

## **GENDER BASED SEGREGATED SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND GENDER STEREOTYPING WITH REFERENCE TO UNDERGRADUATES IN SRILANKA**

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### **Abstract**

The perceptions on gender-based stereotypes not only reflect varied thinking patterns of individuals but also impact the way they define themselves, their skills, and dispositions. These have been captured in the stereotypical images of several groups of individuals to a certain degree. However, considerably less focus has been centralized on finding the external environmental factors that have led these individuals to adopt this specified stereotypical thinking behavior of which the school environment is viewed to be prominent. This study, thus, reviews evidence on the perceptions of undergraduates of public universities in Sri Lanka, who have had their school education in a gender-segregated school environment on gender-based stereotyping. The study followed a qualitative approach where the information collected through in-depth interviews from twenty-eight (28) respondents selected through judgmental sampling technique were analyzed using the 'phenomenological method.' The findings of the study revealed that a negative impact is visible on males by the gender-segregated schools, while a similar school environment demoes a positive impact on females in terms of gender-based stereotyping. The study is expected to be providing valuable insights for parents, for schools, and also for policymakers on the impacts of the school environment and the study is accompanied by a considerable theoretical contribution, as an insignificant number of studies were recognized in the discipline as of the present day.

*Keywords:* Gender Stereotyping, Gender-segregated School Environment, School Environments

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## **1. Introduction**

Over the past decades, gender issues in society have received much attention. With the signs of progress and development, the global society seems to focus more on 'Gender Stereotyping'; a gender-related issue, which will directly impact how individuals socialize with their peers and form relationships. Gender stereotypes are culturally defined expectations about the sexes, which begin to develop early in life and become more extensive as children grow older (Martin & Dinella, 2001). In other terms, Gender Stereotypes can be identified as the beliefs that individuals have about the characteristics of males and female. A review of literature, however, reveals limited investigation of the sources of gender stereotypes. More specifically, limited attention has been exerted on the impact of the gender-segregated school environment on gender stereotyping. This issue or the social phenomenon has rarely received serious attention. This study, therefore, focuses on addressing the aforementioned question on the impact of different school environments on gender stereotyping.

### **Research objectives**

Amongst the number of questions that could be raised on the aspect of 'gender-stereotyping, two (02) questions are denoted to be significant to gain better insights on the phenomenon. The first question is concerned with how stereotypes are cognitively represented and how they impact the perceptions and actions of stereotypical category member while the second question focuses on how and why stereotypes acquired. The cognitive behavior and the structural and behavioral properties have been the focus of a number of preceding studies where significant knowledge do exist in the specified direction (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986).

The second question has however, received much less attention, and we still know relatively little about the origins of gender stereotypes or the factors responsible for their contents. Schools serve as the dominant institution for transmitting social knowledge and attitudes, thereby facilitating social change (Nonaka, et al., 2012). Therefore, some consider higher school enrolment to reduce gender inequality in society, using a broad range of indicators, by shifting social attitudes (Bank & Voice and Agency, 2014), (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). In reality, however, educational institutions are not designed or mandated to shift social attitudes hostile to gender stereotyping. According to some scholars, the classroom can paradoxically serve as a place for nurturing gender bias and stereotypes (Blumberg, 2007), (Chisamya et al, 2012).

Though several pieces of research have been previously conducted to illustrate these social phenomena, less attention has been given to the crucial fact of the origin of gender stereotypes and the factors responsible for the above content. Hence, to precisely address the social issue of the negative impact of gender stereotyping on individuals, a prominent requirement was identified to explore the manifest factors that affect the origin of gender stereotyping.

The study intended to examine the possibility of the existence of an impact of the gender-segregated school environments on gender stereotyping of individuals with reference to undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Research would see if gender-related education would raise the tendency of students to respond more gender-stereotypically, or if it improved their tendency for learning to react less gender-

stereotypically or vice versa, by using a shred of evidence among Sri Lankan graduates. The findings of this contemporary study are expected to be significant for the government and other policymakers in arriving at effective decisions on the management of schools as such impacts would leave a footprint across the lifespan of an individual. It is further sighted to be contributing the parents on deciding the best school environment for their children while gaining insights on the spheres of which they should personally be involved in the better molding of a child utilizing the awareness on the possible impacts a child would experience from his/her school environment.

## **2. Literature Review**

Gender Segregated education is the educational approach in which, boys and girls are taught in separate classrooms and schools depending on the gender. It is further identified as a traditional approach and becomes a significant focus of concern in the previous studies (Stanberry, 2012). The term, 'Gender Stereotypes,' has been addressed and defined by several researchers and authors in different perspectives and stances. As presented by Ashmore & Del Boca (1979), Gender stereotypes are denoted to be structured sets of beliefs about personal attributes, e.g., interests, competencies, and roles, of men and women. Rosenkrantz and colleagues specified the meaning of 'gender stereotypes' in a parenthetical phrase, "The existence of sex-role stereotypes, that is, consensual beliefs differed characteristics of men and women in our society" (Rosenkrantz et al., 1968).

In the pursuit of gender disparities, gender-stereotyped expectancies are denoted to be a key factor, as they influence the behaviour and thereby contribute to a vicious cycle in infant motivation and success. Gender norms are indeed crucial as they influence the conception and social categories of both women and men. These definitions include not only examples of how people think of women and men, but also descriptions of what women and men should be and, even though opinion differs from fact, belief can be very strong factors in self and others' judgments. Gender norms are indeed crucial as they influence the conception and social categories of both women and men. These definitions include not only examples of how people think of women and men, but also descriptions of what women and men should be and, even though opinion differs from fact, belief can be very strong factors in self and others' judgments (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Therefore, it is pivotal to examine the structure of stereotypes in understanding the beliefs and attitudes of an individual with reference to gender stereotypes.

### **Perception of gender-based stereotypes**

Perception of something is the way that anyone conceives it or recognizes it using their senses (Ganguli, Hausmann, & Viarengo, 2011). Likewise, student's perceptions on access to resources by males and females will reflect their behaviors of gender stereotypes (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2013), especially since attitudes and perceptions on any issue are influenced by a variety of historical, social and cultural factors (Ronald & Baker, 2000). Dandapat and colleagues (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2013) further argued that the division of activities and behaviors into the male and female domain is universal, without worldwide agreement about what those activities and

characteristics are. However, they further argued that such division of activities form the basis for gender roles and furnish the potential for gender stereotyping (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2013). As of the prior research conducted by Dandapat and colleagues on women and gender stereotyping in higher education, the data set for the "post-graduates students' attitudes towards the access to resources" was constituted including the factors namely- (1) Both need an equal amount of food, (2) Both can have similar occupations and (3) Both need to be given equal health care and medical attention (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2013).

Social institutions aggregate several different variables in all. They include the right to the profession, the right to share responsibilities and the right of ownership (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2013). All these variables tend to have an impact on the attitudes and beliefs of gender stereotyping where Sen (Sen, 1999) argued that the goal of development is not to achieve a certain set of indicators but to increase choices (especially in reference to women).

Dandapat and colleagues identified the variables of social institutions mainly as-(1) Both can be assigned the same duties and responsibilities, (2) Equal share for daughters and sons in family property or assets and (3) assets should be registered in joint names of husband and wife (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2013). They further evince the above facts by stating that in respect of gender inequality in ownership rights and gender inequality in profession (i.e. duties and responsibilities), it is observed that the males are conservative than females. However, it is argued that such attitudes of the discrimination in the ownership and control of the property are the single most critical contributor to the gender gap (Agarwal , 1994), which acts as a basis for the origin of gender stereotypes.

The level of abilities includes two components; (1) Both can perform all tasks equally well and (2) Both have similar intelligence and abilities (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2013). Gender stereotyping starts as early as infancy and needs therefore to be tackled in the earliest stages in life (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2013). The specific attitudes and behaviors with reference to gender stereotyping may have different origins, out of which the school environment tends to be of more impact since an individual spends a vital period of time in the school environment in their lives. Accordingly, the present study intends to investigate undergraduate's beliefs and attitudes about behaviors, occupations and traits of men and women in society to sort out the impact of gender-segregated school environment on gender stereotyping.

### **3. Methodology**

In consideration of the purpose of the present study, a qualitative research approach was selected since the attitudes and beliefs of the respondents on the impact of the gender-segregated school environment on gender stereotyping are considered where the data were collected from twenty-eight (28) respondents. This study began with 'possible use of the theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem' (Creswell, 2007); i.e. the impact of gender-segregated school environment on gender stereotyping. To study this problem, the researcher used an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, 'the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or

themes' (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the study followed an inductive approach based on qualitative research application by establishing patterns or themes. The researcher built up patterns, categories and themes from "bottom-up," by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information (Creswell, 2007). This inductive process involved the researcher working back and forth between the themes and the collected data until a comprehensive set of themes were established with proper evidence. It also involved collaborating with the respondents interactively so that they had a chance to shape the themes or abstractions that emerge from the process (Creswell, 2007). The analysis includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher and a content description and interpretation of the problem which extends the literature or signals a call for action.

### **Data collection procedures**

The data were gathered in the respondents' native environment. The research collected up-to-date information, in which the respondents actively talked and collected information. In the natural environment, the researcher had face-to-face interactions throughout time, while the investigator itself collected data through documents, behavioral observations, and participant interviews. Where necessary, the guidelines were translated into local languages and were tested for translation. The process was always emergent; this means that the initial plan for the 'Interview Questions' was sometimes changed or shifted with the responses received from the respondents and thereby developing the rest of the questions in parallel with. For example, the questions were changed, the way that questions are delivered and explained to the respondent were changed, the forms of data collection were changed, etc., a part the varied responses received from the respondents. The participants were approached individually, and the interview method was performed one at a time after rapport building.

The interview schedule was divided into three parts: one concerned the perception of the interviewee about access by men and women to resources, the next concerned the respondent's perception of social institutions regarding men and women and the other concerned the questioner's perception of the level of capability between men and women. In anticipation of possible discrepancies, the interviews were organized both through recording and transcription equipment. In the course of the interviews, the participants were asked to give a clear picture of their thinking. For instance, if they agreed upon a sample statement provided by the interviewer, further explanations were requested to elaborate the grounds upon his/her agreement or disagreement was made. "Ice-breakers" were effectively utilized by the researcher in the interviews based on the phenomenon while saying "little" and "emotional outbursts" are intended to be handled by the researcher effectively. Furthermore, several initiations were taken to ensure the ethical conduct of the study, including the utilization of pseudonyms without revealing the identity of the participants, allowing the participants to withdraw the interview at any time, taking the consent from the participants prior to the interview while presenting an over-all idea on the study at the beginning of the interview.

#### 4. Results

Pertaining to the author's assumption that the University undergraduates are the category of individuals who have had comprehensively absorbed the possible impacts from the school environment through the completion of school education, yet have undergone the least impact from other social institutions as they are still undertaking their tertiary education, the study thus focalized on twenty-eight (28) under graduates in Sri Lanka. All these undergraduates voluntarily participated in the study, representing an equal number of respondents (i.e. fourteen (14) in count) from each category of gender. All the participants under the study were in their mid-twenties, mostly between twenty-four (24) to twenty-six (26) years. Amongst the total of twenty-eight (28) respondents, twenty-four (24) had attended an identical school environment for both their primary and secondary education. The author had selected the four (04) remaining respondents purposefully who had shifted at some point of their level of education of one type of school environment to another, to provide further insights into the findings (Annexure 1). Accordingly, the sample comprised of twelve (12) male respondents holding thirteen years' experience of education at a 'boys-only school', twelve (12) respondents who had attended 'girl-only schools' for both their primary and secondary education, two (02) respondents from each category of gender who had shifted from a co-educational school environment to a gender-segregated school environment at a specified level of school education. Moreover, all the respondents were representing the same race, ethnicity, level of education, and marital status (unmarried) which further mitigated the impact of variations of aforementioned social factors on the responses of the participants.

##### **Perception to the 'access to resources'**

Pertaining to the themes presented by the literature of previous findings, the perception of the respondents on the access to resources were assessed under two (02) perspectives, namely, perception on whether both male and female needs an equal amount of food and whether they can have similar occupations.

##### **'Both need an equal amount of food'**

The respondents from the gender-segregated school environment mostly perceived that a greater amount of food should be provided to the males than to females bringing forward varied reasonings. Kasun (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-01) a male respondent from a gender-segregated school environment demoed similar thinking and were even indicated through his responses notably, "Males need more strength than females to do their duties and activities and to gain the strength they must consume more food". A similar thought was expressed by Hiran (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GSM-03) where he stated that women perform 'less tough work and thus would not require the consumption of more food. "But on the other hand, men are engaged in hard work. Even at the working place, or at home, the hard work are laid with the males", Hiran explained his position in regards. Praneeth (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-M-02) also agreed upon the statement, but on a different ground than females by nature eat less and in contrary, the men are eating more, thus food should be provided accordingly. He further stated; "I think it is a natural phenomenon that even from the history when the men went for hunting, the women were at home

looking after children. Since that time, men would have been eating a lot and hence, I also call it a fair activity to provide more food to men than for women." However, it was quite visible that all the fourteen (14) female respondents from similar school environment (i.e. the gender-segregated school environment), denoted exactly the opposite of the views presented by the male respondents of the same school environment. Yamuna (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-F-15) and Deepthi (*pseudonymous*) (26 years) (GS-M-18) elaborated almost identical views regarding the provision of food for men and women, where they expressed that consumption of food does not merely depend on the gender, hence the provision of food should not also be discriminated on the grounds of gender. "I think gender has nothing to do with the consumption of food. If you are a food lover, you would eat more. There is nothing to do with the gender", Deepthi further explained her status. As of a response to the question raised by the interviewer on whether they would provide more food to their son in comparison to their daughters in future, it was quite spotlighting that all the fourteen (14) male respondents from the gender-segregated school environment simply said "yes", even without further justifications on the answer. In contrast, all the female respondents expressed upturned responses where Randini (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-F-19) exposed her thoughts that she would not merely depend on gender to decide the portion, instead would consider their specified requirements. Taniya and Primali (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-F-20) both denoted similar perceptions expressing that no such determination would be made in regard. All the aforementioned responses and facts highlighted by the author demonstrated that every male respondent from the gender-segregated school environment without exception demoed thinking or a belief that 'both the genders do not equally need food', where male requires more than women to be specified. On the contrary, all the female respondents from the identical school environment demoed the complete opposite where they firmly believed that 'both the genders do need equal amount of food' while demoing similar belief and thinking in every single sub-section on which the interview was focused on.

#### **'Both can have similar occupations'**

To investigate the perceptions held by the respondents with regard to the statement 'whether both the genders could have similar occupations or not', the author presented a list of occupations to every single respondent while requesting to select the most suitable occupations for males and females in accordance to their preference. The respondents were further directed to select three occupations which ought to be suitable for each category and to rank them in order of preference. The particular list provided to the respondents included several commonly visible occupations in the society which in general are occupied by both males and females more or less, notably, 'Lawyer', 'Doctor', 'Architect', 'Tailor', 'Cricketer', 'Teacher', 'Pilot', and 'Judge'. It was a prominent observation that all the fourteen (14) male respondents from the specified gender-segregated school environment selected 'teaching' as the most suitable occupation for women stating as the first preference of the list. Three male respondents namely, Kasun, Rasheen (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-M-05), and Anusara (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-06) expressed similar responses for the next two preferences of occupations for females stating to be 'tailor' and 'lawyer'

respectively. However, Hiran only selected the occupation 'tailor' other than his first preference of 'teacher' and stated that no other suitable occupations are available in the list for the females. "All the other occupations require a greater extent of dedication towards the occupation which will consume more effort and time that it would even lead to the omission of their duties at households and thus are not suitable for a woman to engage in", Hiran further expressed his grounds. On the flip side, thirteen (13) of all four male respondents selected 'pilot' as the first preference for males while Darshana (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-04) preferred 'architect' as his first preference noting down the occupation 'pilot' in the second position of his list. Amongst the three preceding noted respondents, two respondents namely Pulindu (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-07) and Hiranya (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-08) selected the occupation of 'doctor' as their second preference in order. To sum up, it could be observed that all the preferences of the respective fourteen (14) male respondents from the gender-segregated school environment were limited to a specified range of four occupations notably, 'pilot', 'cricketer', 'doctor', and 'architect' which were perceived by the noted respondents to be most suitable occupations for males out of the list of occupations provided.

On the contrary, the female respondents from the gender-segregated school environment did not specifically showcase a particular pattern of their preferences and the responses were way different to one another. Anjala (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-F-21) selected the three most suitable occupations for females from the given list to be 'teacher', 'lawyer', and 'architect' while further expressing that she has observed key successful women in these fields in real. Deepthi, who was noted to be a member of the University Elle team chose her first preference to be 'cricketer' stating that sports would be an excellent occupation for a woman even though a lesser concern is exerted in the particular sphere by the women. Her following preferences were stated to be 'doctor' and 'lawyer' respectively. Once the list was presented to Ruwanthi (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-F-22) for the selection of occupations, she refused to order the occupations as of her preference expressing that she is unable to do so as all the occupations in the society are applicable for all the males and females equally. She further expressed her thoughts as "I have never heard of an occupation which is only occupied by either male or female. For instance, if you take any occupation, there would be even a single male or a female at any point of this globe who are engaged in the occupation irrespective of their gender." Even if the response of the rest of the female respondents varied from the aforementioned orders, it was notifiable that all the respective female respondents did not precisely exhibit a pattern of their preference on occupations for females, yet displayed varied preferences denoting that they perceived the capability of women not on a limited range of occupations but almost all the occupations stated in the given list. On the other hand, except for Ruwanthi who refused to make a list of preferences based on similar grounds, stated to be explained by her preceding, the rest of the respondents denoted a varied range of occupations in the contemporary concern in respect of most suitable occupations for males. Two respondents namely, Thilini (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-F-23) and Lakshmi selected 'pilot' as their first preference expressing that more chances are available for the men in the particular field even if it is so unfair to do so. The next preferences of occupation of Thilini and Lakshmi were 'cricketer,' 'judge,'

and 'architect,' 'lawyer' respectively. Deepthi's first preference was 'cricketer' which was the exact similar preference in the first place for women, highlighting that she perceives that both male and female could be engaged in the similar occupation equally well. She further noted her next two selections to be 'architect' and 'tailor' in the order of preference.

By focusing on the aforementioned details of responses presented by the respondents, it could be pictured that all the male respondents disagreed with the statement that 'both males and females can have similar occupation' while preferring two (02) lists with a limited scope of occupations to be most suitable for males and females separately. Contrastingly, all the female respondents from gender-segregated school environment agreed with the respective statement denoting a variety of occupation to be suitable for women as their perception while a single respondent even refused to make a selection denoting that such discrimination is not possible to be made on the suitability of the occupation in regard to gender, which further denoted their thoughts that all the occupations could be performed by both the categories equally well and thus are not limited to particular occupations.

### **Perception on 'social institutions'**

The perception of the respondents from the gender-segregated school environment is assessed by the author under two (02) major dimensions on whether an equal share should be given for daughters and sons in family property or assets, and whether the assets should be registered in joint ownership of husband and wife. Accordingly, the attitudes of the specified respondents on the respective sphere are analyzed while spotlighting several prominent responses stated by the respondents.

### **'Equal share for daughters and sons in family property or assets'**

As the family is identified as one of the most prominent social institutions amongst the rest, the author attempted to identify the perception held by the respondents on the share or the ratio of family property or assets to be divided among the children of a family. It was quite an interesting observation that all the fourteen (14) male respondents stated that the family property or assets should not be divided, instead should wholly be transferred under the name of the son. Sahas (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-09) expressed that the daughter would not find the ancestral house to be important as much as the son, because the daughter would have to live at her husband's house after the marriage. This further demoed that Sahas was perceiving that a girl should live at the house of her husband in future and thus it would not be fruitful to transfer the property to the daughters in a family over the sons.

On the contrary, the female respondents from the identical type of school environment exhibited completely different perceptions and thoughts wherein to sum up, all the respondents agreed upon sharing the family property or assets amongst the future children equally irrespective of their gender. As a response to this question at the interview, Shilpa (*pseudonymous*) (26 years) (GS-F-24) responded; "all will be children of mine. How can I possibly treat one better than the other?" Vandana (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-F-25) also delivered a short but firm response that 'all the children have an equal right for the properties and thus would be shared equally.' Rashmi (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-F-26) was also observed to be

willing to share an equal share for daughters and sons in her future family while Yamuna was not interested in an equal share yet on a share as per the circumstance which would favor every child at its best. All these aforementioned facts and findings denoted that the male respondents from the gender-segregated school environment did not agree with the statement that an equal share of family property and/or assets should be shared among daughters and sons of a family yet emphasizing that the whole or a greater portion should be transferred to the son of the family. In contrast, all the female respondents of similar school environment totally agreed with the statement that an equal share should be considered except for Yamuna who stated that the ratio on the division of property would depend on the circumstance yet 'gender' not being a salient factor in the decision of the appropriate ratio of the transfer of family properties.

**'Assets should be registered in joint ownership of husband and wife'**

As to cross-check with the responses the participants held in terms of share for daughters and sons in family property or assets, the author also checked the perception they held on whether the assets should or should not be in joint names of husband and wife. The male respondents from gender-segregated school environment denoted similar responses as of the preceding section which tested the perception on whether an equal share of family assets should be allowed for daughters and sons, all fourteen (14) of them disagreed with the statement and preferred to have the assets registered only under the name of the husband of the family. Ruhamal (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-10) noted that the grounds for his decision was the 'patriarchal societal system' prevailing in Sri Lanka stating that it has been a practice for years that the male of the family would hold the assets and property of the family as well. Maheesha (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-11) presented similar thinking expressing that 'all the properties of their family are registered under the name of his father and would like to continue such practice in his future family too.' Gayan (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-12) made a spotlight statement that "the assets would be more secured and safeguarded when they are under the name of a male than that of females." On the flip side, the female respondents from the identical category of school environment held dissimilar thinking from their male colleagues where all agreed that assets should be registered in joint ownership of husband and wife of a family. Further elaborating the status, Sanduni (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-F-27) noted that gender would not be an influencing factor to decide on whose name the assets and/or properties should be registered yet would decide on the most beneficial option. Hansi (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-F-28) and Deepthi expressed that it would definitely be beneficial to have the assets in joint ownership while Deepthi clarified utilizing an example; "Just in case if something happens to one of us (i.e. husband and wife), it would be convenient if the assets were in joint names, or else we would have to face a complex legal procedure which would also be very time consuming." These statements by the respondents which were spotlighted by the author as above demoed that all the female respondents agreed with the statement that assets should be registered in joint ownership of husband and wife while the male respondents firmly expressed that the assets of a family should be under the single ownership of the husband providing varied grounds.

### **Perception on level of abilities**

Perception of the level of abilities and skills possessed by males and females is observed to be commonly utilized in the preceding studies to test the gender-stereotypical behavior and attitudes of the individuals (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2013) and is undoubtedly to be an effective dimension of accomplishing the afore-stated requirement. Thus, the author of the present study collected responses from the respondents under two sub-sections namely, whether both males and females can perform all tasks equally well and whether both have similar intelligence and abilities.

#### **'Both can perform all tasks equally well'**

To commence with, male respondents did not perceive that both men and women can perform all tasks equally well, where all the respondents stated specified tasks that could be well performed by one category of individuals than the other category. Deelana (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-13) expressed that the tasks that require a high level of energy and efforts could 'only' be done by men where the tasks which require creativity are well performed by females. Akindu (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-14) stated that the tasks which need a higher level of technical knowledge could be performed well by men than of women. Kasun and Praneeth both stated that they completely disagree with the statement stating that there are 'masculine-typed' and 'feminine-typed' tasks in the society which cannot be performed equally well by the opposite gender. Kasun presented 'driving heavy vehicles' as an example for 'masculine-typed' tasks while Praneeth stated 'teaching' to be a 'feminine-typed' task further elaborating that teachers especially assigned for the primary grades require soft-heartedness and patience which he perceived to be qualities of a woman than that of a man. On the contrary, female respondents from the identical type of school environment completely agreed with the statement. It was an interesting observation that none of them even attempted to justify their answer, instead provided a simple yet firm answer of "yes," agreeing with the statement that both male and female can perform any task equally well.

To further visualize the perception held in terms of the ability to perform a task equally well by both genders, another question seeking whether they would perceive that 'truck driving' and 'heavy vehicle driving' is suitable for a girl as an occupation was raised to all the participants except for Kasun who directly stated 'heavy vehicle driving' to be a 'masculine-typed' task which cannot be performed by the females. Hiran firmly rejected the statement stating that; "I would never allow my sister or my future wife to become a truck driver. It takes long hours and sometimes even have to sleep inside the truck itself in long journeys." Akindu also stated that the specified occupation was not suitable for women as it requires a lot of driving skills while emphasizing that women in general lack such advanced driving skills. Darshana delivered an exact similar response which also spotlighted the perception of "women lacking required driving skills." However, pertaining to the responses delivered in the preceding question, all fourteen (14) female respondents agreed that a girl could follow 'truck driving' as an occupation. Providing justifications for her choice, Taniya stated her response as; "I have seen very responsible female drivers and worst male drivers. Gender would not have an impact as long as you have the required skills." Lakshmi and Deepthi did not provide any in-depth explanations yet agreed

with the fact that a girl could select 'truck driving' as her occupation if she is willing to. As of a sum up, it could be observed that all the male respondents from the gender-segregated school environment perceived that all the tasks could not be performed by both men and women equally well, and it was further confirmed through the responses for the questions followed, which all the male respondents disagreed on the fact that 'truck driving' ought to be a suitable occupation for a girl. In contrast, all the female respondents of the identical school environment agreed on the statement that both males and females could perform all tasks equally well while recognizing 'truck driving' to be a suitable occupation for females.

### **'Both have similar intelligence and abilities'**

The fourteen (14) male respondents did not agree on the statement under consideration while providing different reasonings for their position held. All of the specified male respondents perceived that the tasks related to the children should be performed majorly by the mother and thus a higher responsibility is said to be lying with the mother over the father regarding their children. Praneeth disagreed with the fact that similar work regarding the children could be assigned between males and females denoting that "the females by nature are gifted with the capability of doing those kind of work which I have to accept that females are much better in performing them than the males." On the contrary, the female respondents from a similar school environment exhibited a completely different perception from that of their male colleagues. Deepthi stated that a similar responsibility is laid with both mother and father on their children while highlighting the concept of 'paternity.' "I highly appreciate the concept 'paternity.' It gives the idea that both father and mother should equally contribute to the growth of a child," she further appreciated the concept. Yamuna (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-F-15) and Taniya (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-F-16) presented a similar basis for their response delivering that even the duties of cleaning and feeding should be performed by the father so that the mother would also find it a relief. "The child is not only the mother's, and it is really disappointing that men in the present society still push all the duties of children only on his wife," Lakshmi (*pseudonymous*) (25 years) (GS-F-17) exhibited her hesitancy. On the question raised by the author regarding the preference of the composition of groups for academic purposes at the university based on gender, all the respondents from both the categories stated to be part of an assignment group with a mixed composition of both males and females and were quite satisfied with the contemporary group. However, the grounds on which they were expressing their satisfaction varied from one category to another. For instance, all the fourteen (14) female respondents under the consideration noted a similar reason for their satisfaction to be the experience gained to associate different types of individuals and the ability to have an advanced output with the collection of ideas from several undergraduates from different genders, cultures, etc. Nevertheless, the male respondents noted a different ground by which all of them expressed the fact of males and females having different skills and abilities as the reason for their satisfaction with the current composition of the assignment group. "There are several tasks that could be well performed by the girls such as decorations, aesthetic activities, and are also good at creative writing than that of boys," Kasun (*pseudonymous*) (24 years) (GS-M-01) elaborated his grounds.

Accordingly, it could be viewed that similar to the pattern of responses under the preceding dimensions, the male respondents from the gender-segregated school environment did not perceive that males and females have a similar level of intelligence and abilities, instead denoted that there are specified tasks and activities which either of them are well suited for. However, the female respondents were observed to be firmly believing that all the tasks could be performed by any individual irrespective of their gender. Even though they were satisfied by the current mixed composition of their respective assignment groups; it was recognized not to be based on the grounds of having differed abilities which indirectly demoed that both categories possess similar intelligence and abilities as per their perception.

## **5. Conclusion**

All the male respondents were identified to be displaying high gender-stereotypical behaviors and attitudes on all three (03) dimensions namely, perception of the access to resources, perception of social institutions, and perception of the level of abilities. Accordingly, the male respondents of the gender-segregated school environment were identified to be 'high gender stereotyped.' On the contrary, all the female respondents agreed with all the subdimensions of the aforementioned major dimensions whilst displaying less or nil gender-stereotypical responses which hence could be concluded to be 'non-gender stereotyped.' Thus, as of a sum up, the males and females of the gender-segregated school environment showcased dissimilar perception which in conclusion provide an effective ground to determine that males and females of the specified school environment were 'gender stereotyped' and 'non-gender stereotyped' respectively. This further displayed that the specified school environment had been impacting negatively on males and positively on females in terms of gender stereotyping. These findings in terms of males were denoted to be in line with the previous findings of Richard and his colleagues which stated that gender segregation likely heightens the salience of gender in the classroom thereby reinforcing and increasing gender stereotypes (Richard, et al., 2013). However, none of the significant studies was found to be conducted have tested the impact of the school gender-wise.

Hence considering all the above impacts of school environment on the gender stereotypical attitudes and behaviors that had been identified in the students of the gender-segregated school environment, the author suggests to experiment and implement a novel educational setting notably, single-sex classroom in the co-educational school to evolve as a solution for the negative impacts imposed by traditional gender-segregated school environments. These findings hold the limitation where the generalizations of these findings to other countries have to be made with caution. Moreover, there are still questions related to Gender segregation that need to be better understood (e.g. private vs. public school contexts, pre- vs. post-adolescent education) where in this contemporary study, it was assumed that the likely answers to the aforementioned components would be the same. However, further studies are encouraged to be conducted to detect the influence of other types of school environments (e.g. co-educational school environment) and the impacts of each environment on students beneath the aspect of gender-stereotyping.

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**Annexure 1: Profile of the respondents**

ID Code	Gender	Age	Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Educational Qualifications	Marital Status
GS-M-01	Male	24	Kasun	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-02	Male	25	Praneeth	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-03	Male	25	Hiran	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-04	Male	24	Darshana	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-05	Male	25	Rasheen	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-06	Male	24	Anusara	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-07	Male	24	Pulindu	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-08	Male	24	Hiranya	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-09	Male	24	Sahas	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-10	Male	24	Ruhamal	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-11	Male	24	Maheesha	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-12	Male	24	Gayan	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-13	Male	24	Deelana	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-M-14	Male	24	Akindu	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-15	Female	25	Yamuna	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-16	Female	25	Taniya	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-17	Female	25	Lakshmi	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-18	Female	26	Deepthi	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-19	Female	25	Randini	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-20	Female	25	Primali	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-21	Female	24	Anjala	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-22	Female	25	Ruwanthi	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-23	Female	24	Thilni	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-24	Female	26	Shilpa	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-25	Female	24	Vandana	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-26	Female	25	Rashmi	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-27	Female	24	Sanduni	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried
GS-F-28	Female	24	Hansi	Sinhala	G.C.E. Advanced Level	Unmarried

Source: Compiled by author