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research article

Perspectives on gendered parenting beliefs in Georgia: a mixed-methods approach

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Political and economic transitions have profound impacts on societies, influencing gender ideologies, including gendered beliefs about parenting. This article examines such gendered parenting beliefs in Georgia, a post-Soviet country that has undergone significant socio-economic transformations in recent decades. Using a quantitative survey-based study (N = 398), we investigate the relationship between age and other demographic variables and gender-essentialist beliefs about parenting (that is, the belief that women are biologically better suited for parenting), as well as the potentially intervening role of basic cultural values in this relationship. The findings reveal that age positively and income negatively predict essentialist parenting beliefs and that basic values partially explain this association. Through qualitative interviews (N = 14), we further explore the beliefs of individuals from three different generations regarding maternal and paternal parenting roles. The analyses reveal the coexistence of traditional, egalitarian and ambivalent beliefs related to gender in the context of parenting. Overall, the findings highlight the tension between evolving gender norms and established cultural frameworks in Georgia. They suggest that shifts in parenting beliefs most likely occur gradually and are part of broader societal value transformations.

Keywords gendered parenting beliefs • social change • basic values

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Introduction

Political and economic transformations play a critical role in modifying gender-related domains of life by reshaping societal norms, values and institutional structures. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a major turning point for the post-Soviet states, leading to significant socio-economic and ideological transformations. These changes have contributed to a growing difference between older and younger generations regarding various areas of social functioning, including beliefs, values and practices associated with parenting (Hamzallari, 2018). As a result of rapid social transformation, generational differences might be more prominent among post-Soviet citizens. Indeed, the younger generations in these newly independent nations, including Georgia, were socialised in environments markedly different from those of their parents (Bushina and Ryabichenko, 2018). While most empirical research on gender-related beliefs originates from Western societies (Piotrowski et al, 2019), the unique historical and social dynamics of Georgia present a compelling context for examining social change, particularly in relation to gendered parenting beliefs. The Soviet-era policies on gender equality in the public sphere, juxtaposed with persistent disparities in domestic responsibilities, the economic transformations following the Soviet Union's collapse that positioned many women as primary breadwinners and the recent resurgence of traditional religious values, all contribute to the distinctiveness of Georgia as an interesting context to study gendered parenting beliefs. Drawing on quantitative data, we examine the association of gendered parenting beliefs with age and other socio-demographic variables and whether such potential associations are explained by participants' basic cultural values. Based on qualitative data, we seek to further explore ideas regarding mothers' and fathers' roles in parenting across three generational groups of participants.

Gender ideologies

Gender-typed roles in parenting are influenced by socially determined factors, such as policy (for example, differences in maternity and paternity leave), and societal expectations, including gender ideologies (Endendijk et al, 2018). Egalitarian gender ideologies reflect a person's belief in men's and women's shared responsibility and capability for earning and caring and accentuate individual choice. Conversely, traditional gender ideologies usually refer to beliefs in separate gendered spheres in the employment and family domains (Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Grunow et al, 2018). Specifically, in the family domain, a traditional gender ideology assumes that mothers have the main responsibility in parenting and that they should always put their children's interests before their own. Fathers, on the other hand, are viewed as less capable than mothers to be good parents because mothers are believed to be inherently better at parenting, as they are naturally equipped to care for children. This belief is also labelled 'gender essentialism' in the literature (Liss et al, 2013; Gaunt and Deutsch, 2024). Past research suggests that, although egalitarianism has gained ground, the pace of change has slowed (Sullivan et al, 2018). Thereby, it should also be noted that scholars challenge the idea that gender ideology can be placed on a single continuum ranging from traditional to egalitarian (Knight and Brinton, 2017), as the specific forms gender ideologies take within different societies are closely shaped by each context's unique socio-economic conditions and cultural trajectories.

Generational differences and cultural value shifts

Modernisation theory suggests that economic development shifts values from security and tradition towards autonomy and self-expression (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Generational value shifts towards autonomy and self-expression foster greater support for gender equality (Pampel, 2011; Schwartz, 2016). Younger generations in post-Soviet societies, shaped by more individualistic and globally interconnected environments, are more likely to reject rigid gender norms and embrace shared responsibilities in parenting and household roles. At the same time, there is evidence from beyond post-Soviet space that, in some cases, younger generations hold more traditional attitudes (Bornatici et al, 2020). Religion and cultural traditions can act as barriers to gender equality in societies undergoing social change. Indeed, religious values often reinforce patriarchal structures, viewing gender roles as divinely ordained and resistant to change (Diehl et al, 2009).

Earlier quantitative studies identified a number of socio-demographic factors associated with gender ideology, including age, income, living place, education and religion (Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Pampel, 2011). For example, higher income and education are found to be associated with more egalitarian gender ideology (Pampel, 2011; Bornatici et al, 2020; Casey et al, 2022). Based on a value-shift perspective, it can be expected that such differences are particularly driven by changes in basic cultural values that are endorsed by different generations. A particularly valuable model in this context is the widely used basic-value model of Schwartz, where values are defined as 'trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group' (Schwartz et al, 2012: 2). The model differentiates between 19 basic values: self-direction (thought and action), stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power (dominance and resources), face, security (personal and societal), tradition, conformity (rules and interpersonal), humility, benevolence (dependability and caring), universalism (concern, nature and tolerance) (Schwartz et al, 2012). A large body of research has shown that these values guide and explain the diversity of human beliefs and behaviours (Schwartz, 2016; Sagiv and Schwartz, 2022).

Within-country differences in endorsement of different values are expected to be associated with differences in people's socio-demographic conditions (Schwartz, 2007). Differences in socio-demographic conditions are often associated with different life circumstances (for example, income may be associated with more autonomy in life decisions), which, in turn, are likely to be associated with the endorsement of different values (for example, financial decline may be linked with the weakening of values of self-direction and self-development [Sortheix et al, 2019]). In line with this, studies indicate that education, income and age predict people's endorsement of specific values. For example, older age is positively associated with valuing security and conformity, whereas it is negatively associated with the values of self-direction, achievement and power. Income is negatively associated with security and tradition while being positively associated with self-direction, achievement and power (Schwartz, 2007). Further, it is suggested that values are associated with people's endorsement of specific gender ideologies. For example, values like self-direction and achievement will be positively linked to egalitarian gender ideologies, whereas values like power and tradition will be negatively linked (Schwartz, 2015). In line with the aforementioned suggestion,

previous research indicates that the values of universalism, benevolence and self-direction are negatively associated with psychological essentialism beliefs, whereas values of security and tradition are positively associated with them (Kesberg and Keller, 2021).

The case of Georgia

Scholars argue that although post-communist societies face social developments similar to those experienced by modern Western societies, including the increasing individualisation and pluralisation of life courses (see, for example, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) and emancipation from traditional role scripts, such as the male breadwinner (see, for example, Giddens, 1991), they do so under different historical and social conditions (Ray, 1997). Further, the distinct historical trajectories of Western and post-Soviet countries have shaped not only the timing but also the nature of these challenges. Scholars note that young people in Georgia often hold dual and, at times, conflicting aspirations, simultaneously valuing national or traditional ideals while also striving towards modern, 'Western' values (Tsuladze, 2012). Notably, differing perceptions of the 'West' and varying degrees of acceptance of Western values can serve as a source of social division in post-Soviet societies, fuelled by ongoing and often polarised discourses opposing 'Western' with 'traditional' values (Khoshtaria et al, 2021).

In the pre-Soviet era, the Georgian family was patriarchal, that is, it usually consisted of three generations, and the eldest male was considered to be the head of the family and possessed the highest level of authority (Sumbadze, 2006). The Soviet period brought many changes in terms of equal opportunities for women and men. The Soviet state strived for equality between women and men in education and labour force participation, and women received certain social advantages, such as long-term maternity benefits and free day-care for children. Due to these policy-level changes, dual-earning families became the norm, yet, at the same time, care-providing functions in the family were still primarily women's responsibility (Wejnert and Djumabaeva, 2004; Sumbadze, 2006).

The collapse of the socio-economic system after the Soviet dissolution brought dramatic shifts in the life arrangements of many of its former citizens (Pinquart and Silbereisen, 2004), including changes in terms of the norms and functions of family roles. Economic crises pushed many women into breadwinning roles (Chitashvili et al, 2010), while greater access to global media introduced egalitarian values (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2003). Nevertheless, as shown by research in other contexts (Sánchez-Mira, 2024), higher economic achievement for women does not always bring about more egalitarian gender behaviours and beliefs within households, and the resurgence of religiosity has often reinforced traditional family roles (Titarenko, 2004).

In line with these seemingly contradictory evolutions, recent studies conducted in Georgia indeed point to the coexistence of contrasting gender ideologies. For example, according to a nationwide survey-based study, 34 per cent of participants believe that men and women should equally be breadwinners for the family, whereas 65 per cent believe that it is men's main responsibility (CRRC, 2019). Gender disparities also persist in childcare: 79 per cent of women versus 37 per cent of men engage in play and leisure with children; and 74 per cent of women versus 31 per cent of men talk to

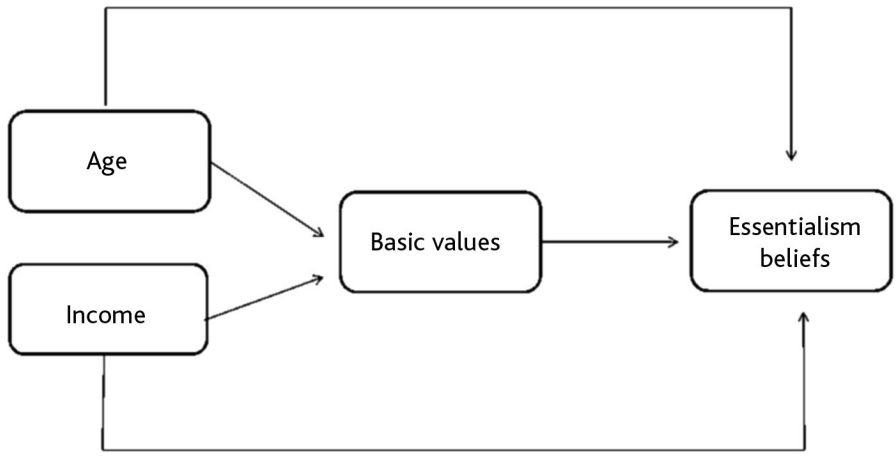
children about personal matters (Rakshit and Levtov, 2020). However, most of these studies are largely descriptive, leaving the factors that explain variation in people's endorsement of gender ideologies underexplored. In addition, studies on this issue are mostly quantitative, based on aggregate scores, omitting potential ambivalences and contradictions in shaping individuals' gender-related beliefs.

The present study

The overarching aim of this article is to examine individuals' gendered beliefs about parenting within the specific cultural context of Georgia. Thereby, we aim to investigate age-related differences, as well as whether shifts in basic cultural values help to explain such differences. To achieve this, we employed a mixed-methods approach, allowing for both a quantitative analysis of specific variables (for example, age, basic values, essentialism and so on) and a qualitative exploration of the nuanced meanings attributed to gendered parental roles and functions, as well as potential ambivalences in participants' accounts.

In the quantitative study, we examined differences in participants' gender-related parenting beliefs as a function of age and other socio-demographic characteristics (gender, income, education and so on), as well as whether such differences are explained by participants' basic cultural values. Therefore, the aim of the quantitative study is to examine the role of participants' endorsement of specific values as a potential mechanism that may explain possible differences in gendered parenting beliefs across age and other socio-demographic variables. Figure 1 presents the theoretical model. Drawing on the literature, we hypothesise that values like self-direction and universalism will negatively predict essentialist beliefs, while values like power, conformity and tradition will positively predict essentialist beliefs. Also, we hypothesise that the association of socio-demographic variables with essentialist beliefs will be explained by individuals' endorsement of specific values. For example, participants' age is expected to positively predict essentialist beliefs because of its positive relation to the value of tradition and its negative relation to the value of self-direction.

Figure 1: Theoretical model



In the qualitative part, we aim to explore existing views regarding the roles and functions of mothers and fathers in the context of parenthood across three generations: those who spent their formative years (adolescence and early adulthood) during the Soviet period (aged 60–70), those born during the Soviet era but whose formative years occurred largely after its collapse (aged 40–50), and those born after the Soviet collapse (aged 20–30). By adding qualitative findings to quantitative results, we seek to gain deeper insights regarding the understanding and interpretations of gender-related parenting beliefs and potentially find distinct patterns of findings across generations.

Method

Participants and procedure

The sample for the quantitative study was composed of 398 participants, with a mean age of 33 (SD = 10.98), and it primarily involved female participants (82.2 per cent). Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis by a group of master's students. Institutional review board approval and participants' informed consent were obtained prior to starting the research. Participants were invited to complete an online questionnaire. Of the participants, 45 per cent were parents, 85.7 per cent had a higher education (that is, a bachelor's degree or higher) and 60 per cent lived in the capital of Georgia. In addition, 77 per cent of the participants described the financial situation of their family as average in comparison with the Georgian population, 15 per cent indicated that it was poorer than average, and 8 per cent indicated being richer than average.

In the qualitative part of the study, we investigated gendered parenting beliefs in a sample with participants from three different generational groups. We conducted 14 interviews with both parents (11 participants) and non-parents (three participants). Table 1 presents the sample size, gender and age for each generational group. All participants had a degree in higher education (that is, a bachelor's degree or higher), and 11 participants lived in the capital. Ethical approval for the research project was obtained from the ethics committee of the relevant university. Information about the study was spread through social network sites, and participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. To ensure informed consent, participants signed a voluntary participation form and received information that the study addressed parenting experiences in Georgia. They did not receive any compensation for participation.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the three generational groups

Generation	Sample size	Female/male	Age
Born after the Soviet collapse	4	2/2	25, 25, 26, 27
Born before the Soviet collapse, but spent their youth after	5	2/3	44, 47, 47, 49, 50
Born and spent youth before the Soviet collapse	5	3/2	60, 60, 62, 62, 70

Measures

Quantitative study

We measured a number of socio-demographic variables, including age (in years), gender (man or woman), education (ranging from secondary to tertiary education), objective household income, measured as ranging from less than 500 Georgian lari (GEL) (1 respondent) to more than 5,000 GEL (5 respondents) a month, and place of residence (capital versus regions).[1] Basic values were measured with the Georgian version (Makashvili, 2017) of the Portrait Values Questionnaire-R (Schwartz et al, 2012). This scale serves as a measure of Schwartz's 19 basic values (three statements for each value type), describing a person's goals that point implicitly to the importance of a given value (for example, 'Being creative is important to him'). Respondents answer the question 'How much like you is this person?' on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 6 (very much like me). We chose nine values considering their relevance to the study question. Self-direction, including 'self-direction – thought' and 'self-direction – action', was measured by six items (for example, 'Being creative is important to him' [α = .81]); Universalism, including tolerance and concern, was measured by six items (for example, 'It is important to him to listen to people who are different from him' [α = .82]). Power, including subscales of dominance and resources, was measured by six items (for example, 'It is important to him to be the most influential person in any group' [α = .83]). Conformity to rules was measured by three items (for example, 'He believes he should always do what people in authority say' [α = .79]). Tradition was measured by three items (for example, 'It is important to him to maintain traditional values or beliefs' [α = .88]). Benevolence, which included the caring subscale, was measured by three items (for example, 'It's very important to him to help the people dear to him' [α = .78]). Achievement was measured by three items ('Being very successful is important to him' [α = .61]). Lastly, stimulation was measured by three items (for example, 'Excitement in life is important to him' [α = .70]). Finally, participants' endorsement of gender-essentialist beliefs was measured through eight items of the essentialism subscale of the Intensive Parenting Attitudes Questionnaire (for example, 'Men are unable to care for children unless they are given specific instructions about what to do' [α = .78]) (Liss et al, 2013).

Qualitative study

In the qualitative part, two trained research assistants conducted semi-structured interviews online. The average length of the interviews was one hour (ranging from 40 minutes to two hours). The following prompts were used during the interview: 'Please describe the optimal/ideal parenting environment as you see it. What are the main goals and values which parents are supposed to nurture during parenting? What are the roles of mothers and fathers in parenting, and what is the difference in their functions?' The answers to the last prompt were outlined and analysed for the current study.

Data analysis

For the quantitative data, path analysis with structural equation modelling, conducted in Mplus 7, was used to test our central hypotheses. Following the recommendations

of Holmbeck (1997), three models were tested: (1) a direct-effects model, including age and income as independent variables, predicting of essentialist beliefs (dependent variable); (2) a full mediation model in which age and income (independent variables) were indirectly related to essentialist beliefs (dependent variable) through the values of self-direction, universalism, benevolence, power and tradition (mediators); and (3) a partial mediation model, including direct paths from age and income to essentialism beliefs. Full mediation is demonstrated when the addition of direct paths in the third step does not improve model fit. The BOOTSTRAP option (with 1,000 iterations) was used to estimate indirect effects. Figure 1 illustrates a hypothetical model of mediation.

The qualitative analysis employed a thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which consists of five distinct phases. Two Georgian-speaking authors read the entire data in depth in search of general patterns, and reflexive notes and ideas were written down (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the second phase, they identified initial codes using an inductive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Next, the data analysis moved from identifying codes to identifying themes. A theme captures a salient aspect of the data that is related to the research question. The authors reviewed codes to assess similarity, difference and overlap among codes. They then identified broad ways in which codes intersected, ultimately uncovering meaningful patterns in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2012). In the fourth phase, the research team reviewed each theme's relation to the data and to the other themes. Lastly, the whole team was involved in defining, naming and clearly stating what was unique and specific about each theme (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The study is situated in a critical realism framework that recognises reality as a legitimate field of research while, at the same time, acknowledging that its representations are co-produced by language and social interactions (Terry et al, 2017).

Results

Quantitative results

Mean-level analysis and bivariate correlations

Table 2 presents means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations for all continuous variables in the study. Essentialist beliefs related positively to age and the values of power, conformity and tradition, as well as negatively to objective income and the values of self-direction, universalism and benevolence. Education and the values of face, stimulation and achievement were not related to essentialist beliefs and were removed from subsequent analyses. Age was positively related to the values of conformity and tradition, as well as negatively related to the values of self-direction, universalism, power, stimulation and achievement. Income was positively related to the values of self-direction and achievement, as well as negatively related to the values of conformity and tradition.

We conducted a series of univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs), with our study variables (essentialist beliefs and values) as dependent variables and gender and place of residence (urban versus rural) as between-subject variables. We found significant differences between the urban and rural groups: those who indicated living in a rural place scored higher on essentialist beliefs ($F(2, 393) = 3.58, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$) and the

Table 2: Descriptives and correlations among study variables

	M	*SD*	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Age	32.92	10.98	.03	–.12*	.22***	–.16**	–.13**	–.13**	.05	–.13*	.04	.15**	–.29***	.24***
2. Education	2.79	.55		.20***	.09	.12*	.06	.002	.05	.01	.09	.03	.07	.07
3. Income	2.67	.95			–.21***	.17**	.07	.05	–.02	.08	.003	–.11*	.13*	.30***
4. Essentialist beliefs	2.27	.80				–.21***	–30**	.28***	.05	.02	–.17**	.17**	.05	.33***
5. Self-direction	5.15	.75					.61***	.04	.32***	.45***	.45***	.23***	.42***	.006
6. Universalism	5.10	.79						–.12*	.29***	.37***	.55***	.38***	.25***	.06
7. Power	2.72	1.1							.27***	.20***	–.16**	.09	.55***	.06
8. Image	4.81	1.02								.25***	.40***	.32***	.43***	.32***
9. Stimulation	4.52	1.07									.33***	.31***	.45***	.23***
10. Benevolence	5.36	.80										.26***	.13**	.34***
11. Conformity	4.25	1.22											.19***	.35***
12. Achievement	4.33	1.06												.04
13. Tradition	4.16	1.42												

value of tradition ($F(2, 393) = 14.39, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$). Some significant differences were also found across gender: women scored higher on the values of both conformity ($F(1,393) = 13.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$) and universalism ($F(1, 393) = 6.96, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$). We controlled for place of residence and gender in the path models.

Path analyses

We first tested the direct-effects model, which involved testing associations between participants' age and income. This model provided a perfect model fit due to saturation (zero degrees of freedom). Age was positively and income was negatively associated with essentialist beliefs.

Next, we estimated a full mediation model, which included the value variables as mediators. Although the full mediation model yielded adequate fit ($\chi 2(2) = 7.85$, $p = .02$; comparative fit index [CFI] = .99; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .08), the partial mediation model was saturated and provided a perfect fit, so we retained the partial mediation model. The partial mediation model accounted for 34 per cent of the variance in essentialist beliefs.

In the final mediation model, age negatively and income positively predicted the value of self-direction, while age positively and income negatively predicted the value of tradition. Age negatively predicted the values of universalism and power, and it positively predicted the value of conformity. In turn, the values of self-direction and universalism were negatively linked to essentialist beliefs, whereas the values of power, conformity and tradition were positively associated with essentialism. Further, the direct path from age to essentialist beliefs was substantially reduced, and the direct path from income to essentialism was reduced to non-significance. Significant indirect effects emerged from age to essentialist beliefs via the values of self-direction, power, conformity and tradition. Indirect effects from income to essentialist beliefs through

Figure 2: Final partial mediation model

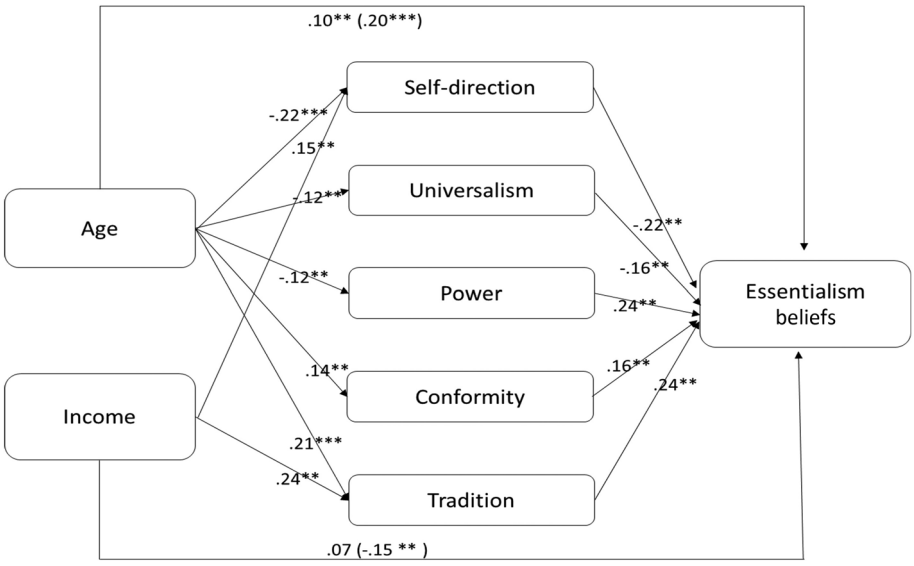


Table 3: Summary of indirect effects through basic values

Independent variable	Mediator variable	Point estimate	Standard error	95% confidence interval
Age	Self-direction	.032	.015	.003 to.061
Age	Power	–.028	.012	–.051 to –.005
Age	Conformity	.026	.012	.003 to.050
Age	Tradition	.060	.015	.030 to.090
Income	Self-direction	–.036	.015	–.066 to –.007
Income	Tradition	–.079	.019	–.116 to –.041

the values of self-direction and tradition were also significant. Figure 2 illustrates the final partial mediation model. Table 3 summarises these indirect effects. These results indicate that participants' values partly explain why age and income are predictive of their endorsement of essentialist beliefs.

Qualitative results

In the qualitative part of the study, we explored participants' perspectives on the roles and functions of mothers and fathers in greater depth. Our analyses yielded three main themes. The first theme, 'Mother and father roles are equal', reflects participants' views on the importance of equality in parenting roles. However, it also incorporates some ambivalent or contradictory perspectives on the matter. The second theme, 'Mother and father roles and functions are different', highlights the ways participants perceive parenting roles as distinct and complementary. The third theme, 'Arguments supporting differences in mother and father roles', explores the reasoning participants used to justify these distinctions. We did not find distinct generational trends, as both perspectives were found in all generational groups.

Mother and father roles are equal

Most participants who supported equal parenting roles rejected traditional gender norms that assign separate responsibilities to mothers and fathers. They opposed the idea that parenting is solely the mother's domain and advocated for shared responsibilities, despite noting that gendered roles remain common in practice. As one 26-year-old male participant noted, 'In many families, fathers are stricter and mothers more accepting, but it is not right, it is a stereotype; there is no difference in parental functions'.

Participants also criticised traditional father roles, urging men to be more emotionally involved and empathetic. For example, a 27-year-old female participant emphasised, 'Fathers are also important [in parenting]. They should start to listen to their children and be more empathic and should not behave like a Georgian masculine man'. This critique also extended to the notion that fathers should be more emotionally present in their children's lives, breaking free from traditional masculine stereotypes.

The importance of coordinated parenting strategies was highlighted, particularly the rejection of 'good cop, bad cop' dynamics. As one participant put it, both parents should use the same approaches in raising children. One 26-year-old male participant emphasised this point, stating that 'There should not be good and bad policemen in parenting roles…. Mothers and fathers should share the same approaches to children'.

Along with these egalitarian views, many participants reflected on the past when the mother and father roles were more clearly differentiated. According to one 50-year-old female participant, 'Modern parents share responsibilities, and both are actively involved in parenting, and I like it a lot, but when I raised my children, it was not like that: the mother played the central role in parenting, and the father was the breadwinner'. However, this participant also exhibited some ambivalence about the evolving norms of shared parental responsibilities. While she recognised the advantages of equal involvement in modern parenting, she continued to view the mother's role as being more central, particularly when it came to the emotional and psychological development of children: 'Parenting is a mother's responsibility…. I still think that the mother's role in parenting, in children's psychological development, is bigger…. The mother is a bigger factor.'

In sum, these participants particularly advocated for equal parental roles and shared responsibilities between mothers and fathers. While acknowledging persistent gender-segregated practices in many families, they criticised the expectation that mothers should be primary caregivers and fathers solely breadwinners. They highlighted the need for fathers to adopt more nurturing and emotionally engaged behaviours, challenging traditional masculine stereotypes.

Mothers' and fathers' roles are different

Despite participants' accounts supporting a more egalitarian stance towards mothers' and fathers' roles, opinions highlighting gendered differences also emerged. These views often reflected a division where mothers were seen as primary caregivers and fathers as breadwinners. For instance, as a 62-year-old male participant stated, 'Children should be raised only by mothers…. Mothers should care, and fathers are mostly working, and they do not have enough time for parenting. Mothers have more duties and functions in parenting, of course'. Many participants highlighted that mothers were more emotionally accessible, fostering trust and open communication with children, while fathers were associated with discipline and authority. One 25-year-old male participant noted, 'Children are more open to their mothers than fathers because fathers are associated with more discipline in parenting. Many participants emphasised that this close connection allows mothers to play a central role in their children's emotional lives, making them the go-to figure for discussing sensitive or personal issues. In this view, the mother is not only the primary caregiver but also the emotional anchor for the child, someone who provides a safe space for open dialogue about the complexities of growing up. This view reinforced the idea that mothers should practise 'intensive' parenting, centring their lives around their children to create emotional closeness and security.

Fathers, in contrast, were seen as distant but necessary figures for setting rules and structure, which, according to participants, can sometimes create a distance between fathers and children in terms of emotional closeness. This pattern, however, did

not negate the role fathers should play in providing structure and guidance in the family, but it reinforced the gendered division of parenting functions, with mothers often perceived as the emotional caregivers and fathers as figures of authority. One 25-year-old male participant illustrated this difference by dividing parenting roles into two distinct functions: encouragement and punishment. He stated, 'There should be good and bad policeman roles divided between mothers and fathers. As mothers spend more time with children, fathers are associated with discipline'. This division reflects a broader societal expectation in which mothers are tasked with the emotional labour of nurturing and guiding their children's personal development, while fathers maintain the role of enforcer and authority.

Arguments supporting differences in mother and father roles

Along with a description of gender differences in parenting roles and functions, some participants addressed the underlying reasons for these disparities. These reasons are presented under three sub-themes that capture different aspects of justification: 'Women and men are naturally different', 'Men are stronger' and 'Religion and historical tradition support gender-related differences in parenting'.

Women and men are naturally different

One line of the argument regarding different responsibilities is associated with differences in mothers' and fathers' parenting abilities. Participants highlighted how mothers may be naturally better at caregiving by stating that 'Men are men and women are women, they are different…. Mothers have more roles in parenting and are more gifted in that' (47-year-old male participant). Thus, these participants tended to endorse gender-essentialist beliefs regarding the roles of mothers and fathers in parenting. They considered these roles as fundamentally tied to inherent differences between men and women. In particular, the provision of warmth, care and emotional support in parenting was widely regarded as a function primarily associated with women's nature. This view reflected a binary understanding of gender, where men and women were seen as two distinct 'kinds', each possessing different emotional capabilities and tendencies. For example, one 62-year-old female participant articulated this belief, stating that, 'Women are more romantic and caring by nature…. Sensitivity, care and warmth that are necessary for children are also important for men but are mostly provided by mothers'.

In this perspective, women were seen as inherently more suited to the nurturing aspects of parenting, with their greater emotional sensitivity and natural inclination towards caregiving. While it was recognised that fathers could be sensitive and caring, the participants largely believed that these traits were less naturally aligned with fathers, and their primary responsibility was in other, more task-oriented aspects of parenting. Fathers would be more competent and stronger, as outlined in the next sub-theme.

Men are stronger

Another way participants distinguished between mothers and fathers was through men's perceived superiority in decision making. Several participants emphasised that fathers, due to their greater experience outside the home, were better positioned to offer advice and make important decisions for the family. This view reflects a belief

that fathers possess a broader understanding of life and, as a result, are seen as more capable of guiding their children. One 62-year-old male participant stated, 'Men's advice is more important, even though the mother teaches everything to a child'. This statement reveals an underlying contradiction, as the participant acknowledges the extensive educational role of mothers while simultaneously asserting that fathers' advice holds greater weight in family matters.

One 49-year-old female participant exhibited ambivalence about these gendered roles:

> I do not divide people into women and men, but sometimes Caucasian attitudes still prevail, and I think that fathers should be a support not only for children but also for their wives…. Somehow, it is carved in my mind that men are stronger, and I do not admit it at the same time, but, subconsciously, I still agree with that.

This participant's statement illustrates the complexity of modern gender attitudes, where explicit declarations of equality coexist with ingrained cultural beliefs. This ambivalence reflects the persistence of traditional gender roles, which many individuals continue to internalise even if they consciously reject them.

Religion and historical tradition support gender-related differences in parenting

Religion and historical tradition emerged as significant sources of justification for gendered parenting roles among some participants in our study. These beliefs provided a framework for understanding the division of parental responsibilities, rooted in long-standing societal norms and spiritual teachings. For instance, one 62-year-old male participant explained, 'We are an Orthodox society, and we strive to teach young parents that fathers should be seen as superior, as the head of the family…. Historically, this was the tradition in Georgia'. This statement reflects a deeply entrenched connection between religious values and traditional family structures, where the father's role as the head of the household is perceived as not merely cultural but spiritually ordained. The participant's emphasis on teaching young parents suggests an effort to preserve and transmit these beliefs to future generations.

The perception of gendered parenting roles was also reinforced through religious symbolism, which some participants used to delineate the inherent differences between mothers and fathers. A 47-year-old male participant described this distinction, stating, 'Mother is a woman and father is a man…. Even if we talk in religious terms, God is a man and stricter and Mother of Jesus is a woman and more tolerant'. This perspective aligns parental roles with divine characteristics, where fathers embody authority, discipline and judgement – qualities traditionally ascribed to God – while mothers are associated with nurturing, compassion and tolerance, akin to the symbolic role of the Virgin Mary or Mother of Jesus.

Discussion

The article has explored gendered parenting beliefs in Georgia, a country in political, economic and sociocultural transition, where more traditional ways of thinking and behaviour are losing their importance and/or relevance, while others retain their strength. Using a mixed-methods approach, the article has shown how cultural

values may explain age and income differences in gender-role beliefs while yielding in-depth insight into participants' representations about the role of gender in the context of parenthood.

In the quantitative study, we examined the extent to which socio-demographic factors and basic values predicted gender-essentialist parenting beliefs and whether this relationship was partially mediated by value orientations. Our results indicated that younger participants and those with higher incomes prioritised self-direction, universalism and power while placing less emphasis on tradition and conformity. These results align with Schwartz's (2016) and Smallenbroek et al's (2023) findings on age-related value differences. Older individuals tend to favour values promoting stability and cohesion, while younger people emphasise autonomy and achievement. Such generational differences may reflect macro-contextual shifts. Georgians born after the Soviet Union's collapse grew up in an environment marked by individualism and global influences, whereas older generations were socialised within a collectivist, patriarchal regime (Lebedeva et al, 2018). Income was linked to value orientations too: those with higher incomes scored higher on self-direction and lower on traditional values. Financial stability may foster greater autonomy, enabling individuals, especially women, to challenge traditional roles and imagine egalitarian parenting models. Prior research similarly links higher socio-economic status with greater openness to change and more egalitarian gender norms (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). However, as these ideals diffuse across social groups, their correlation with socio-economic status may weaken over time (Elder and George, 2016). These differences in basic values partially accounted for the associations of age and income with essentialist beliefs. Specifically, younger and more affluent participants exhibited higher endorsement of self-direction and universalism values while placing comparatively lower importance on tradition and conformity. These broader value orientations appear to be extrapolated to the domain of family gender roles, shaping less essentialist attitudes. Taken together, these findings align with the value-shift perspective on gender ideology, suggesting that broader sociocultural transformations are mirrored in changing beliefs about gendered parenting roles.

The qualitative findings revealed the coexistence of traditional and egalitarian approaches to mothers' and fathers' roles and functions in parenting. Some participants emphasised differences between maternal and paternal parenting, often framing parenting as primarily the mother's responsibility. These beliefs reflect traditional gender norms that assign fathers the role of strict disciplinarians and view mothers as nurturing figures (Lamprianidou et al, 2025). Several participants echoed these stereotypes, portraying mothers as sympathetic and emotionally attuned and fathers as distant but authoritative. Even though other participants endorsed egalitarian perspectives more strongly, ambivalence emerged even among these participants: while affirming gender equality in parenting, some simultaneously upheld the idea that mothers are more central to child rearing and that fathers play a dominant role in maintaining authority. This internal tension suggests an ongoing negotiation between evolving societal expectations and entrenched cultural norms. In spite of the changing reality, where many women provide equally or are the only providers for their families, a traditional division of roles continues to be prevalent in our findings (see Sánchez-Mira, 2024). Thus, even as gender roles evolve, the residual influence of past societal structures continues to impact contemporary views on parenting, suggesting that change in gender norms is often incremental and complex (Grunow et al, 2018).

Our qualitative findings revealed three lines of argument supporting the traditional division of gendered parenting beliefs. Some participants linked maternal responsibility to men's role as primary earners, arguing that men's limited time at home justifies less involvement in parenting (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999). Emotional closeness with children was also tied to the greater time mothers spend at home. Further, traditional parenting roles were frequently justified through religious beliefs and historical norms. These views reinforce the notion that gender roles in families are rooted in a deeper moral and cultural order. Religion, particularly in times of social upheaval, may function as a stabilising force and a means of resisting change (Diehl et al, 2009; Henrich et al, 2019). For some, religion provided symbolic support for preserving traditional family structures in the face of rising female economic participation. Finally, some participants argued that women are inherently better suited to parenting. This essentialist view limits father involvement and reinforces the idea that caregiving is a maternal domain (Gaunt and Deutsch, 2024). Thus, despite increasing challenges to these notions, essentialist beliefs surrounding parenthood remain influential.

Overall, our findings highlight the tension between evolving gender norms and established cultural frameworks, suggesting that changes in parenting beliefs are gradual and complex, being one component of general trends of societal value shifts (Bosoni, 2014). At the same time, there are several limitations in our studies that restrict the conclusions that can be drawn from these findings. First, the gender imbalance in our quantitative sample (predominantly women) may limit insight into male perspectives, particularly given that men often adopt egalitarian beliefs more slowly (Dotti Sani and Quaranta, 2017). Future studies should explore factors that hinder men's endorsement of gender equality in parenting. Second, our sample was primarily composed of highly educated participants, which may not reflect the full spectrum of Georgian society. Third, the qualitative prompt emphasised differences between mothers and fathers, which may have skewed responses towards distinctions rather than similarities. Future research might adopt more exploratory approaches to capture broader parenting beliefs and consider perspectives on parenting beyond such dichotomies. Moreover, it should be noted that recent scholarship challenges the usefulness of traditional divisions, such as care versus work, home versus workplace and rigid gender binaries. Instead, it highlights care as a vital foundation of social reproduction, essential for fulfilling human physical, emotional and social needs. From this perspective, gender justice depends on revaluing, redistributing and restructuring care work, moving away from the notion that it is a private duty of women and towards recognising it as a collective social responsibility (Doucet, 2023). Fourth, we did not assess participants' religiousness or employment status in the quantitative study – two potentially important factors influencing gender-essentialist beliefs (Kraaykamp, 2012). Finally, the data were collected in 2020, before recent sociopolitical developments, most notably Russia's invasion of Ukraine, justified, in part, by appeals to so-called 'traditional family values', and the Georgian government's increasing use of similar rhetoric. Therefore, it is critical to conduct new studies in light of this transforming sociopolitical context.

Conclusion

Conditions of socio-economic and cultural transition in societies challenge, among other things, gender roles and associated beliefs. In this article, we have explored

participants' gendered beliefs about parenthood in the cultural context of Georgia, a country that has undergone a tremendous transition over the last 30 years. Overall, the present findings provide valuable insights into the ways in which social change, including shifts in cultural values, may be linked to generational differences in people's gender-role beliefs about parenthood.

Note

[1] At time of writing 1 GEL = 0.28 GBP.

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Research ethics statement

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this article are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Contributor statement

NS wrote the first and subsequent drafts of the manuscript, with comments from SVP, AM and E-AL. NS and SVP conceptualised the study. NS conducted data analysis and interpretation, with contributions from SVP, AM and E-AL.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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