

Mothers are the most responsible in transferring of sexist attitudes

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Children learn gender roles from their family. Credit: Jordi Green

A study at the University of the Basque Country reveals a link between the sexist attitudes of mothers and that of her sons and daughters. Published this month in the magazine *Psicothema*, the results also link gender and the family's socio-economic and cultural level to sexism.

"The newest aspect of this study is to prove that there is indeed an intergenerational connection in [sexism](#)," states Maite Garaigordobil, co-author, along with Jones Aliri, of a study into the transference of gender prejudices in the family. Both co-authors are researchers at the University of the Basque Country, Spain.

Published this month in the magazine *Psicothema*, the investigation

separately analyses the relation between the sexism levels of mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter and father-son due to the role that gender plays in these different attitudes.

It appears that the mother is a figure who has greater influence in the transference of discriminatory behaviour. According to Garaigordobil, "the degree of sexism in the mother is more linked to that of her sons or daughters in comparison to the influence of the father."

The study was carried out using a sample of 1455 [adolescents](#) between 11 and 17 years of age along with their mothers and fathers (764 and 648). It highlights the strong influence that the mother has on her sons and daughters and also the influence that the father has on their sons.

The author states that "if we bear in mind that women are the main victims of sexism, it is paradoxical that they are the ones who have a greater influence when it comes to the transference of such damaging attitudes". However, she goes on to admit that "we are unable to confirm that this relationship is of a cause-effect nature given that our study is not correlational and does not use experimental methodology."

The authors of the study point out other factors that could explain this phenomenon. These include the amount of time that children spend with their parents, the household chores that the mother encourages them to do, the type of gifts that they are given and the roles that these gifts infer and, finally, the important role of the mother in the transference of values in general.

Garaigordobil outlines that "some researchers state that mothers tend to socialise more with their daughters and fathers do so more with their sons. Our study confirms this hypothesis."

Educating parents

The study suggests the importance of working with parents with regards to gender [prejudices](#) because a lower level of sexism in parents would also bring about a lower level in their offspring. Furthermore, Garaigordobil and Aliri explain the importance of implementing educational programmes during infancy and adolescence as a way of encouraging gender equality, reducing sexism and preventing gender-based violence.

Garaigordobil remarks that "we must emphasise that sexism is transferred through the family but sexist attitudes also develop from other significant sources. These include the social group to which each person belongs or the media, which would need to have some involvement if sexism were to be reduced."

Boys are more sexist

The study also confirms that sexist attitudes are linked to gender: adolescent boys reach significantly higher levels than girls and the same can be said for fathers in comparison to mothers.

The study shows a close link between the sexism levels of the mother and the father in that "women and men with high sexism scores tend to choose sexist partners, and vice versa," according to Garaigordobil.

In addition, it was proved that there is a link between the family's socio-economic and cultural position and the persistence of discriminatory attitudes. The researcher from the Basque Country concludes that "the greater the socio-economic and cultural level of the family, the lower the level of sexism in both sons and daughter and in mothers and fathers".

More information: Garaigordobil, M., y Aliri, J. (2011). Conexión intergeneracional del sexismo: influencia de variables familiares.

Psicothema, 23(3), 382-387.

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