

**OP 21**

**Perception of gender roles among medical undergraduates in a State University in Colombo district**

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**Objective:** 'Gender' refers to socially constructed roles and behaviours, that a given society considers appropriate for men and women and continues to be a concept poorly understood in many settings. To describe the perceptions of gender roles among medical undergraduates in a state university in Colombo district

**Methods:** This descriptive cross sectional study was carried out among 390 medical undergraduates using a self-administered questionnaire.

**Results:** Only 47% of undergraduates of both sexes, felt that males and females are treated the same way, 68% agreed that females should have equal education opportunities and 89% accepted females to hold high positions in society. However, 48% felt that courts give lenient sentences to women and 95% that girls need more protection than boys. When answers are disaggregated by sex, more male students than females felt a woman should always obey her husband (65% vs 40%,  $p < 0.001$ ), women are responsible for family care (78% vs 62%,  $p < 0.05$ ), man is the decision maker in the family (62% vs 29%,  $p < 0.001$ ). Moreover, more males than females felt that a woman should tolerate partner violence to keep family together (48% vs 27%  $p < 0.01$ ), she should not refuse sex with her husband (59% vs 34%,  $p < 0.001$ ) and accept male sexual promiscuity before marriage (53% vs 29%,  $p < 0.05$ ). While being educated in a mixed school was a significant factor identified, being in a current relationship did not affect the attitudes.

**Conclusions:** medical undergraduates despite their training and awareness continue to harbor unfavorable gender attitudes such as patriarchy, subordination of women, and greater acceptability of gender based violence. It is necessary to address wider societal gender perceptions in capacity development of medical undergraduates.