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THE IMPACT OF GENDER STEREOTYPES ON MENTAL HEALTH AND HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Gender stereotypes are socially constructed beliefs and expectations that define how individuals should think, feel, communicate, and behave according to their gender. These stereotypes influence personal identity, emotional development, social relationships, educational experiences, professional opportunities, and psychological well-being. From childhood, individuals are exposed to messages about masculinity, femininity, strength, weakness, leadership, emotional expression, and social responsibilities. Such expectations can create psychological pressure when individuals feel compelled to behave according to traditional gender roles rather than their personal interests, abilities, and identities. Gender stereotypes may contribute to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, emotional suppression, identity conflicts, and difficulties in developing healthy relationships. They can also influence human behaviour by shaping decision-making, communication patterns, career choices, social participation, and responses to stress. Although gender-related expectations differ across cultures and communities, their effects can be observed in families, educational institutions, workplaces, media, and broader social structures. This research examines the relationship between gender stereotypes, mental health, and human behaviour, focusing on the psychological and social consequences of restrictive gender expectations. It also explores the importance of gender-sensitive education, supportive social environments, inclusive institutional policies, and public awareness in reducing the harmful effects of stereotypes. The study argues that promoting equality, individual freedom, and emotional acceptance can contribute to improved mental health, healthier interpersonal relationships, and more positive human behaviour.

KEYWORDS:*Gender stereotypes, mental health, human behaviour, gender roles, psychological well-being, social expectations, self-esteem, emotional development, gender equality, social identity.*

INTRODUCTION

Gender stereotypes are deeply rooted social beliefs that establish particular expectations for men, women, and individuals of different gender identities. These beliefs influence how people are expected to dress, speak, express emotions, make decisions, choose careers, and participate in society. From an early age, children receive messages about acceptable masculine and feminine behaviour through family traditions, educational institutions, religious and cultural practices, peer relationships, and media representations. Boys may be encouraged to demonstrate strength, independence, competitiveness, and emotional control, while girls may be expected to display kindness, obedience, sensitivity, and responsibility for family care. Although these expectations are often presented as natural or traditional characteristics, they are largely influenced by social and cultural environments. When individuals are repeatedly judged according to such expectations, they may begin to restrict their behaviour and personal choices to gain social

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acceptance. This process can influence psychological development, personal identity, and the ability to express individual needs. Gender stereotypes therefore represent more than general social assumptions because they can shape opportunities, relationships, emotional experiences, and the overall quality of human life.The influence of gender stereotypes on mental health has become an important subject in contemporary psychological and social research. Mental health is affected by several interconnected factors, including personal experiences, social relationships, economic conditions, discrimination, and cultural expectations. Restrictive gender norms can become an additional source of psychological pressure when individuals feel that they must continuously meet unrealistic standards. For example, expectations that men should remain emotionally strong may discourage them from discussing sadness, fear, or psychological difficulties. Similarly, expectations that women should always be caring, attractive, patient, and emotionally available may create pressure, exhaustion, and dissatisfaction. These experiences can contribute to stress, anxiety, low self-confidence, and feelings of inadequacy. The World Health Organization (2025) emphasizes the importance of addressing social and structural influences that affect mental health and well-being. Understanding gender stereotypes as a social determinant of psychological experiences helps explain why mental health cannot be considered separately from the expectations and inequalities present in society. Andersson, M. A., & McSwain, A. N. (2025).founds thatThe relationship between gender stereotypes and human behaviour is particularly visible in family structures, educational institutions, and workplaces.

For example, girls may receive discouraging messages about technical and scientific careers, while boys may feel pressure to avoid subjects or activities considered feminine. In professional settings, women may face assumptions that they are less suitable for leadership, while men may experience pressure to prioritize professional success over family responsibilities. Such expectations can limit individual development and reinforce unequal social arrangements. The UNESCO (2024) discussion of gender equality and technology-related opportunities illustrates the importance of challenging assumptions that restrict participation and access. These examples show that gender stereotypes influence behaviour by shaping the opportunities individuals consider available to them and the choices they feel socially permitted to make.Social media and contemporary communication technologies have further expanded the ways gender stereotypes are produced, shared, and challenged.Digital platforms contain a wide range of representations of masculinity, femininity, beauty, success, relationships, and social status. Influencers, advertisements, entertainment content, and online communities may reinforce unrealistic expectations about physical appearance, lifestyle, emotional behaviour, and professional achievement. Continuous exposure to idealized images can encourage social comparison and dissatisfaction, particularly among individuals who feel unable to meet the standards presented online. Women may experience pressure to maintain particular beauty standards, while men may encounter expectations related to physical strength, financial success, and social dominance. At the same time, digital platforms can provide spaces for discussing mental health, challenging discriminatory assumptions, and sharing alternative representations of gender identity. The

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impact of social media therefore depends on the nature of the content, users' experiences, and the social support available to them. A balanced understanding of digital communication is essential for examining how modern gender stereotypes influence psychological well-being and everyday behaviour. Burns, L., Olive, L., Turner, A., Rice, S., Wrobel, A., Montgomery-Farr, B., Norton, B., Seidler, Z., & Hayley, A. (2026).explain thatCultural traditions and social institutions play a significant role in determining which gender expectations are accepted and how strongly they influence individual lives.

In many communities, traditional ideas about family responsibilities, marriage, leadership, emotional expression, and economic participation remain powerful influences on personal decisions. Individuals who challenge these expectations may experience criticism, social exclusion, family conflict, or discrimination. Such reactions can create psychological stress and discourage people from expressing their abilities and personal preferences. However, cultural practices are not fixed or identical across societies; they change through education, economic development, social movements, and changing family structures. Greater awareness of gender equality can encourage communities to reconsider harmful assumptions while maintaining respect for cultural diversity. Research into gender norms must therefore consider the relationship between individual experiences and broader social conditions. It is important to recognize that the consequences of stereotypes may differ according to age, economic position, disability, education, and other social circumstances.In contemporary society, challenging gender stereotypes is essential for developing healthier individuals and more inclusive communities. Education, family awareness, responsible media representation, workplace equality, and accessible mental health services can help reduce the negative consequences of restrictive gender expectations.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the impact of gender stereotypes on mental health and human behaviour by analysing their influence on emotional expression, self-esteem, psychological well-being, personal identity, social relationships, and individual decision-making.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How do gender stereotypes influence mental health and human behaviour, particularly in relation to emotional development, psychological well-being, self-esteem, social relationships, and personal decision-making?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender stereotypes have been widely examined in psychology, sociology, education, and gender studies because they influence how individuals understand themselves and interact with society. Social expectations concerning masculinity and femininity often become part of personal identity

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through family upbringing, education, cultural traditions, and everyday communication. These expectations can affect people's beliefs about their abilities, responsibilities, and social value. When individuals repeatedly receive messages that particular activities or characteristics are unsuitable for their gender, they may internalize these assumptions and limit their interests or ambitions. Contemporary gender research increasingly emphasizes that social norms are not merely external rules but can become psychological influences that shape self-perception and behaviour. The World Health Organization's work on social determinants of mental health highlights the importance of social conditions in understanding psychological well-being (WHO, 2025). From this perspective, gender stereotypes should be understood as part of a broader social environment that can either support individual development or create barriers to psychological and social participation. Xu, L., Jiang, Z., & Roivainen, E. (2026).Research on gender roles and emotional well-being suggests that restrictive expectations can influence how individuals identify and express their emotions. Traditional masculine norms frequently associate men with independence, toughness, emotional control, and self-reliance. Although confidence and independence can be positive qualities, the expectation that men must never display vulnerability can discourage emotional communication and professional help-seeking. Similarly, traditional feminine norms may encourage women to prioritize others' needs, avoid confrontation, and maintain particular standards of appearance and behaviour. When these expectations become rigid, individuals may experience emotional conflict because their actual feelings and personal needs do not match socially approved behaviour. Psychological pressure may increase when people fear rejection or criticism for expressing emotions that are considered inappropriate for their gender.

This literature indicates that emotional well-being is connected not only to individual personality but also to the social rules that determine which emotions people feel permitted to express.Another important area of literature focuses on the relationship between gender stereotypes, self-esteem, and personal identity. Self-esteem develops through personal experiences, social feedback, achievements, relationships, and perceptions of acceptance. Gender-based judgments can influence self-esteem when individuals are repeatedly evaluated according to unrealistic standards of appearance, strength, intelligence, leadership, or social behaviour. Women may experience pressure to satisfy idealized standards of beauty and caregiving, while men may face expectations to demonstrate financial success, physical strength, and authority. Individuals who cannot or do not wish to meet these expectations may feel that they are failing to fulfil their social roles. Such feelings can affect confidence, identity development, and satisfaction with personal choices. Research on social and cultural influences on identity development suggests that the messages individuals receive from their environments can shape how they understand themselves and their place in society. Consequently, reducing restrictive stereotypes is important for supporting self-acceptance and healthy identity formation Lausi, G. (2026)..The literature also identifies important connections between gender stereotypes and educational experiences. Educational institutions are not completely separate from social

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expectations because teachers, students, families, and learning materials may reproduce assumptions about appropriate subjects, skills, and career pathways for different genders. Girls may receive less encouragement to pursue science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in environments where these subjects are associated with men. Boys may similarly feel discouraged from studying fields related to nursing, early childhood education, or other caring professions because such occupations are sometimes viewed as feminine. These expectations can affect classroom participation, confidence, academic motivation, and future employment choices. UNESCO (2024) emphasizes the need to address gender-related barriers in technology and education, illustrating how stereotypes can influence access to opportunities. A more inclusive educational environment can challenge these assumptions by recognizing individual ability, encouraging diverse interests, and ensuring that all students receive equal opportunities to develop their potential.

Digital media has become an important subject in recent research because online communication can strengthen or challenge traditional gender expectations. Social networking platforms, online advertising, films, and influencer culture often circulate images of idealized bodies, lifestyles, relationships, and professional success. These representations can create pressure to conform to narrow standards, particularly among young people who are developing their identities and comparing themselves with others. Gender stereotypes may be reinforced through content that presents women primarily in terms of appearance or men primarily in terms of dominance, wealth, and physical strength. However, digital platforms can also support campaigns for equality, provide access to mental health information, and create communities where individuals can discuss experiences that are not easily expressed in their immediate surroundings. UNESCO (2024) highlights the importance of understanding gender equality in digital environments. The literature consequently suggests that the effects of digital media are complex and depend on content, patterns of use, media literacy, and the availability of supportive online and offline relationships. Zhu, Y., Yan, Y., Feng, Y., Liu, Y., Lin, C. Y., Ai, Q., ... & Lou, J. (2024).The literature also points towards the importance of social change, inclusive education, and institutional responsibility in reducing harmful gender stereotypes. Public awareness campaigns, gender-sensitive curricula, equal employment policies, responsible media practices, and accessible mental health services can challenge restrictive expectations and support healthier behaviour. UN Women (2024) emphasizes the importance of social protection and gender equality in building resilience and reducing inequalities. Such approaches recognize that individual attitudes are shaped by wider social systems and that meaningful change requires action at multiple levels. Families can encourage children to develop interests without gender restrictions, schools can provide equal participation opportunities, and workplaces can create environments where employees are respected regardless of gender. Mental health services can also promote emotional openness and challenge stigma surrounding vulnerability and help-seeking. Overall, existing literature supports the view that gender stereotypes influence

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psychological well-being and human behaviour through interconnected personal, cultural, and institutional processes.

METHODOLOGY

The present research adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine the impact of gender stereotypes on mental health and human behaviour. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the subject involves personal experiences, emotional responses, social expectations, cultural influences, and individual interpretations of gender roles. The study focuses on understanding how stereotypes influence psychological well-being, self-perception, emotional expression, social relationships, and everyday decision-making. Rather than treating gender stereotypes as isolated personal beliefs, the research considers them within wider social and institutional environments. This approach provides an opportunity to explore the relationship between individual psychological experiences and the cultural expectations that influence human behaviour.The study is based on secondary sources of information, including academic journal articles, psychological research, systematic reviews, books, institutional reports, and publications related to gender equality and mental health. Relevant literature published between 2023 and 2026 is given priority to ensure that the discussion reflects contemporary academic perspectives. Research articles addressing gender norms, emotional suppression, psychological distress, self-esteem, discrimination, identity development, and workplace stereotypes are considered particularly relevant. Sources are selected according to their academic credibility, relevance to the research objectives, and contribution to understanding the psychological and behavioural consequences of gender-based expectations.A descriptive and analytical research approach is used to examine the different forms of gender stereotypes and their possible consequences. The descriptive component identifies common expectations associated with masculinity and femininity, while the analytical component examines how these expectations may influence emotional experiences, psychological health, social participation, and individual choices.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is based on a thematic review of the available literature. Relevant academic materials are organized into major themes, including gender socialization, emotional expression, psychological distress, self-esteem, educational experiences, workplace discrimination, digital media, and help-seeking behaviour. Each theme is examined to identify recurring arguments, similarities, differences, and research gaps. Thematic organization makes it possible to connect individual psychological experiences with broader social structures. It also provides a systematic way of understanding how gender stereotypes may influence behaviour in different environments, including homes, schools, workplaces, and online communities.The study acknowledges certain methodological limitations associated with secondary research. The findings depend on the quality, availability, and geographical coverage of existing publications, and conclusions cannot automatically be generalized to every cultural or social context. Studies

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may use different definitions of gender stereotypes, psychological distress, and gender conformity, making direct comparisons difficult. Furthermore, associations between gender norms and mental health do not always establish a direct causal relationship. The research therefore interprets published findings carefully and distinguishes between established evidence, reported associations, and broader theoretical arguments. Despite these limitations, the qualitative review provides a useful foundation for understanding the relationship between gender stereotypes, mental health, and human behaviour.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis indicates that gender stereotypes influence mental health through social pressure, internalized expectations, discrimination, and restrictions on emotional expression. Individuals who feel compelled to behave according to rigid gender roles may experience conflict between their personal identities and socially accepted expectations. This conflict can contribute to psychological distress, dissatisfaction, insecurity, and reduced self-confidence. Mommersteeg et al. (2023) examined gender roles and psychological distress in a Dutch population sample and found relationships between gender-related norms and certain measures of distress. Similarly, Andersson and McSwain (2025) reported that gender traditionalism was associated with greater depressive and anxiety symptoms among women and men in their study. These findings suggest that traditional expectations may have psychological consequences, although the strength and nature of these relationships can differ across individuals and contexts. A second major theme concerns emotional expression and psychological help-seeking. Traditional masculine expectations may encourage men to appear strong, independent, and emotionally controlled, potentially making it difficult to acknowledge vulnerability or request psychological assistance. On the other hand, restrictive feminine expectations may encourage women to prioritize caregiving responsibilities and suppress their own emotional needs. Burns et al. (2026) reviewed 82 studies and found that stronger conformity to masculine gender norms was associated with lower psychological help-seeking and treatment engagement. This evidence demonstrates how social expectations can influence behaviour beyond emotional expression by affecting whether individuals seek professional support. The analysis therefore identifies emotional openness, supportive relationships, and accessible mental health services as important factors in reducing the harmful consequences of restrictive gender norms. The third theme examines the influence of stereotypes on social behaviour, professional participation, and opportunities. Gender-based assumptions can shape judgments about leadership, competence, communication, career suitability, and family responsibilities.

FINDINGS

The research finds that gender stereotypes can negatively influence mental health by creating pressure to fulfil socially prescribed expectations. Individuals may experience anxiety, emotional dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and psychological distress when their personal interests,

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abilities, or identities conflict with traditional gender roles. The expectation that men should always demonstrate strength and independence can discourage emotional openness, while the expectation that women should consistently fulfil caregiving and appearance-related standards can create additional psychological burdens. The reviewed literature indicates that these experiences are not limited to one gender and that restrictive expectations can affect people differently depending on their social and cultural circumstances. The study therefore identifies gender stereotypes as an important social factor that should be considered when examining psychological well-being.The findings also demonstrate that gender stereotypes influence human behaviour in families, educational institutions, workplaces, and social relationships. These expectations can affect career choices, communication patterns, leadership participation, household responsibilities, and the willingness to seek professional support. Individuals may change their behaviour to avoid criticism, gain acceptance, or fulfil expectations associated with their gender. Such adjustments can limit personal freedom and prevent people from developing their abilities according to their interests and capabilities. The reviewed evidence also highlights that gender-based assumptions can contribute to discrimination and unequal opportunities. Consequently, challenging stereotypes is important not only for improving individual psychological experiences but also for promoting fairer relationships and more inclusive institutions.

CONCLUSION

Gender stereotypes have a significant influence on mental health and human behaviour because they shape the expectations through which individuals understand themselves and interact with society. Traditional beliefs about masculinity and femininity can influence emotional expression, personal identity, self-esteem, family responsibilities, educational opportunities, and professional participation. When these expectations become restrictive, individuals may experience psychological pressure and feel compelled to hide their emotions, change their behaviour, or limit their personal ambitions. The research demonstrates that gender stereotypes are not simply harmless social assumptions; they can become barriers to psychological well-being and individual development. Their effects may differ across social and cultural environments, but the importance of understanding their influence remains relevant in contemporary society.The study also concludes that the relationship between gender stereotypes and mental health requires attention from families, educational institutions, employers, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Social expectations can influence whether individuals feel accepted, whether they can express their emotions, and whether they seek support during difficult circumstances. Therefore, addressing psychological difficulties requires an understanding of the social pressures that contribute to them. Educational programmes should promote gender equality and emotional awareness, workplaces should provide fair opportunities, and mental health services should recognize the influence of gender-related experiences.

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