



## THE IMPACT OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GENDER ROLES IN CHILDREN BETWEEN 3 AND 7 YEARS AGE

**Kristina Qypi**

Social Services Master 2nd Year,  
Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Social Sciences,  
“Aleksander Xhuvani” University, Elbasan, Albania

### **Abstract:**

The family is the foundation of society. Without it, there would be no development, prosperity and continuity of life. The influence of family affects our life including the development of gender roles in children aged 3-7 years. Family Education is the basis of any subsequent education, because personality and personal identity is formed there. Family also plays an important role in the socialization of gender roles in the ways they organize the environment for the child. This study aims to address the impact of the nuclear family, on the formation of the concept of gender roles as well as gender discrimination for boys and girls aged 3-7 years. We have used the qualitative method, through which we aim to highlight how do parents with their behavior influence the formation of gender roles, by including each other in activities of daily life and engagement in the division of housework. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of the nuclear family in the formation of gender identity in children aged 3-7 years old in Albanian society. The study was conducted in the city of Elbasan. The findings of this study were identified from the viewpoint of couples who have children of both sexes. From data analysis, we have concluded that the nuclear family has great influence on the formation of gender roles of boys and girls aged 3-7 years. Men were seen as more focused and directed in the public area, while women in the private sphere. The impacts in the formation of gender roles were seen from the difference in colors, toys and children activities - activities for boys and activities for girls.

**Keywords:** nuclear family, gender role, gender discrimination

## 1. Introduction

Family is the first place of humanism; it is the most divine institution and represents the most important nucleus of society. Families provide initial socialization for children that shape their self-worth, attitudes, values and behaviors. The family is the most basic structure of human ecology, it is the place of real education, the community of mankind, the first human society, a society which is built on the foundation of a family. The family is the micro part of human society where all macro systems of society at every level: the level of morality, culture and ethics, in the management level of income, policy-making and decision-making, the level of social justice, equality and peacemaking, are developed in their full stage (Akil Pano, May 27, 2014, <http://www.panorama.com.al/sfida-e-integrimite-familjes-shqiptare/>). The family is the child's early microsystem for learning how to live. The Modern Family was built after a broad foundation of economic and political support, which is supported today by a public infrastructure that includes funding for roads, schools, home buying and legal arrangements of marriage and divorce. The place of work and family nowadays are interrelated; "Family wage/income" organizes the family and its economy, expressing so an idealized view of what family is and how it should be. Although paternal authority was still the essence of "an arranged family" a new morality of "affective individualism" led to an ideal relationship warmer and more intimate between husband and wife and between parents and children. Our study observed the events of everyday life and personal experiences. Families consistently play an important role in the socialization of gender roles in ways they organize the environment for the child. The strongest influence on the development of gender roles seems to occur within the family, with parents who transmit, overtly and covertly their beliefs and attitudes about gender.

Gender's revolution provides an opportunity for each parent, to teach to his children that spectrum of masculinity and femininity is not only outside the family but also within each of us. At least, teaching our children about gender extension will help them embrace all their parts; will prevent depressive isolation leading to higher rates of suicide among transgender youth. For this study, we have used the qualitative method, as one of the most effective methods to analyze and measure the perceptions of stakeholders, in this case parents, in shaping gender roles in children 3-7 years old. The criteria of sample selection make it possible to achieve in finding. However, the interviewed people present themselves, and consequently the growth mode has affected in the formation of their attitudes. So couples reflect on their livelihood the model with which they are grown and formed, and what do they expect to realize with

their children. They continued again with the concepts of typical characteristics of a male or female, division of responsibilities or duties, attributing this to the external factors and not to the reluctance to change. What study aimed to reach was to study the appearance of the current perceptions of family nucleus for the formation of gender roles, but above all to make recommendations so that family environment would be diversified to enable facilitation in shaping gender roles in children.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Getting to be a boy or a girl, is not always associated with characteristics that we expect and this fact has been understood and accepted by the Albanian society. They also realize that the environment in which children grow up, affects the formation of the concept of being a boy or girl. Sex refers to the biological status of being male and female, gender refers to the meaning that societies and individuals give being male or female, gender role refers to social expectations for appropriate behavior of female and male, Gender identity refers to how a person perceives psychologically themselves as male or female. At the age of 3, the children know if they are male or female. Gender role development begins at birth. Children are exposed to many factors that influence their attitudes and behavior concerning gender roles. These attitudes and behaviors are learnt in family and later reinforced by the child's peers, schools and media. The strongest influence on the development of gender roles occurs within the family, with parents who transmit, overtly and covertly, their beliefs about gender. However, the lack of accurate information to parents about the differences between sex, gender and gender roles affect the way they approach the child, approach in the perception, expectation, attitude and behavior. Some studies conducted in different countries of the world show that the findings illustrate the multidimensionality of gender. Studies have concluded that in the exploration of basic family patterns, the results were consistent with previous studies indicating that the education of parents and their income affect their attitudes towards children. The more time parents spend with their children, the more they help kids about gender role development. (Basow, 1980). According this study, it is very important the increase of the residence time of a father with children, whether boy or girl. So, the influence of the father in the development of gender roles is greater than the mother, more if he regularly is involved in helping with the housework. The time that parents spend with children, the relationship between them and the incomes influence on the formation of gender roles in children. Sharing family responsibilities and the involvement of the father in the house chores, create the necessary and indispensable diversity for the formation of gender roles in children. So,

they will be able and free to establish themselves the social and psychological meaning to their sex, so being male or female.

(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3270818>).

Albanian society lack such studies that focus on sensitive issues within the family, as the formation of gender roles. The society knows very well the concept of sex, male or female, bypassing the discrepancy of sex and what the person really feels. The focus of the study is couples who live alone with their children and have a minimum of a boy and a girl, so that their personal perceptions are comparable.

### 3. Theories of gender development

To understand the development of gender roles is important to know the difference between certain concepts. Thus, sex refers to the biological status of being male and female, gender refers to the meaning that societies and individuals give being male or female, gender role refers to social expectations for appropriate behavior of female and male, while gender identity refers to how a person perceives himself psychologically, as male or female.

#### 3.1 Freud's psychoanalytic theory

According to Freud, the development of gender roles occurs during the phallic stage where children identify themselves with their parent of the same sex. (David Reed Shaffer, Teena Willoughby, Eileen Wood, 2002). Oedipus complex occurs in boys aged 3-6 years. Girls suffer from the Electra complex. The girl desires the father, but realizes that she does not have a penis. This leads to the development of **penis envy** and the wish to be a boy. The girl blames her mother for her 'castrated state' and this creates great tension. The girl then **represses** her feelings (to remove the tension) and identifies with the mother to take on the female gender role. (Kaplan, 2000).

#### 3.2 Social Learning Theory

In the Social Learning theory Albert Bandura (1977) stresses that Behavior is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning. Albert Bandura notes that the development of gender roles is obtained in two ways. First, when a particular behavior is rewarded regularly, that behavior will most likely persist and if a particular behavior is constantly punished, it will most likely desist. Second, children observe and imitate the attitudes and behaviors of the same sex. Bandura (1977) He believes that people are active processors of information and think about the relationship through their behavior and its consequences.

### **3.3 Biosocial Theory**

There is no real biological approach regarding the development of gender roles, but there are three factors that are important:

- Males release testosterone hormone and women estrogen.
- Women have a central nervous system and advanced bone formation
- The male Y chromosome contains fewer genes than chromosome X.

These factors influence the development of children's gender (Kaplan, 2000) Behavioral theorists claim that the differences between men and women are due to learnt behaviors. At birth, girls and boys are treated differently. For example, different colors are associated with different genders. Interestingly, there has been a reversal since blue was seen as fragile and dainty and consequently is connected with girls and pink color is seen as a stronger and more masculine.

Boys generally are encouraged to participate in motor activities and are given more freedom. Girls receive more affection and assistance when is required. Child development is guided by observing the patterns and imitating them. (Kaplan, 2000). Social scientists use advertising to study gender stereotyping in the media and, unfortunately, female roles are narrowly defined. (Martyn D. Barrett, Eithne Buchanan-Barrow, 2005) Biological and social theories seem incomplete so it is helpful to see a combination of both. The Biosocial theory is more accurate in describing the development of gender role identity.

### **3.4 Lawrence Kohlberg's Cognitive Development Theory**

Children use cognitive processes to choose appropriate gender-related behaviors. Cognitive theory argues that gender behavior is learnt by viewing others' behavior through social learning process. Lawrence Kohlberg (1966) gives a theory of gender development phase. His theory proposes that children's understanding of gender passes through several phases. When the child moves through the stages his understanding about gender becomes more complex. The first stage is gender identification, which is usually reached at age of 4. At this stage, the child is able to name his exact sex. The second stage is the gender stability, which is usually reached at age of 4. At this stage, the child understands that gender remains the same all the time. However, his understanding is greatly influenced by external features as hair and clothing. A guy at this stage can understand that if he wore a dress would be a girl. The third stage is the Gender consistency. The child begins to understand that gender is independent of the exterior features. This stage is usually reached at the age of 7.

### **3.5 Gender Schema Theory**

Carol Martin and Charise Halverson regard children as highly motivated to take interests, values and behaviors that are inconsistent with their self-image as a boy or girl. This information is included in a gender scheme. Schemes may contain objects, behavior and gender specific roles. Kids also build their sex scheme that contains information that helps perform behaviors in accordance with gender. At age of 7 children develop knowledge and strong preference of stereotype. (Shaffer, 2009). According to this theory, once the children form a core gender identity they begin to develop gender schemes. Gender schema theory states that children adjust their behavior based on the norms of their particular culture.

## **4. Methodology**

The study aims to explore the impact of the nuclear family in the formation of gender identity in children 3-7 years old in Albanian society. The study is done in Elbasan.

### **4.1 Objectives of Study**

1. To identify and analyze the perceptions of couples regarding their understanding of the concepts of sex, gender, gender role and gender discrimination.
2. To explore the perceptions of respondents about the typical characteristics of a male or female
3. To analyze the expectations of parents about the features of boy (son) / girl (daughter) and their involvement in family responsibilities.

### **4.2 Research Questions**

1. How does the way of conceiving sex, gender, gender role and gender discrimination of couples affect their behavior towards children?
2. How does the perception and attitude of parents regarding typical features of a certain gender affect in shaping gender roles in their children?
3. How do parent's expectations affect regarding the characteristics that must have their son / daughter and their engagement in housework?

### **4.3 Method Used**

According Cresell: "*Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a general perspective, the possibility of using the theory and study of research problems, asking how individuals or groups react to a human or social phenomenon*" (Cresëell, 2012).

Qualitative research can be described as an effective model that occurs in its natural environment and allows researchers to get too involved in the actual experience. (Crescèll, 1994). The aim of qualitative research is to provide all of the experiences and stories of the participants involved in the study. (Richard M. Grinnell, 2011). The final report includes participants' voice, the opinion of the researcher and a complex script and interpretation of the problem. For our study, it was important to study the phenomenon in its natural environment that is the family, the environment in which children are grown and formed. The Qualitative research can be described as an effective model that occurs in its natural environment and allows researchers to get too involved in the actual experience. (Crescèll, 1994). The aim of qualitative research is to provide shading of all the experiences and stories of the participants involved in the study. (Richard M. Grinnell, 2011). Literature's review, analysis of secondary data and qualitative methods of collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data were part of the study. We chose this method because it was the most appropriate method in relation to the purpose, objectives and research questions of the study.

A good structure of qualitative research, in which parts are interrelated with each other harmoniously, promotes efficiency and a good operation, while a lame structure leads to a wrong operation or failure. (Malterud, 2001).

According to Vincent A. Anfara, 2014, a theoretical framework has the ability to focus qualitative researchers while they are overwhelmed by the large number of data. As for Schram (Schram, 2003) without the conceptual framework would not be possible to obtain reasonable decisions in the search process.

Thus, the phase of the literature's review helped in the creation of a database of existing reports and studies on this issue. Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of data words and images to enter inside a special phenomenon for which we are interested. (Linda Dale Bloomberg, 2005). Access to the sample collection is closely related to the model and methods of research. (Ross, 2011). The sample is the part of the population that is used to represent the whole.

The Qualitative study sample is smaller than that of the quantitative study. (Ross, 2011). In this case, there were taken in the study 14 pairs or in other words, 28 people, of whom 14 are women and 14 are men. The main purpose of qualitative research is not the collection of information (except to the case-study forms), but to assess the particular and specifics of this information. The purpose of the study is to identify mechanisms that affect family formation and gender roles in children 3-7 years old. The study involved two main actors that influence the formation of gender roles, mother and father. For each sample of study are specified the sample selection criteria in order to receive and summarize all the information necessary and essential to the

purpose of the study. They are set more specific criteria related to the issue of study, but claiming the minimum criteria of eligibility limits:

1. Age, all participants in the study should be 25-40 years old;
2. They should be partners, parents and should have children of both genders;
3. Only nuclear families have been part of this study, only parents and children living in the same house;
4. Parents should have children from 3 to 7 years old.

The data in this study were collected using as an instrument semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents who have children of different sexes aged 3-7 years old, to explore their perceptions about analyzing the factors and situations that lead to the formation of gender roles in children. There are used in-depth semi-structured interviews, because they combine elements as structured interview, as well as the unstructured interview. Interviews have been a mainstay of the qualitative research for decades, and are essentially "conversations with a purpose" (Grieshaber, 2004) even though the form and the structure might change. In this study, we have combined the collection of secondary data from literature with the collected data from individual interviews with parents. This process includes accurate data from different sources to shed light on an issue or perspective. Authors (Margaret Anzul, Margot Ely, Teri Freidman, Diane Garner, Ann McCormack-Steinmetz, 2003) emphasize the importance of the combined use of data.

## 5. Conclusions

The nuclear family includes spouse couple, who live together with their children. They share with each other family responsibilities, childcare and all obligations arising from mutual coexistence.

Gender role refers to social expectations for appropriate behavior of male and female. At the age of three, children can identify their gender. The early exposure of the child with what it means to be male or female comes from parents. Children adopt their parents' messages about sex at a young age.

At the age of three, children can identify their gender. Gender role development begins at birth. Children are exposed to many factors that influence their attitudes and behavior concerning gender roles. These attitudes and behaviors are typically learnt at home and later reinforced by the child's peers, school and media. The strongest influence on the development of gender roles seems to occur within the family, with parents who transmit, overtly and covertly, their beliefs about gender.



There was a wrong forming on the concept of sex and the concept of gender. Almost the whole study sample taken confuses the gender concept with sex, therefore biologically male or female, bypassing environmental impact in the understanding of sex. Only one couple gives the right answer about the concept of gender. This means that usually the Albanian society gives more importance to genetic, to the inherited physiognomy, bypassing the psychological and social meanings attributed of being biologically male or female. Perhaps in this aspect influences also the culture that Albanians have, to quite emotional and spiritual sphere, hide their feelings, taboo for a particular set of feminine behaviors or attitudes for males or masculine ones for females.

The subjects included in the study were 28 people in total, 14 pairs of parents therefore, of which will 14 women and 14 men. All interviewees had a very clear conception about gender roles. This related to the fact that they always start explaining the word itself. Almost all of the interviewees possessed full information in relation to gender discrimination. All interviewed women were inclusive of children of both genders with the house chores, like placing the toys in the right place, taking care of personal hygiene, tidy the room etc. while men agree to involve the children to home environment, but were more tolerant if children refuse to do that. As a result of the conducted interviews we may say that many that parents influence the progress of gender roles. They exhibit and model behaviors and different attitudes for girls and boys.

Since birth, the child's treatment is affected in a considerable degree from their gender. Newborns are immediately exposed with traditional differences of the culture which they belong to, while parents and other adults interact with male and female infants in stereotypical ways.

## **6. Recommendations**

Family is the main core of life, the continuity of the society and multidimensional human development. Mechanisms that family owns and uses are part of a process which is not static and final, but an ongoing process that faces new challenges required to overcome.

For a successful implementation of these objectives, should be achieved cooperation between parents, children and any Albanian institution, public or private institutions which has in focus the work with children, non-profit organizations and all media.

The participation of parents in educational outreach programs as:

- understanding gender roles, gender discrimination and sexual typing, would help them to create a stimulating and conducive environment without gender differences. Involving children in different activities.
- including them in environments that promote collaboration, interaction and children's play without gender difference.
- exchange the roles of different games so that children explore themselves, and others and form freely their gender role.
- sharing positive experiences at school and kindergarten in order to create a diverse environment for children.
- social workers / psychologists who are involved in the structure of school / kindergarten will have to adopt programs and activities in order to increase tolerance and collaboration and empowerment policies of understanding the gender role in children aged 3-7 years old, but not only.
- denouncing the practices of violations of children's rights, in moments when they face gender discrimination.

## References

1. Akil Pano, May 27 2014, <http://www.panorama.com.al/sfida-e-integrimit-te-familjes-shqiptare>
2. Basow, S. A. (1980). Sex-Role Stereotypes: Traditions and Alternatives. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company
3. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3270818>
4. David Reed Shaffer, Teena Willoughby, Eileen Wood. (2002). Developmental Psychology: Childhood and Adolescence. USA.
5. Kaplan. (2000). Kaplan Gre Exam 2000 2001. New York: Simon and Schuster.
6. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies. California: Stanford University.
7. M, T. J. (1974). Variability of growth and maturity in newborn infants. New York.
8. Martyn D. Barrett, Eithne Buchanan-Barrow. (2005). Children's Understanding of Society. UK: Psychology Press.
9. Shaffer, D. R. (2009). Social and Personality Development. University of Georgia: Wadsworth.
10. Creswell. (2012). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. Lincoln: Sage Publication.

11. Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
12. Richard M. Grinnell, Y. A. (2011). *Social Work Research and Evaluation: Foundations of Evidence-Based Practice*. England: Oxford University Press.
13. Malterud, R. (2001). *Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines*. Manchester: J and M.
14. Vincent A. Anfara, J. N. (2014). *Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research*. Sage Publication.
15. Schram, T. H. (2003). *Conceptualizing Qualitative Inquiry: Mindwork for Fieldwork in Education and the Social Sciences*. Virginia: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
16. Linda Dale Bloomberg, M. V. (2005). *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End*. Sage Publications.
17. Ross, M. a. (2011). *The Health Study Companion*. British Library.
18. Elaine Chan, D. K. (2012). *Narrative Inquirers in the Midst of Meaning-making: Interpretive Acts Teacher Educators*. United Kingdom: Howard House.
19. Grieshaber, S. (2004). *Rethinking Parent and Child Conflict*. New York: Routledge Falmer.
20. Margaret Anzul, Margot Ely, Teri Freidman, Diane Garner, Ann McCormack-Steinmetz. (2003). *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles Within Circles*. Sage Publications.

Kristina Qypi  
THE IMPACT OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GENDER ROLES IN  
CHILDREN BETWEEN 3 AND 7 YEARS AGE

---

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Social Sciences Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).