

Religious Beliefs and Gender Norms as Determinants of Attitudes Towards Women Rights as Perceived by College Students from Selected Catholic Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Poor attitudes toward women's rights is a global concern. The significance of the impact of religious beliefs and gender norms as determinants of attitudes towards women's rights was determined. Using diagnostic research design, involving 150 college students selected through quota sampling, gathering data via survey questionnaire, and analyzing data using multiple linear regression, it was found that religious beliefs and gender norms jointly shape attitudes toward women's rights, partially supporting Gender Schema Theory. Future studies should explore other factors and use qualitative approaches, while schools promote programs to strengthen support for women's rights.

Keywords: Religious beliefs, gender norms as determinants of attitudes towards women rights, college students, catholic higher education institutions

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Scope

Poor attitudes toward women's rights remain a serious issue in many societies. For example, Jan Antonoyiannakis, Hugues Chaté, Serena Dalena, Jessica Thomas, and Alessandro Villar (2023) develop a new global method for estimating gender profiles from first names, showing that standard inferences under-estimate gender bias in large datasets, suggesting that bias might be more pervasive than commonly measured (Antonoyiannakis et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Golovchenko, Stańczak, Adler-Nissen, Wangen, and Augenstein (2023) provide evidence of global gender bias in digital diplomacy: women ambassadors receive substantially fewer retweets than men, highlighting how biased visibility undermines women's roles in international politics (Golovchenko et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, patriarchal norms restrict women's autonomy in education, work, and family life, perpetuating discrimination across generations (Gopang, 2023). In Poland, public opinion surveys show that restrictive views on women's reproductive rights remain strong, demonstrating sustained negative attitudes toward women's bodily autonomy (Czarzasty et al., 2024). In Afghanistan, under Taliban rule, women and girls are banned from secondary and higher education, restricted in movement without a male chaperone, and excluded from many jobs, reflecting repressive societal attitudes toward women's rights (Amiri and Ahmadi, , 2024). In Iran, women's rights activists resisting compulsory veiling laws face arbitrary arrests,

flogging, and other punishments, highlighting ongoing gender-discriminatory state repression (Kayyal and Ali, 2024).

In the Philippine context, research on gender attitudes is scarcer in top-tier international journals; however, studies on intimate partner violence (IPV) and intergenerational transmission of violence provide insight into how poor attitudes toward women's rights persist. For instance, Puno, Kim, Jeong, Jeong, and Kim (2023) document that Filipino women whose mothers experienced IPV are more likely to experience violence themselves, indicating how social acceptance of such violence runs deeply (Puno et al., 2023). At the same time, social-psychological studies show Filipino women internalize restrictive norms about gender roles, reinforcing patterns that justify unequal treatment (Vibal, 2024).

The consequences of such negative attitudes toward women's rights are profound. Golovchenko et al. (2023) argue that reduced visibility of women in public and diplomatic roles contributes to their underrepresentation in decision-making arenas, limiting women's influence. Moreover, Zulfiqar and Mohyuddin (2024) stress that brain waste among female professionals not only undermines individual potential but also represents a loss of social and economic capital for the broader society. It is for this reason that this study was conducted.

Significance of the Study

This study on attitudes toward women's rights holds significant value for the Department of Education (DepEd) and Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs) as it provides empirical evidence that can guide curriculum development, teaching practices, and student formation. By identifying prevailing biases and gender stereotypes within academic communities, the study can help educators integrate gender-sensitive pedagogies, strengthen values formation, and align programs with national and international commitments to gender equality. For DepEd, the findings can inform policy adjustments in basic education to embed gender awareness early on, while for CHEIs, the research can provide insights into reconciling religious values with progressive gender discourse, ensuring that faith-based institutions remain advocates of inclusivity and justice. This contribution is crucial as education plays a central role in shaping attitudes that either reinforce or challenge gender inequities.

For women's organizations and other relevant agencies, this study provides a strong basis for targeted advocacy, program development, and community interventions that address harmful norms and practices. Women's organizations can use the findings to design awareness campaigns and support services that directly counteract stereotypes and discriminatory behaviors. Meanwhile, local government units, NGOs, and policy-making bodies can employ the study as evidence for gender-responsive planning, especially in areas such as Davao City where empirical studies are limited. By highlighting the prevailing attitudes toward women's rights, this research bridges knowledge gaps, equips stakeholders with actionable insights, and supports the collective effort to advance gender equality in both national and local contexts.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the significance of the impact of religious beliefs and gender norms as determinants of attitudes towards women's rights. Specifically, it aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the levels of religious beliefs of college students in terms of belief in a high power, religious practices, morality and ethics, and interfaith understanding; gender norms in terms of traditional gender roles, equality and empowerment, stereotypes and bias, and challenging norms; and attitudes toward women's rights in terms of gender equality, equality among gender, and activism and advocacy.

2. To determine the significant relationship between religious belief, and gender norms, and the attitudes toward women's rights of college students.
3. To determine the significance of degree of influence of religious belief and gender norms on attitudes toward women's rights of college students.

Hypotheses

This study was tested at the .05 level of significance.

H₀₁: Religious belief and gender norms do not significantly correlate with attitudes toward women’s rights.

H₀₂: Religious belief and gender norms individually, do not significantly influence attitudes toward women’s rights.

H₀₃: Religious beliefs and gender norms combined, do not significantly influence attitudes towards women rights.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Gender Schema Theory posits how individuals process through gender schemas that guide processing information related to gender and shape the concept of gender. These schemas are influenced by intersectionality, historical influence, and contextual fluidity (Bem, 1981).

In this study, religious beliefs indicated by belief in a higher power, religious practices, morality and ethics, and interfaith understandings (Leite, 2023) stand intersectionality of the theory. Gender norms indicated by traditional gender roles, equality and empowerment, stereotypes, and the challenging of bias (Sedlander 2022) represent historical influence of the theory. Lastly, attitudes toward women’s rights indicated by gender equality, women’s rights, and activism and advocacy (Kan & Kolpashnikova 2021) represent the concept of gender.

The other variable spoken about in the theory that is contextual fluidity related to gender was excluded in this study.

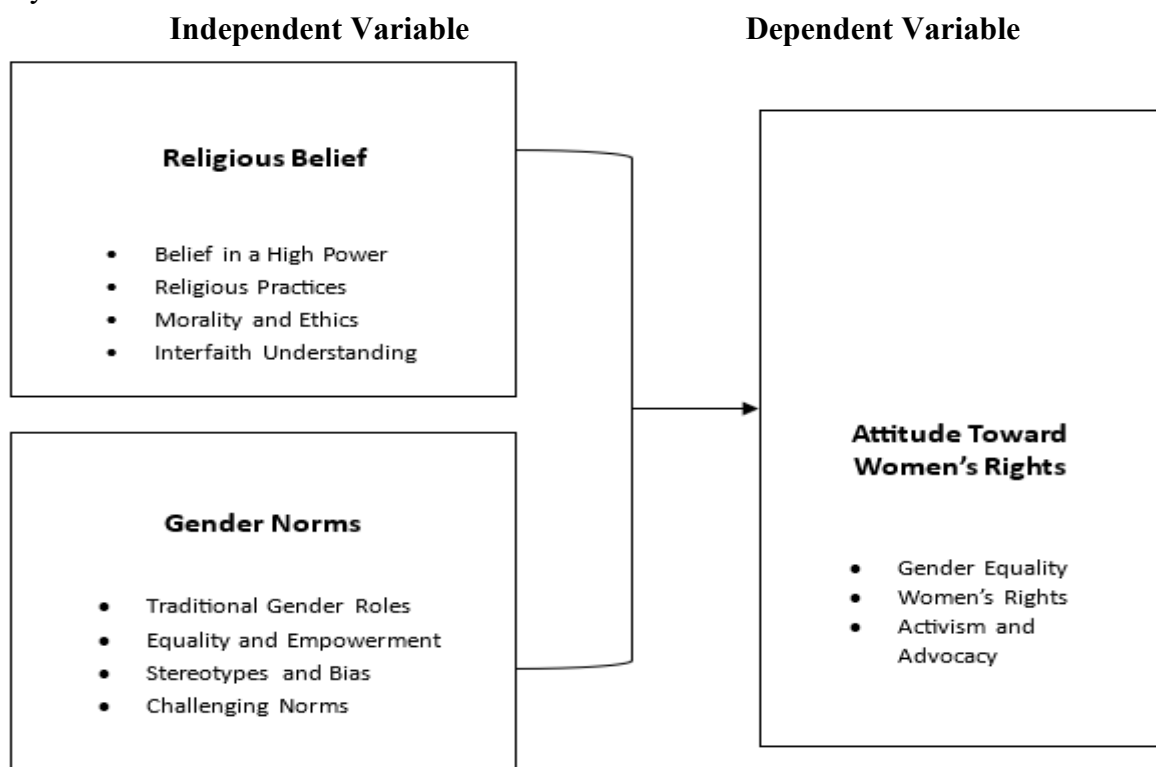


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

METHODOLOGY

The researcher, in this chapter described the approaches and procedures that were utilized by the researcher in conducting the study. The contents of this chapter included the research design, the research locale, the sample and sampling, the research instruments, the data gathering procedure, the data analysis, and the ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative research method using a diagnostic research design. It was a type of research methodology that examined the relationship between variables to determine if one or more predictor variables could forecast an outcome or criterion variable (Bhat, 2023). Additionally, it involved researchers observing and measuring variables of interest without altering them or attempting to establish cause-and-effect relationships, instead examining the patterns and relationships that emerged from the data. This study employed the predictive-correlational method to examine the correlation between religious beliefs, gender norms, and attitudes toward women’s rights.

Research Locale

The respondents of this study were from three college institutions in Davao City. These institutions were known for providing quality tertiary education, being religious institutions, and having a diverse student population.

Sample and Sampling Technique

This involved 150 college students selected through quota sampling. Quota sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers divided a population into subgroups (quotas) based on specific characteristics. The researcher then selected participants non-randomly within each quota to ensure proportional representation of these characteristics. This method was often used in market research and social science studies when probability sampling was impractical due to time or cost constraints (Etikan & Bala, 2021).

Data Gathering Technique

Survey questionnaire technique was used in this study. There were 3 questionnaires utilized each for the variables. All of those questionnaires apply the 5 Likert scale scheme. The following were used for the interpretation of the data:

Interpretation of the Descriptive Level of the Mean

Range of Means	Description	Religious Beliefs	Gender Norms	Attitudes towards Women’s Right
4.20-5.00	Very High	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
3.40-4.19	High	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
2.60-3.39	Moderate	Good	Good	Good
1.80-2.59	Low	Poor	Poor	Poor
1.00-1.79	Very Low	Very Poor	Very Poor	Very Poor

Standard Deviation Value Interpretation

<i>Range</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
$SD \leq 0.50$	<i>Highly Consistent Responses</i>	<i>strong and uniform perception</i>
$SD = 0.51 - 1.00$	<i>Moderately Consistent Responses</i>	<i>acceptable consistency</i>
$SD = 1.01 - 1.50$	<i>Low Consistency Responses</i>	<i>differing views or experiences</i>
$SD > 1.50$	<i>Very Low Consistency</i>	<i>high variability and lack of consensus</i>

Standard Interpretation of the Correlation Coefficient *r*

<i>Range of r-value</i>	<i>Strength of Correlation</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
$\pm 0.00 - \pm 0.19$	<i>Very Weak</i>	<i>Negligible or almost no relationship</i>
$\pm 0.20 - \pm 0.39$	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Low degree of relationship</i>
$\pm 0.40 - \pm 0.59$	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Substantial or fair relationship</i>
$\pm 0.60 - \pm 0.79$	<i>Strong</i>	<i>High degree of relationship</i>
$\pm 0.80 - \pm 1.00$	<i>Very Strong</i>	<i>Very high or near-perfect relationship</i>

Data Analysis Technique

The following statistical treatment were used: mean to describe the level of the variable, Pearson r to describe the significance of the correlation of the variables, and multiple linear regression to describe the significance of the degree of the influence of the determinants on the criterion.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study, secured approval from the research panel and the SMILE ethics committee, ensured informed consent from respondents who were not minors and therefore not vulnerable to deception, and protected confidentiality by excluding respondents' names from the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Presented in this segment are the descriptive, correlation, and multiple linear regression analysis, and interpretation of the data.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 is the descriptive table. It contains the variables of the study namely; religious beliefs indicated by belief in a high power, religious practices, morality and ethics, and interfaith understanding; gender norms indicated by traditional gender roles, equality and empowerment, stereotypes and bias, and challenging norms; attitude toward women's rights indicated by gender equality, equality among gender, and activism and advocacy. It also contains standard deviation, mean, and the corresponding descriptive level.

Specifically, table 1 shows that religious belief obtained a mean of 3.95 (SD=0.75), described as high. It is interpreted that the religious beliefs is perceived as very good. Three of its four indicators are described as high and only one is very high. The gender norm variable obtained a mean of 3.54, described as high. It indicates that gender norm is perceived as very good. Half of its indicators are described as very high and the others as moderate. Lastly, attitudes toward women's rights obtained a mean of 3.75, described as high, denoting it being perceived as very good.

Table 1. Descriptive Table

Variables	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Religious Beliefs	0.75	3.95	High
Belief in a High Power	0.85	4.05	High
Religious Practices	0.96	3.68	High
Morality and Ethics	0.89	3.81	High
Interfaith Understanding	0.72	4.25	Very High
Gender Norms	0.57	3.54	High
Traditional Gender Roles	1.06	3.01	Moderate
Equality and Empowerment	0.61	4.21	Very High
Stereotypes and Bias	1.11	2.65	Moderate
Challenging Norms	0.67	4.28	Very High
Attitudes Toward Women’s Rights	0.61	3.75	High
Gender Equality	0.68	4.21	Very High
Equality among gender	0.76	3.68	High
Activism and Advocacy	0.88	3.37	High

Religious beliefs, gender norms, and attitudes toward women’s rights were all interpreted as high or very good, with religious beliefs and attitudes toward women’s rights showing more consistently high indicators, while gender norms showed a more mixed pattern across its indicators.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2 is the correlation table. Presented here are religious beliefs and gender norms as predictors, and attitudes towards womens rights as criterion variable. Likewise, the r-value, p-value, decision on hypothesis and interpretation are presented. Finally, the correlational results between the religious beliefs and genders as predictors, and attitudes toward womens rights as criterion variable are also denoted.

Table 2. Correlation Table

Attitudes Toward Womens Rights				
Variables	r-value	p-value	Decision on Ho @ 0.05 level of significance	Interpretation
Religious Beliefs	0.58	0.00	Reject Ho	Moderate High, Significant
Gender Norms	0.57	0.00	Reject Ho	Moderate High, Significant

Specifically, the table shows that the relationship between religious beliefs and attitudes toward women rights yielded $p=0.00$ which is less 0.05 degree of confidence, indicating significant correlation. With an $r=0.58$, such correlation is substantial. Moreover, the relationship between gender norms and attitudes toward women rights yielded $p=0.00$ which is less than alpha, denoting significant correlation. With an $r=0.57$, the strength of such correlation is fair.

The results indicate that both religious beliefs and gender norms are significantly related to attitudes toward women’s rights.

Regression Analysis

Presented in Table 3 are the predictors and criterion variable. The standardized beta coefficients including the t value p-value, decision on hypothesis and the interpretations are also shown.

Table 3. Regression Table

Attitudes to Gender Rights of College Students						
Variables	β	Std. Error	t	p-value.	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Constant	0.80	0.22	3.58	0.00	Reject Ho	Significant
Religious Beliefs	0.21	0.06	3.75	0.00	Reject Ho	Significant
Gender Norms	0.60	0.07	8.35	0.00	Reject Ho	Significant

$$R^2 = 0.55 ; F\text{-value} = 89.32 ; p\text{-value} = 0.00$$

The regression coefficient for religious beliefs variable ($\beta = 0.21, p = 0.00$) signifies 21% influence on attitudes towards womens rights. With a p-value of less than alpha, the null hypothesis was rejected indicating a significant degree of influence. Such degree influence is significant however weak. Furthermore, gender norms ($\beta = 0.60, p = 0.00$) signifies 60% influence on attitudes towards women rights.

With a p-value of less than alpha, the null hypothesis was rejected indicating a very strong significant degree of influence.

The R^2 value of 0.55 ($F = 89.32$) with a p-value of 0.00, which is less than 0.05 degree of confidence, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis, signifies that religious beliefs and gender norms have 55% combined degree of influence on attitudes towards women's rights.

Summary of Findings

Based on the statistical results, it was found that:

1. Religious belief and Gender norms significantly correlate with attitudes toward women's rights, at moderate degree.
2. Religious belief significantly influences the attitudes toward women's rights, at weak strength.
3. Gender norms significantly influence the attitudes toward women's rights, at strong strength.
4. Religious beliefs and gender norms contribute combined significant influence on attitudes towards women's rights.

DISCUSSIONS

Presented in this chapter are the discussions of the findings, conclusion, and recommendations of this research.

Correlation of Religious Beliefs and Gender Norms with Attitudes Toward Women's Rights

The study showcased that religious beliefs and gender norms are significantly related to attitudes toward women's rights. The finding indicates that individuals with stronger religious commitment and more traditional gender norms are more likely to hold less supportive views toward women's rights. This highlights the important role of religion and socially constructed gender expectations in shaping beliefs about women's roles, equality, and entitlements in society. This contention supports recent empirical evidence showing that religiosity is associated with more traditional views on women's roles and rights (Kasmiarno and Susanto, 2024). In addition, research on gender norms among young people shows that deeply embedded cultural expectations about gender continue to influence beliefs about rights and equity (Eze et al., 2025) was also affirmed.

In contrary, the finding of this study contradicts research suggesting that religion and gender norms affect women's rights attitudes only in certain contexts (Ouahid et al., 2025); and the heterogeneity of religiosity and its varied relationship with gender equality attitudes (Dangubić, 2025).

Influence of Religious Beliefs and Gender Norms on Attitudes toward Women's Rights

The regression analysis confirmed that gender norms exerted a stronger influence on women's rights attitudes than religious beliefs. The results indicated that while religious beliefs significantly influence women's rights attitudes, their effect was weaker compared to gender norms. This finding supports the assertion that religious beliefs shaped general moral frameworks, while gender norms had a more direct and immediate impact on individuals' gender-related attitudes and behaviors (West & Zimmerman, 2022). Likewise, the study stating that gender norms remained the primary driver of these attitudes, consistent with research showing that exposure to egalitarian gender norms increased support for gender rights, even among religious individuals (Bussey & Bandura, 2020) was supported.

On the other hand, the finding of this study challenges the previous studies emphasizing that religiosity is a primary factor shaping traditional gender attitudes (McElroy et al., 2025), and patriarchal norms tied to religion as major barriers to women's empowerment (Ahn, 2025).

Conclusion

Based on findings, it was concluded that religious beliefs and gender norms together significantly contribute 55% combined degree of influence on attitudes towards women's rights. Hence, the Gender Schema Theory was partially affirmed stating how individuals process through gender schemas that guide processing information related to gender and shape the concept of gender; that schemas are influenced among others by intersectionality and historical influence.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, future research is recommended utilizing other variables not covered in this study such as related contextual fluidity in order to account the remaining 45% variance in attitudes towards women's rights. Qualitative study may be undertaken to generate themes and sub-themes that are potential as variables and indicators for future research propose. Further, educational institutions may initiate program relevant to improving religious beliefs and gender norms towards the attainment of greater attitude towards women's rights.

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