotypes on academic performance. However, those studies focused on female students in general, not specifically married students.

This study found that most married female students did not feel that society or family undervalued their education. This contrasts with Elizalde (2021), whose participants felt societal expectations compelled them to conform to gender roles, devaluing their academic efforts. Elizalde's study, however, focused on female first-generation students, which might explain the difference.

In terms of mental well-being, the study emphasized that married students, more than unmarried ones, bore the emotional consequences of fulfilling traditional domestic roles. Many participants reported increased anxiety due to their perceived inability to manage both academic and household duties. This supports findings by McRoy and Fisher (1982) and Pittman et al. (2001), who noted that an unbalanced division of labor can lead to exhaustion and frustration. Jin (2023) also emphasized that gender stereotypes negatively impact girls' psychological development.

Respondents often felt anxious when their responsibilities clashed with academic deadlines. Dryden (1999) similarly found that women blamed themselves for household disorganization, leading to guilt and anxiety. Married respondents expressed that multitasking was exhausting and that meeting expectations made them restless. Those with children reported feeling insecure about not fulfilling every demand placed on them.

A significant portion of the study centered on the level of support students received. Most married students reported receiving support from family and society to balance their roles. This finding aligns with Coronel et al. (2010), who observed that many women rely on outside help for domestic duties. However, Coronel et al. also found only 39.5% of women were satisfied with the support they received, whereas this study found higher levels of satisfaction among respondents.

The role of institutional support, however, was notably lacking. Most students reported that their university did not offer sufficient accommodation. Requests for married-student-friendly dormitories and full-time daycare facilities were common. These findings indicate that despite receiving some social support, institutional neglect remains a barrier. The lack of support from the University of Dhaka significantly impacts both academic persistence and mental well-being.

This issue was particularly apparent among student mothers. One KII respondent, who had a child in her first year, said she could not attend evening classes due to the limited daycare hours. Another student had to take her final exams while eight months pregnant. Despite initial family support, societal and marital pressures resurfaced when she received an international Ph.D. offer. She eventually left her child with her parents, which led to emotional strain and ultimately a divorce. Her story illustrates how adherence to traditional gender roles can restrict educational and career growth.

This study's unique value lies in its focus on married female students at the University of Dhaka. It addresses a gap in the literature by analyzing how academic persistence and mental well-being are impacted by traditional gender roles. Eagly and Karau's Role Congruity Theory helps explain these experiences. The theory emphasizes that societal beliefs about gendered behavior create obstacles for women who pursue roles misaligned with those expectations. This was evident in both the survey data and key informant interviews. One respondent's experience of resistance from her in-laws when she attempted to study abroad is a direct example of role incongruity.

The research findings provide practical insights. Institutions should implement policies to support married students, such as daycare centers, more flexible academic rules, and psychological counseling. Respondents themselves suggested these solutions.

While the study has some limitations, such as a small sample size and time constraints, the findings are still significant. The respondents came

from various regions of Bangladesh, giving the data contextual depth. The survey used SPSS for reliability, and interviews provided nuanced narratives.

In conclusion, the study confirms that stereotypical gender role expectations adversely affect married female students' academic and emotional lives. The findings advocate for better institutional support, greater social awareness, and further research to help married female students overcome these challenges.

7. Conclusion & Recommendations

7.1. Conclusion

Married female undergraduate students often face the challenge of balancing their academic pursuits with household responsibilities and caregiving obligations. Many are overburdened by the duties of managing family life alongside academic demands. This struggle leads to stress and emotional exhaustion as they try to meet both sets of expectations. These issues are deeply shaped by societal gender norms, which impose direct and indirect pressures.

Students who received support from spouses or extended family members faced fewer difficulties and were better able to manage their studies. However, many still rely heavily on their families and society for help, indicating that the burden of gender role expectations has not been lifted completely. The research reveals that stereotypical roles continue to restrict women's educational progress, especially for those with children. The nation has yet to overcome these deeply embedded cultural preconceptions. This result indicates that marriage is not merely a personal or cultural factor, but a key influence on women's academic persistence. Pressures like in-law expectations, managing guests, and domestic responsibilities, often overlooked in research, shape how young women navigate higher education. The findings also highlight the role of universities themselves: rigid attendance rules, absence of childcare, and a curriculum designed around unmarried students can unintentionally reproduce gender inequality. By documenting these interconnected pressures through the framework of Role Congruity Theory, the study extends existing theoretical discussions and offers a model that can be applied to other South Asian contexts where early marriage intersects with higher education. Overall, this study moves beyond filling a local gap. It

reframes the discussion by showing how marriage, gender norms, and university structures intersect to shape women's educational opportunities, offering insights that are relevant for both theory and policy across South Asia.

7.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges faced by married female undergraduate students:

1. **Childcare Facilities:** Establish affordable, high-quality daycare centers within universities. This would help student mothers focus on academics without worrying about their children's care during class hours.
2. **Gender Awareness Programs:** Universities should introduce programs to raise awareness about domestic gender roles and their impacts on education. Special emphasis should be placed on sensitizing men about shared household responsibilities.
3. **Further Research:** More studies with larger and more diverse samples across multiple universities in Bangladesh should be conducted to understand the broader impact of gender roles on education. The research can serve as a case study and can be expanded to include a comparative analysis of different contexts in the future.
4. **Ministry-Level Counseling Support:** A counseling division under the Ministry of Education should be established to assist married students. This can help them manage marital stress, academic attendance issues, and the mental burden of dual roles.
5. **Encouraging Spousal Participation:** Husbands should actively share household tasks and child-rearing responsibilities to relieve the pressure on their wives.
6. **Promoting Shared Domestic Duties:** Family members, including in-laws, should be encouraged to participate in household chores and foster a culture of shared responsibility.
7. **Training in Prioritization & Delegation:** Married female students should be supported in developing time management skills. They should also learn to delegate responsibilities, assigning tasks such as childcare to other trusted family members when needed.
8. **Coping Strategies:** Encourage healthy coping mechanisms, such as disconnecting from responsibilities during rest (e.g., turning off phones) and setting boundaries to manage stress.

9. Policy Reforms for Inclusion: Educational institutions and policymakers must work together to create an inclusive academic environment where married female students can thrive without being hindered by societal expectations.

In order to progress, it is crucial to persistently question and dismantle the stereotypical gender role expectations that limit the potential of married female students and, by extension, all women. Educational institutions, policymakers, and society at large must work together to create a more inclusive and equitable environment to enable married female students to actively pursue their academic and professional goals while simultaneously addressing and alleviating societal pressures that may impede their progress.

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