

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN'S GENDER ROLES: THE EFFECTS OF SOCIO- DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Silvia Rogošić

University of Zagreb, Croatia
E-mail: silvia.rogosic@ufzg.hr

Ana Maskalan

Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia
E-mail: ana@idi.hr

Tomislav Krznar

University of Zagreb, Croatia
E-mail: tomislav.krznar@ufzg.hr

Abstract

In line with the theory of planned behaviour, different factors influencing the formation of attitudes and beliefs indirectly affect the intentions that determine an individual's behaviour. Hence, it is important to examine the factors affecting the attitudes of preschool teachers towards children's gender roles considering that their own understanding of gender roles influences their behaviour towards children in kindergarten (which can be in agreement with the egalitarian or stereotypical attitudes of preschool teachers). Therefore, a quantitative research was conducted in Zagreb (Croatia) on a sample of 481 preschool teachers. The research was aimed at determining the effects of socio-demographic characteristics, religious (non) affiliation and personal experiences of gender discrimination during childhood on the attitudes of preschool teachers towards children's gender roles and on the frequency of noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls in kindergarten by other preschool teachers. The findings revealed that preschool teachers who have identified themselves as non-religious or religiously non-affiliated who were brought up in larger cities, with a personal experience of gender discrimination in childhood, more frequently notice unequal treatment of boys and girls in kindergarten (by other preschool teachers). Among the mentioned variables, the strongest effect on noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls in kindergarten has the variable experience of gender discrimination during childhood which confirms greater awareness of gender discrimination among persons who experienced such discrimination.

Keywords: children's gender roles, gender equality, preschool education, preschool teachers' attitudes.

Introduction

From a very early age, children start developing attitudes and values and learn (un) acceptable behaviour in a particular social context. Accordingly, in addition to their parents, preschool teachers and school teachers represent the key stakeholders in children's acquisition

of gender roles. Therefore, it is important to examine the ways (conscious or unconscious) in which the preschool teachers teach children about gender roles and the contributing factors.

The existing research has confirmed that stereotypes function according to the principle of self-fulfilling prophecy (e.g. Hamilton et al., 1990). Expectations pertaining to a particular gender stereotype (e.g. *it is more appropriate for the girls to be quieter than the boys*) create a chain of events which, eventually, result in the endorsement of such a stereotype. Many ways in which children acquire gender stereotypes have not been identified yet. The transfer of stereotypes is most frequently influenced by parents and preschool or school teachers (Schoon & Eccles, 2014). They exert influence through social modelling, through expression of their gender-related beliefs or through direct practice of socialization (Wolter et al., 2015). Furthermore, significant others influence children's assumptions of gender roles by expressing their own gender expectations (Wolter et al., 2015). For instance, the preschool teachers who believe that it is acceptable for the girls to express sadness, but not for the boys, can be more prone to comforting a crying girl than a crying boy. Therefore, attitudes of preschool teachers affect their actions, which represent mechanisms of transfer of gender-stereotypical attitudes onto younger generations through social learning, i.e. modelling. According to the theory of social learning, a child's attention is directed towards the behaviour of the model and imitation, and the most frequent role models are the persons from the child's immediate environment or frequently encountered persons (Bandura, 1989).

The endorsement of rigid gender stereotypes can potentially threaten the development of both the girls and the boys and indirectly limit their numerous life choices, such as career paths (Our Watch, 2018). What is more, exposure to stereotyping during childhood can negatively affect the ability to process emotions in a healthy way (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011) and the (in)ability to become involved in equal partner (male-female) relationships in adulthood (Witt, 1997). Similarly, the support of gender stereotypes implies the support of the historical system of gender inequality, which created numerous problems for the members of both genders, but women still remain disadvantaged compared to men (Our Watch, 2018). These are only some of the reasons why so many researchers examine the children's acquisition of gender roles in early age.

In that respect, Chick et al (2002) found that preschool teachers who were more inclined to the traditional understanding of male and female roles frequently praised the girls for their clothing choices and neatness, while they praised the boys for their strength and academic achievement. Thus, the children acquired acceptable behavioural patterns for females and males and consequently behaved according to the gender stereotype roles. The analysis of a large corpus (e.g. Chick et al., 2002; Erden & Wolfgang, 2004; McNair et al., 2001) was conducted to examine the correlation between gender-role acquisition among children and the attitudes and behaviour of preschool teachers. However, there is less research on the correlation of preschool teachers' socio-demographic characteristics and their attitudes towards gender roles which considerably affect their behaviour towards children. Research papers focusing on teachers' socio-demographic characteristics affecting their understanding of gender roles mostly emphasized the characteristics such as age, sex, level of education or growing up in urban or rural areas. The findings showed that younger respondents have more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles than older respondents (LaFont, 2010) and that respondents from rural areas have more stereotypical attitudes towards gender roles as compared to those from urban areas (Fazeli et al., 2015). The research conducted in Croatia by Galic (2012) also showed that respondents older than 46 were more inclined towards patriarchalism, whereas younger respondents were more prone to gender egalitarianism. Research confirmed that religious (non) affiliation represents an important factor in the formation of attitudes towards gender roles (Brinkerhoff, 1984; Brinkerhoff & MacKie, 1985; Odimegwu, 2005; Thronton & Camburn, 1989).

According to Japaridze et al (2013), the extent to which religion influences an individual's attitudes towards gender roles depends on the specific doctrine of the church and the degree of engagement and devotion of an individual to the religious institution. In Croatia, the hypotheses on the correlation between traditional catholic religious world view and patriarchalism and androcentrism have been confirmed (Galic & Nikodem, 2006), while some international research (e.g. Fazeli et al., 2015) showed that religious (non)affiliation does not have an influence on the formation of attitudes towards gender roles. In addition, it was established that men are more prone to gender stereotyping than women (e.g. Berkel, 2004; Tang & Dion, 1999) and that employed men and women with a higher level of education have more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles (Mason et al., 1976; Wilkie, 1993).

There is insufficient research concerning the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the understanding of gender roles by preschool teachers in Croatia. One such research was carried out by Topic (2018) on a sample of 177 preschool teachers in Rijeka. Topic (2018) found that *preschool teachers who claimed a higher level of gender conservatism showed more gender stereotypes towards the children's behaviour and less awareness of the importance of gender equality in early and preschool education*. What is more, Topic (2018) emphasized that *preschool teachers of an older age showed more gender-conservative attitudes in general, more gender-conservative attitudes related to the children's behaviour and less awareness of the importance of gender equality in early and preschool education*. In addition, the results of the mentioned research showed that *preschool teachers who completed additional training for the implementation of a religious programme tend to show more gender-conservative attitudes, more stereotypical attitudes and perception of child behaviour and less awareness of the importance of gender equality in early and preschool education*. In addition to socio-economic characteristics, numerous authors noted that personal experience of gender discrimination also influenced the formation of attitudes towards gender roles. In that respect, Kamenov, Huic and Jugovic (2010) concluded that the negative experience of gender discrimination in childhood increases the level of awareness of gender inequality. The mentioned findings confirmed that individuals who had been discriminated on account of gender exhibit more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles, which confirms that experience can also have a protective function and develop positive cognitive models (Kamenov et al, 2010).

This research is aimed at examining the correlation between socio-economic characteristics of preschool teachers (age, years of work experience, hometown, religious (non)affiliation) and their personal experience of gender discrimination regarding 1) their own (more or less traditional, i.e. egalitarian) attitudes towards children's gender roles and 2) their acknowledgment of unequal treatment by other preschool teachers towards boys and girls in kindergarten. The theory of planned behaviour derives from the assumption that different factors influencing the formation of attitudes and beliefs also influence the intentions determining an individual's behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 1991). Therefore, if the elements that determine the intentions of individuals can be recognised we can more easily predict their behaviour. In the context of this research, we have examined the respondents' characteristics which are (in)significantly correlated with their attitudes towards gender roles. The correlation of their understanding of male or female roles with their teaching practice in kindergarten (i.e. the extent to which preschool teachers adhere to their beliefs in their behaviour towards children) has not been empirically tested but only assumed, according to the theory of planned behaviour. In addition, we considered the frequency of noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls by other preschool teachers, which indicates their awareness of the manners of transfer of gender stereotypes onto children as one of the elements that determine their behaviour. Although educational level, gender, and work status (employed/unemployed) are emphasized in the relevant literature as the factors contributing to the formation of attitudes towards gender roles, they were exempt from this research because the sample consisted mostly of women with

a similar level of education employed in kindergartens. Hence, the differences in subsamples could not be tested with respect to the mentioned variables.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Three research questions were formulated: 1) are there significant differences in the attitudes towards children's gender roles among preschool teachers with respect to their age, years of work experience, hometown (rural area or city), religious (non)affiliation and personal experiences of gender discrimination during childhood?, 2) are there significant differences between the preschool teachers who notice and those who do not notice unequal treatment towards boys and girls in kindergarten with respect to their age, years of work experience, hometown, religious (non)affiliation and similar personal experience?, 3) which of the mentioned variables (age, years of work experience, hometown, religious (non)affiliation, personal experience of gender discrimination, attitudes towards children's gender roles), has the strongest effect on noticing unequal treatment towards boys and girls by other preschool teachers?

Hypothesis 1: younger respondents with less work experience, who were brought up in cities and are non-religious or non-affiliated, with personal experiences of gender discrimination during their childhood have more egalitarian attitudes towards the gender roles of children in kindergarten.

Hypothesis 2: younger respondents with less work experience, who were brought up in cities, and are non-religious or non-affiliated, with personal experiences of gender discrimination during their childhood more frequently notice unequal treatment of boys and girls by other preschool teachers in kindergarten.

Hypothesis 3: personal experience of gender discrimination during childhood has the strongest effect on noticing unequal treatment towards boys and girls by other preschool teachers.

Research Methodology

General Characteristics

A quantitative research design (i.e. survey research) was employed to tackle the research questions, and the research was conducted in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, in 2018.

Sample

The research included 481 respondents, namely preschool teachers from Zagreb, which constitutes 12% of the entire population of preschool teachers in the City of Zagreb according to the official data from the Zagreb City Administration from 2018. The minimum sample size has been determined statistically using Yamane (1967) model of estimating a sample size of a finite population (confidence level of 95%, and margin of error 5%). The research was conducted in kindergartens in each of the 16 city districts of Zagreb. A total of 16 kindergartens were included in the survey. This sample approximately replicates a larger group (population of preschool teachers in Zagreb) according to their gender and years of service. Research comprised 100% women between 24 and 65 years of age, which is an average of 43 years. Respondents have an average of 18.5 years of service, ranging from 1 to 43 years.

Procedures and Data Collection

The research was approved by the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb (University of Zagreb). The respondents were asked to voluntarily participate in the scientific research and they were granted the possibility to withdraw at any moment. They were also informed that the survey and their data were to remain anonymous. In agreement with the respondents, a 20-minute survey was conducted.

Operationalization of Variables and Instruments

In order to measure preschool teachers' attitudes towards children's gender roles in kindergarten, a questionnaire comprising six statements was used. The statements were taken from the study conducted by Massey and Christensen (1990). The answers were provided on a 5-point Likert scale (*Entirely disagree with the statement; Mostly disagree with the statement; Neither agree nor disagree; Mostly agree with the statement; Entirely agree with the statement*). The following is an example of the statement: *Girls should be quieter and calmer than boys*. The factor structure of the questionnaire *Attitudes towards children's gender roles* was tested by the method of principal components. The factor analysis (KMO=.795; Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2_{df15}=406.839$; $p<.001$) showed that one factor according to the Kaiser-Guttman's criterion has eigenvalues greater than 1, hence a one-factor solution was selected. In total, 41.5% of the total variance was explained. Cronbach α was .7, implying that the scale had an acceptable reliability (according to Pallant, 1991). The overall result on the scale was obtained by adding the estimates for all statements. The higher result on the scale indicated greater tendency for gender stereotyping.

Personal experience of gender discrimination during childhood was examined by the four-statement scale taken over from Baranovic and Jugovic (2011). The following is an example of the statement: *Because of my gender, I've been unfairly assessed during my education*. The answers were provided on a 4-point Likert scale (*Never; Yes, once; Yes, several times; Yes, frequently*). The factor structure of the *Questionnaire of personal experience of gender discrimination (in childhood, primary and secondary school)* was tested by the method of principal components. The factor analysis (KMO=.734; Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2_{df6}=333,715$; $p<.001$) showed that one factor, according to the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, has eigenvalues greater than 1, hence a one-factor solution was selected. Overall, 53.7% of the total variance was explained. Cronbach α was .7, which implied that the scale has an acceptable reliability (according to Pallant, 1991). The overall result of the scale was obtained by adding the estimates for the statements where the higher result signifies that the respondents were discriminated more frequently based on gender.

The respondents entered their years of work experience and their year of birth into the questionnaire. In order to conduct the statistical analyses (ANOVA test), the years of work experience were organized into five categories: *up to 10 years; from 11 to 20, from 21 to 30, from 31 to 40 and more than 40 years of work experience*.

For the same reason, the birth year was grouped into 3 categories: *from 1950 to 1965, from 1966 to 1981; from 1981 and younger*.

In addition, the respondents were asked to declare themselves as *Catholic; religious persons but of a different denomination; non-affiliated; agnostic or atheist*. In the further statistical analyses, due to a relatively small number of respondents (20%) who have not declared themselves as Catholics, the religious affiliation was changed into a binary variable (1 religious / 2 non-religious or religiously non-affiliated).

Furthermore, the preschool teachers were asked to state where they had lived until their 18th birthday. The possible answers were: *In the country; Small town (up to 10 000 inhabitants);*

Small city (from 10 000 to 50 000 inhabitants); City (50 000 to 100 000 inhabitants); Large city (100 000 to 500 000 inhabitants).

The frequency of noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls was also tested by the statement *While working in kindergarten, I noticed unequal treatment of children based on gender*. The possible answers were: *Never; Yes, once; Yes, several times; Yes, frequently*. In order to conduct the statistical analyses (Chi-square test), this variable was changed into a binary variable (1 *While working in kindergarten, I have not noticed unequal treatment of children based on gender* / 2 *While working in kindergarten, I have noticed unequal treatment of children based on gender*).

Data Analysis

For testing the first and the second hypothesis (i.e. for calculating the mentioned differences between subsamples), the Chi-square test, Welch t-test and ANOVA test were applied depending on the tested variable. The Chi-square test was applied for two binary categorical variables, while the Welch t-test was applied in the cases with one-binary categorical and the second continuous (ordinal) variable. In the cases with two continuous (ordinal) variables, the one-way Welch ANOVA (according to Pallant, 2011) was applied. Furthermore, the linear hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the extent to which age, years of work experience, hometown and religious (non)affiliation, personal experience of gender discrimination during childhood and attitudes towards children's gender roles effect the frequency of noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls by other preschool teachers. The computer program SPSS 21 was used for the statistical data analyses (i.e. For testing third hypothesis).

Research Results

Table 1 shows the results of the Welch ANOVA test, which was used to measure the differences among the preschool teachers in their attitudes towards children's gender roles with respect to their age, years of work experience, hometown, religious (non)affiliation and similar personal experience. The Welch ANOVA test was applied as the subsamples differed in size, making this test more reliable than the usual ANOVA test. The overall higher result on the scale of *Attitudes towards children's gender roles* implied a greater tendency for gender stereotypes, i.e. the traditional understanding of gender roles.

Table 1
Differences between preschool teachers' attitudes towards children's gender roles (Welch ANOVA test)

Variables	Sub-samples	Results for the scale Attitudes towards children's gender roles		Welch ANOVA			
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df^b</i>	<i>df^w</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Year of birth	1950 to 1965	1.56	.60	2	276.58	1.55	.19
	1966 to 1981	1.53	.58				
	1981 and younger	1.60	.64				
Years of work experience	Up to 10	1.60	.53	4	88.08	1.39	.27
	From 11 to 20 yrs.	1.47	.49				
	From 21 to 30 yrs.	1.54	.57				
	From 31 to 40 yrs.	1.48	.47				
	More than 40 yrs.	1.46	.43				
Hometown	Country	1.66	.53	4	107.98	1.98	.13
	Small town (up to 10 000 inhabitants)	1.67	.59				
	Town (from 10 000 up to 50 000 inhabitants)	1.50	.44				
	City (from 50 000 up to 100 000 inhabitants)	1.58	.52				
	Big city (from 100 000 up to 500 000 inhabitants)	1.50	.49				
Religious (non) affiliation	Religious	1.58	.51	1	101.52	9.96	<.001
	Non-religious/Non-affiliated	1.36	.40				
Personal experience of gender discrimination	No (I don't have a personal experience)	1.55	.50	1	43.48	.68	.43
	Yes (I have such a personal experience)	1.48	.53				

df^b=degrees of freedom between groups; *df^w*= degrees of freedom within groups

Table 2 shows the results of the Chi-square test, which examined the differences between the preschool teachers in noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls with respect to their religious (non)affiliation and personal experience of gender discrimination in childhood. The sample was divided into two groups of respondents: those who have noticed unequal treatment of boys and girls (one or more times) and those who have never noticed unequal treatment of boys and girls in kindergarten.

Table 2
Differences between preschool teachers in noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls (Chi-square test)

	Variables		Chi-square test		
	While working in kindergarten, I have not noticed unequal treatment of children based on gender	While working in kindergarten, I have noticed unequal treatment of children based on gender	Yates' correction	df	p
<i>Frequencies</i>					
Religious	344	48	11.77	1	.001
Non-religious/non-affiliated	49	20			
I have not had experience of gender unequal treatment	369	49			
I have had a personal experience of gender unequal treatment	21	19	34.18	1	<.001

Table 3 shows the results of the Welch t-test, which examined the differences between preschool teachers who have noticed (one or more times) and those who have never noticed unequal treatment of boys and girls in kindergarten (by other preschool teachers) with respect to their age, years of work experience and hometown.

Table 3
Differences between preschool teachers in noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls (Welch t-test)

Variables	Sub-samples	Welch t-test					
		M	SD	df ^b	df ^w	F	p
Year of birth	No	2.14	.82	1	98.32	.99	.31
	Yes	2.25	.80				
Years of work experience	No	23.23	12.57	1	94.73	.86	.36
	Yes	21.71	12.85				
Hometown	No	3.85	1.50	1	107.65	4.94	.01
	yes	4.27	1.19				

df^b=degrees of freedom between groups; df^w= degrees of freedom within groups

Table 4 presents the sixth step of the hierarchical regression analysis with the dependent variable *noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls by other preschool teachers*, which was conducted for the purpose of testing the 3rd hypothesis. The first step included the respondents'

year of birth, while the second referred to their *years of work experience*. The third step included the *hometown* and the fourth step referred to their religious (non)affiliation, while the fifth step included the results of the scale *Attitudes towards children's gender roles* and the sixth referred to their *personal experience of gender discrimination in childhood*. Variables included into the first two steps of the regression analysis did not yield significant contributions to explaining the criterion variable, hence the first two steps account for 0.9% of the variance. In the third step, a significant contribution to explaining the criterion variable was provided by the variable *hometown*, and in total 1.8% of the criterion variable was explained ($\beta=.123$; $p<0.05$). The fourth step included the variable *religious (non)affiliation* which provided a significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable ($\beta=.228$; $p<.001$), along with *hometown* which also provided a significant contribution ($\beta=.105$; $p<0.05$). Overall, 7% of the dependent variable was explained. The fifth step in the regression analysis included the variable *Attitudes towards children's gender roles* which provided a significant contribution to explaining the criterion variable ($\beta=-.098$; $p\leq 0.05$). The significance of the *hometown* variable decreased, while the *religious (non)affiliation* retained its contribution ($\beta=.216$; $p\leq .001$). Overall, 8% of the variance was explained. The sixth step included the variable *Personal experience of gender discrimination during childhood* which provided a significant contribution to explaining the criterion variable ($\beta=.209$; $p<.001$). The final sixth step of the regression analysis, in addition to the above mentioned one, contained the significant predictors *hometown* ($\beta=.096$; $p\leq 0,05$) and *religious (non)affiliation* ($\beta=.175$; $p<.001$). Overall, 12% of the variance was explained.

Table 4
Sixth step of the hierarchical regression analysis

	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Year of birth	-.031	-.270	.787
Work experience	-.054	-.470	.639
Hometown	-.096	1.949	.05
Religious (non)affiliation	.175	3.506	.001
Attitudes towards children's gender roles	-.089	-1.819	.070
Personal experience of gender discrimination during childhood	.209	4.229	

A higher result for the statement *I have noticed unequal treatment towards children in kindergarten based on gender* implies that the respondents more frequently noticed their colleagues engaging in unequal treatment of children in kindergarten. *Religious respondents* were coded with 0 and non-religious or non-affiliated respondents were coded with 1; *Respondents with no experience of gender unequal treatment during childhood* were coded with 0 and *those with experience of gender unequal treatment during childhood* were coded with 1; higher results on the scale *Attitudes towards children's gender roles* signify more traditional attitudes towards gender roles.

Discussion

The presented findings show that the attitudes of preschool teachers towards children's gender roles primarily differ with respect to their religious (non)affiliation. Religious preschool

teachers had significantly more stereotypical attitudes towards gender roles of children than the respondents who have identified themselves as non-affiliated or non-religious. This finding is in agreement with the results of previously conducted research, which indicated that the position of women in society is partly a consequence of interpretations of religious texts, religious cultural practice and institutional organization of the church (Klingorova & Havlicek, 2015). Furthermore, gender stereotypes were more expressed among the persons who are more dedicated to religious institutions (Japaridze et al., 2013). Therefore, it is assumed that the traditional attitudes towards gender roles of children were more characteristic of respondents whose religious affiliation can be described as institutionalized (according to Nikodem, 2011, that would be *religiosity according to teachings of the church*), and were less characteristic of respondents whose religiosity can be described as individualized (which according to Nikodem, 2011 is *religiosity in their particular way*).

With respect to other socio-demographic characteristics (age, hometown, work experience) and personal experience of gender discrimination during childhood, significant differences between preschool teachers and their attitudes towards children's gender roles were not found. It is assumed that, with respect to the majority of the included variables, no differences were found in the attitudes towards children's gender roles, as the respondents provided generally socially acceptable answers, which do not imply stereotypical understanding of gender roles. As a result of the mentioned limitation of this research, further research is required which would examine the respondents' perception of gender roles both at the declarative level and in view of their behaviour in particular situations where their reaction depends on their attitudes towards children's gender roles. Such research should be qualitative and include the observations of everyday situations in kindergarten, in addition to the interviews with the respondents. The differences in the attitudes of preschool teachers towards children's gender roles were found only with respect to their religious (non)affiliation, hence the obtained results only partially confirm the first hypothesis (*younger respondents with less work experience, who were brought up in cities and are non-religious or non-affiliated, with personal experiences of gender discrimination during their childhood have more egalitarian attitudes towards the gender roles of children in kindergarten*).

The analysis of the differences between the subsamples showed that the preschool teachers who are non-religious or non-affiliated, who were brought up in larger cities, with a personal experience of gender discrimination during childhood more frequently notice unequal treatment of boys and girls in kindergarten. Hence, the second hypothesis (*younger respondents with less work experience, who were brought up in cities, and are non-religious or non-affiliated, with personal experiences of gender discrimination during their childhood more frequently notice unequal treatment of boys and girls by other preschool teachers in kindergarten*) is also partially confirmed. These findings confirm the initial assumptions regarding the influence of socio-demographic characteristics and religious (non)affiliation on the degree of awareness of preschool teachers with respect to transferring stereotypes onto children. What is more, preschool teachers who have had the experience of unequal treatment became more aware of the issue of gender inequality, which confirmed the hypotheses of cognitivists theories where an individual (child) is an active agent in selecting and using information important for its developmental level and personal goals (Lips, 2007). In view of the above, the respondents who have had the experience of gender discrimination are more inclined to acknowledging unequal treatment towards boys and girls in kindergarten by their colleagues, and it is assumed that they are less inclined to mediate traditional beliefs regarding gender roles onto children. Kamenov et al (2011) emphasized that *although other research clearly shows that children learn traditional gender roles according to the model (e.g. observing a mother doing the majority of housework while the father rarely participates in such work), a "boomerang effect" nevertheless occurs, i.e. the moment when they experience unequal treatment themselves and become aware of the experience of injustice*.

By including the independent variables (socio-demographic characteristic, perception of gender roles of children and personal experience of gender discrimination) into the hierarchical regression analysis, the results showed that personal experience of gender discrimination during childhood is the strongest predictor of the dependent variable (*Noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls*) which confirmed the third hypothesis (*personal experience of gender discrimination during childhood has the strongest effect on noticing unequal treatment towards boys and girls by other preschool teachers*). Considering that the personal experience had more influence on noticing unequal treatment of boys and girls than the other factors (socio-demographic characteristics and religious (non)affiliation), it is of the utmost significance to educate individuals about the implicit and explicit forms of gender discrimination in order to recognize it in their own lives. In that respect, social organizations and the media can play a key role. If the media devoted more time to issues such as gender discrimination, it would increase the possibility for individuals to question their experiences and recognize them as forms of gender discrimination. This can later have an effect on their noticing gender unequal treatment towards children and increasing their awareness of mechanisms of transfer of gender stereotypes onto younger generations.

Conclusions

The findings of this research point to the important factors which are significantly correlated with the attitudes of preschool teachers towards children's gender roles and with their acknowledgement of unequal treatment towards boys and girls in kindergarten by their colleagues. The results of the research lead to the conclusion that the raising of awareness of preschool teachers regarding their own experience of gender discrimination during childhood increases their ability to recognize unequal treatment towards boys and girls in kindergarten. It enables them to tackle the situations where they recognize unequal treatment of boys and girls by warning their colleagues of a more egalitarian way of understanding gender roles of children and basing their own teaching practice on those principles. The traditional religious worldview increases the possibility of gender roles of children to be perceived in a stereotypical manner. It is, accordingly, assumed that religious preschool teachers will have greater propensity towards the gender stereotyping of children. Therefore, within the framework of formal and informal education in Croatia, it is necessary to educate preschool teachers about the manners of transfer of gender stereotypes onto children considering the frequent unawareness of such situations and considering that they themselves did not recognize particular situations from their childhood as gender discrimination. Although the respondents who declared themselves as religious have a more conservative attitude towards children's gender than those who are non-religious or non-affiliated, the mean value on the scale *Attitudes towards children's gender roles* shows that both subsamples have rather egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles of children. Therefore, future research should examine the correlation between religious (non)affiliation with the behaviours of preschool teachers (in particular situations) in order to establish whether there are greater differences in gender stereotyping between the subsamples and the current situation at the declarative level.

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Silvia Rogošić (Corresponding author)	PhD, Scientific Associate, Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, Savska cesta 77, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia. E-mail: silvia.rogosic@ufzg.hr
Ana Maskalan	PhD, Scientific Associate, Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Frankopanska 22, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia. E-mail: ana@idi.hr
Tomislav Krznar	PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, Savska cesta 77, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia. E-mail: tomislav.krznar@ufzg.hr