

# Life Skills Development/Module Two/Gender and Sex Roles

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## Gender and Sex Roles

### Introduction

In this unit we are going to discuss gender and sex roles in relation to interpersonal relationships. It will share how these roles or the change in any, impact on interpersonal relationships and influence the choices we make in life. Also, it will discuss the relationship between gender, sex and the spread of HIV.

### Objectives

Upon completion of this unit the learner will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the difference between the terms "gender" and "sex."
2. Distinguish between similarities and differences of the roles of men and women.
3. Examine cultural stereotypes and their impact on gender and sex roles.
4. Identify changes in gender roles in relation to the needs and demands of society.
5. Examine how the change in gender roles can impact on interpersonal relationship.
6. Contrast the relationship between gender, sex and the spread of HIV.



### Definitions

- Gender - The different roles and responsibilities that are culturally determined for men and women, the meanings given to those roles and the relations that develop as a result.
- Sex - refers to our physical and sexual characteristics which is normally unchangeable.
- Gender roles refer to societal norms about behaviour that are viewed as masculine or feminine in a particular culture.
- Sex Roles - are roles that are a result of biological differences.
- Cultural Stereotype - is a simplified mental picture of an individual or group of people who shares certain characteristic qualities.

## Sex and Gender Differences

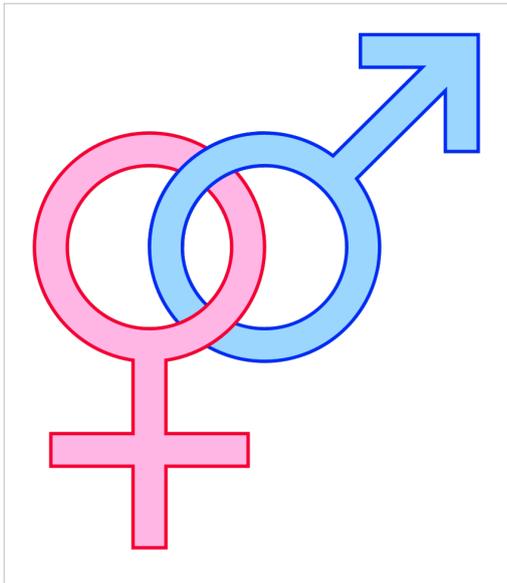
Sex refers to the biological characteristics which define humans as females or males. These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive as there are individuals who possess both but they tend to differentiate humans as males and females. Only women can give birth and breastfeed. Only men can supply sperms. Gender on the other hand is socially constructed and learned. You are not born with it, therefore, it is changeable. Women can do traditionally male jobs as well as men. Men can take as good care of children as women.



### Reflection

1. Identify the different roles of women and men. Then compare the differences of a mother and a father
2. List down the societies (in your context) expectations for you
3. Think of a song/story or a poem where there are influences for men and women.
4. Discuss some of the shared responsibilities of men and women

## Similarities and Differences in Gender and Sex Roles



### Gender Roles:

Society assumes that men and women are born to perform different roles and with different aptitude and abilities. As such it has identified the woman's role of that of nurturing, homemaking and caring for the family, in other words, it sees the woman as involved in what may be called "soft occupations". On the other hand the man is assigned the role of breadwinner which is usually associated with what is called the "hard occupations" requiring strength, the one to exercise power over the woman. Some other masculine gender roles include tailoring and carpentry. The similarities exist when these roles overlap in some way. These roles, however, can be changed by education and media images, among other means as gender issues are rooted in learned behaviours.

### Sex Roles:

The difference between men and women is obvious in both physiological and psychological aspects. Personality differences between men and women are not as obvious as biological differences because psychological differences in men and women are probably caused by biological differences. The historic interpretation of these differences can often lead to prejudice and discrimination against women. Read more by clicking on this website <http://academics.tjhsst.edu/psych/oldPsych/ch14-2/> Before going on any further, let me ask you a question, how would you describe yourself to yourself? I believe if you are a female, you might answer by discussing the different roles that a female have, being a daughter, a wife, mother, a lover, a friend etc. because females define who they are by describing themselves by the relationships they have. On the other hand if the same question was posed to males, the response might be different they might define or describe themselves by their accomplishments and from their success stories.



### Activity

Below are two lists in which we have identified some male and female gender roles. Add some more roles to each list.

Male	Female
Breadwinner	Nurturing
Carpenter	Caring for the family
Tailor	Seamstress

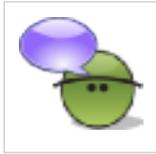


**Feedback:** How many more gender roles were you able to identify? Keep adding to your list whenever you find a new role of each.



### Activity

Select from the list below gender and sex traits for men and women. Breasts, physically strong, hips, facial and chest hair, low voice, penis, menstruation, gives birth, passive, doesn't cry easily, makes money for family, cooks and cleans, makes decisions, emotional.



### Feedback:

Male (Sex)	Female (Sex)
Breasts	Facial and Chest hair
Gives birth	Menstruation

## Cultural Stereotypes and Impact on Sex and Gender Roles

Cultural stereotypes vary with culture and can be either positive or negative. They are often used, however, in a negative sense as they tend to ignore the individual beliefs, needs, experiences, abilities and characteristics of each person. They create assumptions about a person based on physical, social and economic factors. There can be sex role stereotypes and gender role stereotypes.

Sex role stereotypes have to do with our expectations about the behaviour of males and females: men do heavy work because we see them as stronger than women, for example, while women care for babies.

Gender stereotypes reflect our impressions and beliefs about females and males: females are expressive, that is, more emotional. Males are more instrumental.

Stereotyping can affect couple and family interaction. Often the division of household labour is based on gender. Women will be assigned housework and men work outside the home to bring in an income for the family. Specifically, men and women may be judged by how well they conform to traditional stereotypes. In Pleck (1976) theory of masculine gender role strain, he said that boys and men are pressured to fulfill a cultural standard of masculinity and when they do not they suffer from low self esteem or worth. Even men who successfully fulfill the standard of masculinity suffer psychologically or emotionally from rigid constraints on acceptable parenting role for men.



### Activity

Think of a gender based stereotype that can be harmful to men. For example "real men have more than one girlfriend." then think of another gender based stereotype that can be harmful to women. For example "you can only be a real woman if you bear a child." which may encourage girls to get pregnant at a young age. List some strategies that can be useful in making these stereotypes less harmful.

## Changing Gender Roles

Widespread change in gender roles is assumed to be occurring at the present time. Emerging evidence shows change in labourforce participation, sexuality and attitudes. Change maybe as a result of several factors and sometimes occur in relation to societal demands and needs. Societal needs may exist in the following instances,among others, where:

1. there is a shortage of manpower caused by heavy migration of men.
2. there is the absence of male family members because of their involvement in fighting/war and women are expected to assume more independent roles.
3. a family is made up of all boys or girls.In this case the boys will be required to perform what is considered to be female roles and girls will perform male roles.

Change in labourforce participation includes the elements of convention or tradition which seem to play a dominant role in deciding which occupations fit in with which gender roles. In the United States, physicians have traditionally been men, and the few people who defied that expectation received a special job description: "woman doctor". Similarly, there are special terms like "male nurse", "woman lawyer", "lady barber", "male secretary," etc. But in China and the former Soviet Union countries, medical doctors are predominantly women, and in the United Kingdom, Germany and Taiwan it is very common for all of the barbers in a barber shop to be women. Also, throughout history, some jobs that have been typically male or female have switched genders. For example, clerical jobs. Clerical jobs used to be considered a man's job, but when several women began filling men's job positions due to World War II, clerical jobs quickly became dominated by women. It became more feminized, and women workers became known as "typewriters" or "secretaries". There are many other jobs that have switched gender roles, and many jobs are continually evolving as far as being dominated by women or men. No society is gender neutral or sexless, however, societies vary in the content of different gender roles. Gender identity can be seen in styles of grooming, dress and social tasks. Today, styles of personal grooming and dress are becoming less differentiated particularly among the young people.



### Assignment

Write an essay, using not more than one thousand(1000) words,discussing how the change in gender roles occur in relation to societal needs and demands.

## Impact of Gender Role Change

The change in gender role can have positive and negative impact on relationship both within the family and at the work place. In families where both mother and father are working, there is the threat of child neglect as enough time may not be spent with the children.



### Activity



### Feedback:

## Sex, Gender and HIV and AIDS

This section will specifically focus on sex (the biological differences between man and women) in relation to the spread of HIV as well as the gender inequality, gender power relations and their impact on HIV and AIDS. The characteristics of the biological make-up of male and female, and their vulnerability to the HIV spread is different and therefore makes it necessary to discuss.

In addition, the gender power relations of man and women also impact their relationships which in turn affect the spread of HIV and AIDS. WHO (2000a) affirm this by stating that the rate of infection among women is growing

rapidly in comparison to the rate of infection among men.

Let's first look at the sexual differences in relation to their impact on HIV and AIDS.

### Sex Differences and the Spread of HIV

This section will specifically focus on sex (the biological differences between man and women) in relation to the spread of HIV as well as the gender power relations and their impact, on HIV and AIDS. The characteristics of the biological make-up of male and female, and their vulnerability to the HIV spread is different and therefore makes it necessary to discuss. The Gender (role) power relations of male and female also impact their relationships which in turn affect the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Van Dyk (2001:20) suggests the following reasons:

- Due to the physical make-up of women, the women receive semen during sexual intercourse, it stays in her body for few hours, while the man is only exposed to the vaginal fluids for a short while
- Semen tend to carry a higher concentration of HIV than vaginal fluids
- Women have a larger surface area of mucous membrane inside the vagina than men do on the glans (top section) of the penis.
- Many women have cervical or vaginal conditions such as STIs, erosions, open sores and infections that facilitate the transmission of HIV
- The practice of 'dry sex' can damage vaginal walls especially by using herbs, douching or other substances.
- Menstruation can facilitate the transmission of HIV, because of the large raw area of inner uterine lining that is exposed
- Younger women are especially vulnerable, because they have an immature genital tract and minimal vaginal secretions (UNAIDS, 2000)

### References

1. Suwazi Youth Manual: *A Life Skill Manual For Youth Peer Educators. Your Journey to a Healthy Life.*
2. Van Dyk, A.C. (1999). *AIDS Care and Counselling.* Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.

### Gender Inequality, Power Relations and the Spread of HIV & AIDS

The Gender inequality and the power relations of male and female also impact their relationships which in turn affect the spread of HIV and AIDS.



**Feedback:** You may have thought of poverty, sexual abuse, the culture of silence, domestic violence, attitude and stigma, etc. Can you think of any other factors that can add to this list?

Van Dyk (2001:21) further listed the following factors:

- Rape, rough sex, female circumcision and anal sex (often practiced to preserve and prevent pregnancy) can cause tearing, bleeding and this further increase the risk of transmission.
- In countries where women have a lower status than men, they do not have the authority to express or enforce their needs in sexual relationships>
- Most women in poor community have little control over their sex lives
- Poverty and need drives women to prostitution
- Low self-image and lack of personal authority often make women particularly vulnerable to rape

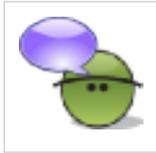


### Activity

Read the following scenario and see if you can answer the following questions. **Scenario**

Mr A and Ms B are neighbours. Mr A goes out and hang out with different partners,have sex without taking protective meaasures(condom use)and sometimes takes drugs. While Ms B has a partner and is committed to this relationship.

1. Who do you think is at more risk of getting HIV or STIs and why?
2. How does the gender norm put man or women at risk?



**Feedback:** Good Work! You are doing well. Find some similarities and differences from the answers.HERE



### Summary

In this unit we discussed the following:

- The difference between the term 'gender' and 'sex'.
- Diffrent roles of men and women
- Cultural stereotype and their impacts on gender and sex roles.
- Changes in gender roles in relation to the needs and demands of the society
- How the change in gender and sex roles can impact on interpersonal relationships
- The relationship between gender, sex and the spread of HIV



### Assessment

Skills Development/Module Two/Human Sexuality and Sexual Health <http://www.wikieducator.org/images/c/ca/Previous.png> <sup>[1]</sup> | Skills Development/Module Two/Human Relationships <http://www.wikieducator.org/images/c/c4/Next.png> <sup>[1]</sup>

### References

[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life>

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