

Gender gap in math confidence is studied

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A survey of middle school girls suggests their self-confidence in math suffers when their parents believe math is a male domain.

Researchers Ruchi Bhanot and Jasna Jovanovic of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which released research data Tuesday, said a gender gap exists in math and science, but it's a gap about performance or achievement.

"It's about attitudes," said Jovanovic, a professor of human and community development. "Girls are not as confident about math and science."

According to the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 71 percent of eighth-grade boys and 60 percent of eighth-grade girls reported confidence in their math ability. The gender gap in confidence persists into high school.

Bhanot, a graduate student in human and community development, said, "Research shows when parents endorse the stereotype that math is a male domain, their daughters underestimate their math ability."

Jovanovic and Bhanot hypothesize parents inadvertently impose stereotypes when they give unsolicited help with their child's homework.

The research appears in the journal *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*.

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