

Masculinity, Son Preference & Intimate Partner Violence



A STUDY CONDUCTED BY ICRW IN PARTNERSHIP WITH UNFPA

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IN INDIA, as well as in several other countries of Asia, son preference has been pervasive for centuries. Son preference is deeply rooted in patriarchal cultural and religious beliefs that uphold the essential value of having a son in a family. The kinship and inheritance systems in a family also powerfully drive son preference. The belief that sons are essential for social survival for a family by carrying on its lineage sustains the ideology of son preference. Sons are also seen to ensure a family's economic security over time as providers of income and resources to parents in their old age.

Women experience intense societal and familial pressure to produce a son and failure to do so, often carries the threat and consequences of violence or abandonment in their marriage (Das Gupta M, 2006). Women may have many pregnancies until a boy is born—putting their own health at risk. The desire to have a son also contributes to the neglect or postnatal death of innumerable girls who are born but not desired (WHO, 2011). Previous research clearly shows that during early childhood, girls in India suffer health and nutritional discrimination (Pande and Malhotra, 2006).

While son preference has a detrimental impact on women's and girls' health and wellbeing, the advent of prenatal diagnostic technology since the mid-eighties has made it easier to practice pre-natal sex selection and subsequent sex-selective abortions. Economic pressures and women's rising educational status have fueled a desire for smaller families. National family planning policies have encouraged smaller families as a part of the population policies. This desire for smaller families, in conjunction with unabated son preference, has led to the use of pre natal sex selection technology for the purposes of balancing family size and composition to ensure a son. Consequently, sex ratios at birth rapidly became unbalanced over this period, indicating that the preference for sons has not changed to keep pace with the small family norm (Li Shuzhou, 2007). Based on the census 2011 data, there have been marginal improvements in states which showed extreme imbalance such as Punjab but declining trends have shown up in states like Jammu and Kashmir that did not manifest a problem before.

There has been no comprehensive strategy to address the problem of son preference outside of a few broad campaigns on the value of the girls and the Pre-Conception Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act. Even the best implemented law, can act as a deterrent but may not eliminate the practice. Son preference will remain as long as the dominant need to have a son is intact in society and the campaigns for valuing girls do not address why and which men and women prefer to have sons.

Interventions, policies and the research around gender equality and son preference has typically centered on women. The position and experiences of men have been neglected even though it has been well recognized that women's decisions and actions are heavily influenced by men.

What informs men's actions and conceptions of accepted behavior do not play into the policies that mean to bring about equality. Without a clear focus on how and why men perpetrate forms of dominance over women and how their thinking can be influenced, the process of ensuring gender equality or rather that daughters are equally valued as sons, is incomplete.

We need to understand the role of men, their own internalized norms of masculinity as well as women's response to male dominance and patriarchy

Sex ratio at birth:
(females per 1000 males)
2001-03: 883
2009-11: 906

(Data from Sample Registration System)

Men's actions and conceptions of accepted behavior currently do not inform the policies for gender equality

1: International Center for Research on Women (ICRW); 2: UNFPA India

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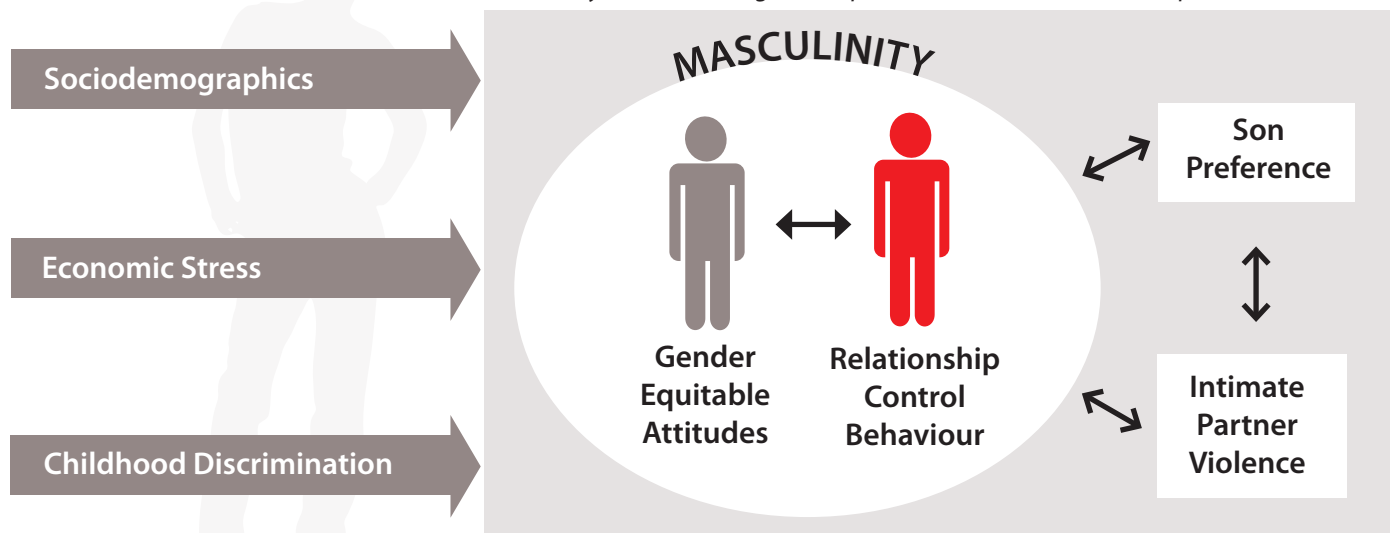
ABOUT THE STUDY

The study explores how masculinity acts as a determinant of son preference and intimate partner violence

In order to delve into the area of masculinities and son preference deeper, ICRW in partnership with UNFPA have conducted a study on men's attitudes around son preference in seven states of India. The study looks at men's attitudes and practices around gender inequality, son preference, and gender based violence. The objective is to understand predictors of masculinities and how varying forms of masculinity affect men's desire for sons and their perpetration of violence against their intimate partners.

Conceptual Framework

Masculinity measured as – gender equitable attitudes and relationship control behaviour.



Men's sample per state
1500 men aged 18-49 years

Women's sample per state
500 women aged 18-49 years

Total Sample
9205 Men
3158 Women

Mean age
Men: 31 years
Women: 30 years

Education Men
Completed 10th Standard: 33%
Illiterate: 10%

Education Women
Completed 10th Standard: 24%
Illiterate: 26%

Sample Size, Methods

The 7 states included in this study were selected on the basis of their diverse sex ratio at birth and geographical spread across the country. Given that Haryana and Punjab represent contiguous areas with cultural overlaps, the states of Punjab and Haryana were considered as one unit. To achieve a representative sample at the state level the sample size was fixed as 1500 men and 500 women in the age group 18-49 years in each state. A multistage cluster sampling approach was adopted for the selection of the samples. Census enumeration blocks were considered as the Primary Sampling Unit (PSU) in urban areas, while in rural areas it was villages or group of villages (in case of small linked villages). Each state was divided into regions and samples were allocated in proportion to the size of the regions. In each state to avert bias in responses, men's and women's samples were selected from completely different PSUs. The PSUs for women were selected first and removed subsequently from the universe. Later, the PSUs for men were selected out of the remaining universe. To ensure representation from rural and urban areas both men's and women's samples were distributed in the ratio 60 to 40, respectively. Appropriate weights were calculated at the state and aggregate level and applied during the analysis.

Background characteristics of the respondents

In Odisha and Madhya Pradesh the proportion of men in the age category 35-49 years was slightly high as compared to other states. While a higher proportion of women in the age category 35-49 years was observed in Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Among the states, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh had more than 10 percent of men who were illiterate whereas in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Odisha it was less than five percent. More than half (67%) of the men and three-fourths of the women (78%) in the sample reported being currently married and majority of them (78% men and 75% women) reported that their marriage was arranged and they agreed willingly. Less than five percent of men and women reported that they chose their spouse and got married without their elders' consent. While nine percent men and four percent women reported that they chose their spouse and got married with consent from elders.

Men, Part of the Solution not the Problem

Masculinity represents the range of men's beliefs about manhood and men's need to exert influence and control in their lives, especially in their intimate partner relationships, and how much power women should have vis a vis men.


Highly rigid masculinity reinforces the belief that women need to be bounded by the more traditional and accepted norms around gender relations.


We coded two variables as masculinity for the analysis. One is an index of gender equitable attitudes held by men and the other is expressed control in their intimate partner relationships. With these we created different forms of masculinities with varying degrees of gender equitable attitudes and controlling behaviour. The results were sorted into four typologies of men to better understand how masculinity is being expressed. Depending on where they fall on the scale of controlling behaviour and equitable attitudes we have categorized them as: *Equitable Men; Flexible Behaviour Men; Flexible Attitude Men; The Rigidly Masculine Men.*


Flexible behavior men are closer to rigidly masculine men in terms of their inequitable attitudes but are more aligned with equitable men as they are able to restrict their behavior and are not as controlling. In contrast, flexible attitude men are closer to equitable men in terms of their attitudes but their behavior is more controlling because they conform to norms of masculinity and control. Flexible behaviour men have less education and tend to be more predominant in rural areas than flexible attitude men. Therefore education and urban exposure may affect men's equitable attitudes but there are other triggers for controlling behaviour.

Based on this analysis we find that on the aggregate about two of five men are rigidly masculine and about a fourth are equitable. Rigid masculinity is highest in Uttar Pradesh (64%) and least in Rajasthan (22%) followed by Maharashtra (25%). The flexible attitude men are in similar proportions across all states (17-22%) except in Odisha they are about 10%. Interestingly, the flexible behaviour men range from 11-17% across the states except in Odisha where they are about 31%.

TYPOLOGIES OF MEN

 **EQUITABLE**
Strong gender equality attitudes,
Less controlling

 **FLEXIBLE BEHAVIOUR**
Weak gender equality attitudes,
Less controlling

 **FLEXIBLE ATTITUDE**
Strong gender equality attitudes,
Highly controlling


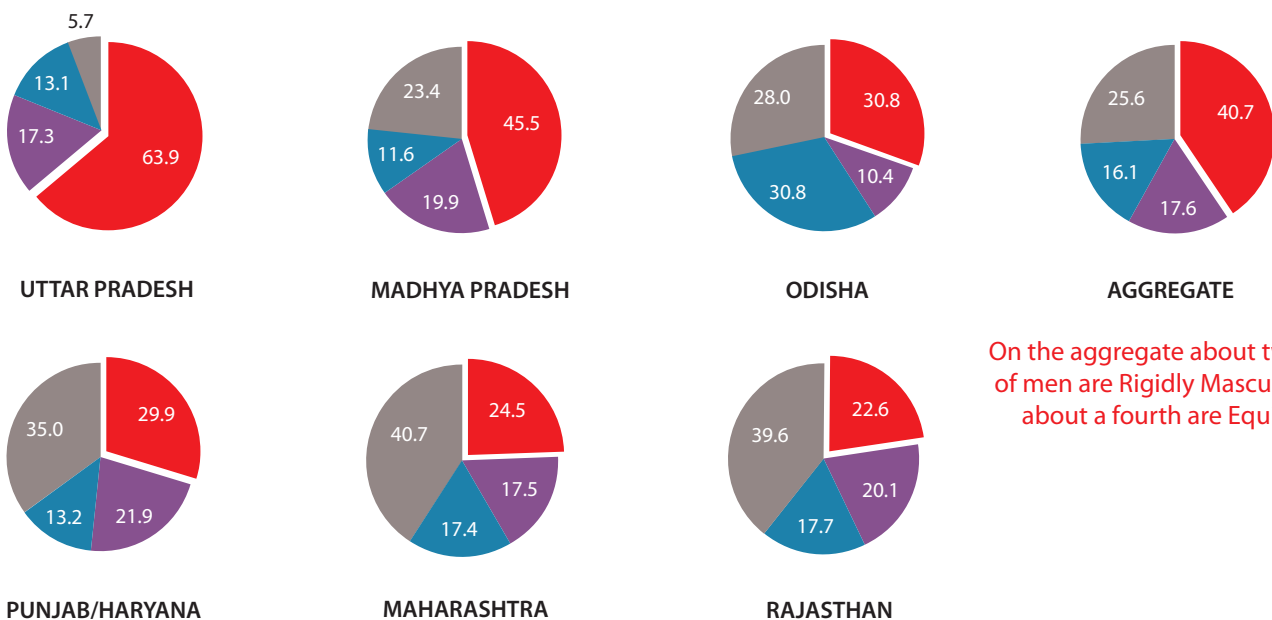
 **RIGIDLY MASCULINE**
Weak gender equality attitudes,
Highly controlling

Figure 1: Masculinity by States



On the aggregate about two fifths of men are Rigidly Masculine and about a fourth are Equitable

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INFLUENCERS

- Childhood Discrimination
- Economic Stress
- Occupation
- Education

Men's past experiences in childhood have a significant impact on their masculine behaviour as adults. The more men witnessed their father making more decisions in their formative years they are less likely to have equitable gender attitudes. Men who had often witnessed some violent acts or discrimination against their sisters or mothers in their childhood internalize this experience to be more rigidly masculine. The proportion of rigidly masculine men is higher amongst those men who experienced discrimination as children compared to those who did not, in most states. In the Punjab and Haryana the opposite is true.

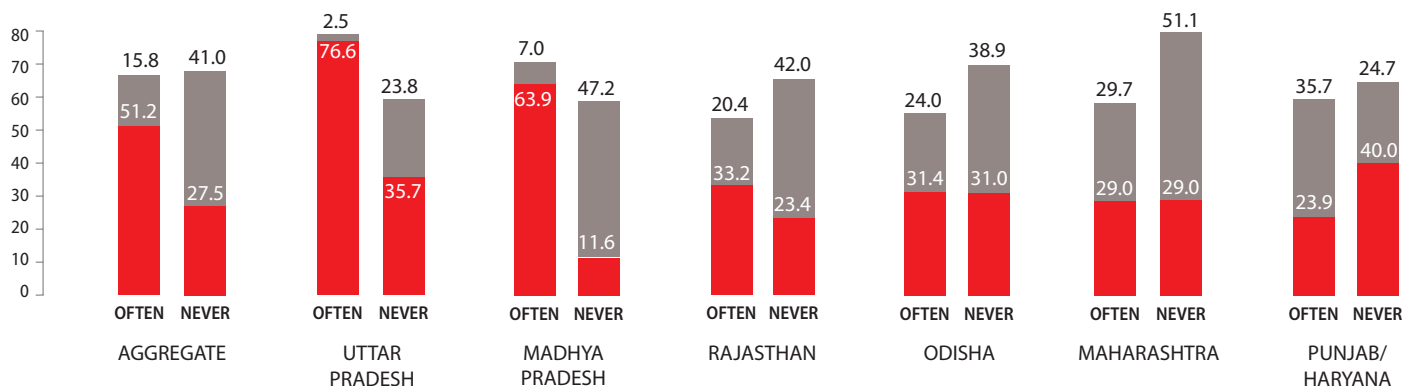


Figure 2: Masculinity and Childhood Discrimination (Often and Never)

Men traditionally view themselves as providers for their families. Facing economic stress of some form could easily affect the way a man perceives his successes and failures in providing for his family. If men's employment was not stable or they felt stressed or depressed at not having enough work or income, they were more likely to be rigidly masculine. At the state level this relationship is significant in Odisha, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. This might be because of higher unemployment of men in these three states.

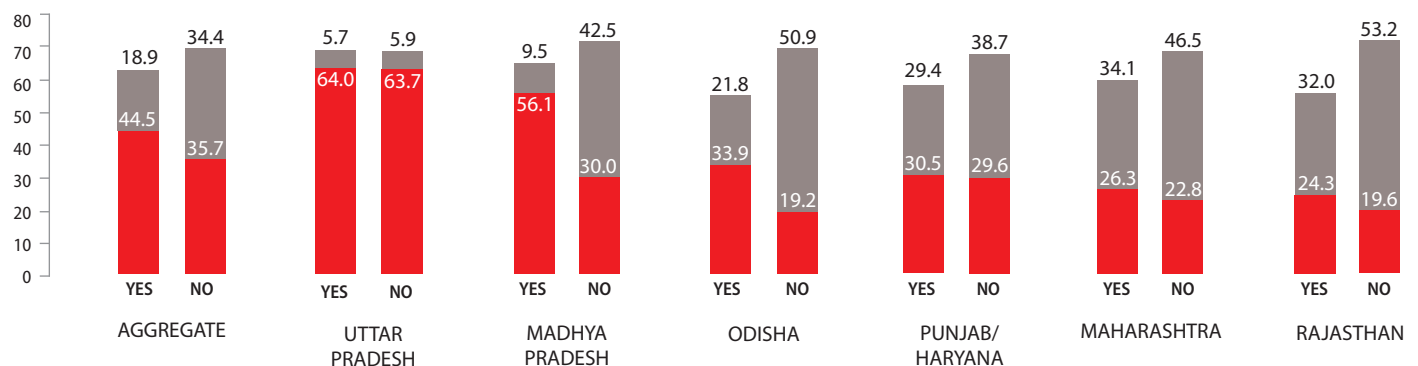


Figure 3: Masculinity and Economic Stress (Yes and No)

The predominant proportion of rigidly masculine men, are typically in the prime marriageable age

Changes in men's life situation can also trigger different expressions of masculinity. Wealth, occupation, education are all influencers as well. As shown in Table 1, our study shows that as men get older they show less rigid masculinity. The dominant proportion of rigidly masculine men, are typically in the prime marriageable age (18 – 24) maybe because the pressure to conform to that norm is the highest at this point. The exception is in Uttar Pradesh where younger men (18-24) are less rigidly masculine. Less educated (below 10th standard) men are also more rigidly masculine across all states. Completing senior secondary school or graduating from university significantly reduces the likelihood of being rigidly masculine. Men who live in rural areas are more likely to manifest rigid masculinity than those who live in urban areas, at the aggregate level.

Men, Part of the Solution not the Problem

Table 1: Masculinity and its Determinants (Multivariate regression: rigid vs equitable men)

PREDICTORS	Aggregate	Maharashtra	Madhya Pradesh	Odisha	Punjab/Haryana	Rajasthan	Uttar Pradesh
Age (Ref: 18-24 yrs)	↑ *	↑ *	↑ *	-	↑ *	-	↓ *
Education (Ref: Illiterate)	↑ **	↑ **	↑ **	↑ **	-	-	↑ **
Economic Stress (Ref: No)	↓ **	-	↓ **	↓ **	-	↓ **	-
Place of Residence (Ref: Urban)	↓ **	-	↓ *	↓ **	-	-	↓ *
Childhood Discrimination (Ref: Never)	↓ **	-	↓ **	-	↑ **	↓ **	↓ **
Influence of Father (Ref: Mother)	-	-	-	↓ **	-	↑ **	-

** Highly Significant (at 0.01 level of significance), * Significant (at 0.05 level of significance) ↑ More Equitable ↓ More Rigid

Masculinity and Intimate Partner Violence

Results from nationally representative samples in India show that 27% women report experiencing intimate partner violence within the past year. In this study as well at the aggregate level the prevalence of any form of intimate partner violence in the last year reported by men is approximately 34% and highest in Uttar Pradesh at 49% followed by Odisha at 46%. In terms of women's reporting in this study, the aggregate prevalence is 31% and highest for Odisha at 59%. In three states, Punjab and Haryana, Odisha and Rajasthan, women report higher perpetration of any form of violence compared to men. However, in terms of specific forms of violence men tend to report higher forms of sexual violence than women except in Odisha and Rajasthan.

Figure 4: Any form of violence (in the past 12 months)

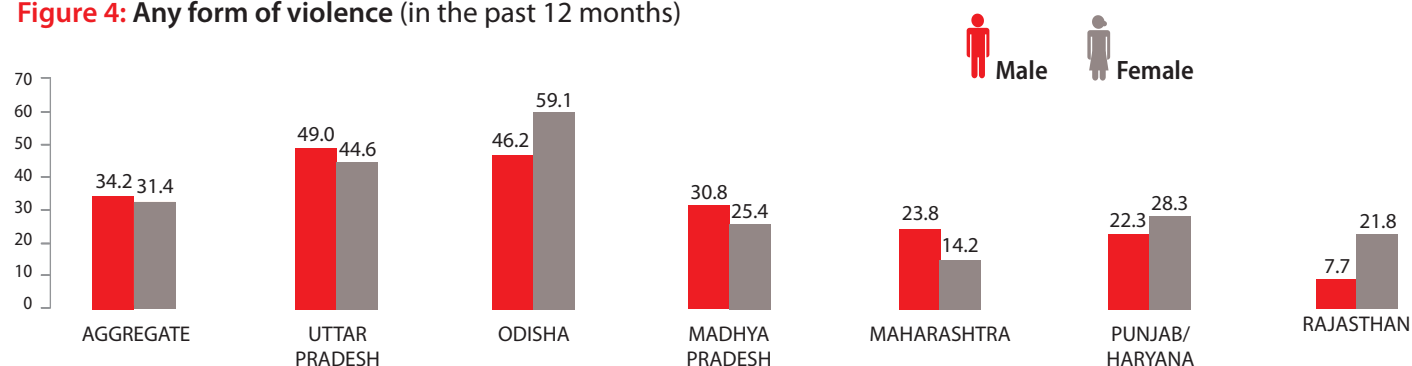


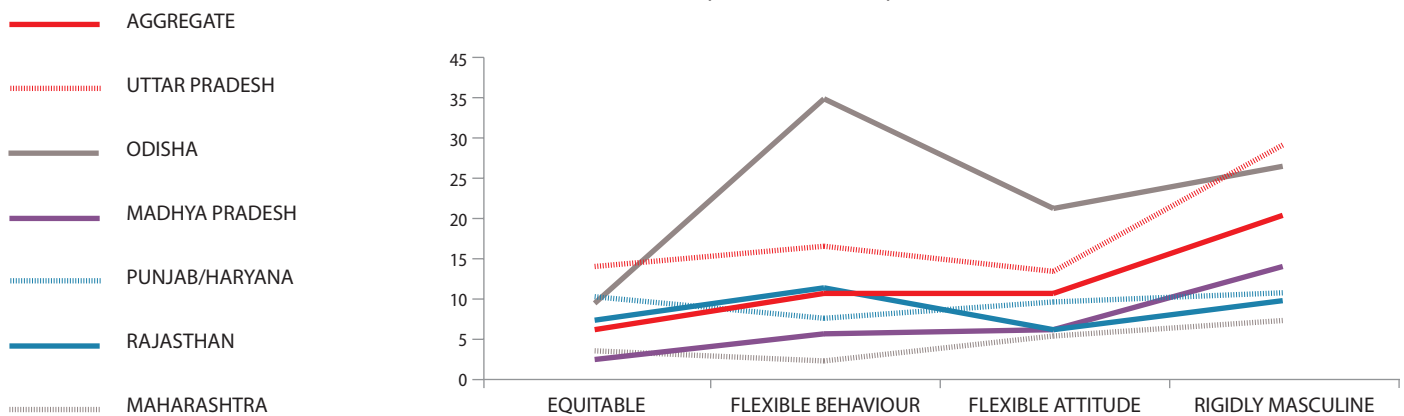
Table 2: Forms of Intimate Partner Violence (in the past 12 months)

STATES	EMOTIONAL		PHYSICAL		SEXUAL		TOTAL N	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Aggregate	21.0	17.5	15.5	21.2	16.1	7.0	6362	2627
Maharashtra	17.8	10.3	5.4	7.6	8.8	2.5	1050	443
Madhya Pradesh	18.8	21.1	10.0	11.7	14.1	3.5	1058	433
Odisha	28.0	49.4	23.8	30.0	14.9	22.2	1114	466
Punjab/Haryana	15.6	15.9	11.2	20.0	7.5	4.1	972	427
Rajasthan	14.6	14.7	9.7	7.6	10.0	11.7	1050	434
Uttar Pradesh	26.1	14.1	27.4	39.3	29.6	7.5	1118	424

Masculinity, Son Preference & Intimate Partner Violence

Men feel intense demands to uphold gender norms (e.g. appear strong, maintain control). Their aggressive behaviors may be reactions to the stress men experience in trying to abide by gender role expectations. On the aggregate men who were rigidly masculine were thrice more likely to perpetrate physical violence than equitable men. The difference between rigidly masculine and equitable men in terms of physical violence was significant in Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The difference between flexible attitudes men and rigidly masculine men is consistent in all states where the latter are more violent as would be expected except in Odisha and Rajasthan where the former are more violent than rigidly masculine men. This may be because of the distribution of occupation within these two categories in these three states with more rigidly masculine men working in the services sector. Masculinity is also highly predictive of perpetration of any form of intimate partner violence in the last year.

Figure 5: Masculinity and Men's Perpetration of Physical Violence against Intimate Partners (last 12 months)



Predictors of Intimate Partner Violence

Men who experience economic stress due to loss of job or being unemployed are more likely to perpetrate violence against their partners. The relationship between economic stress and intimate partner violence varies across the states. At an aggregate level and in most states, a higher percentage of men (40%) who have economic stress reported perpetrating violence against a partner as opposed to those who did not experience economic stress (27%). This difference was not significant at the aggregate level but was significant for several states excluding Punjab and Haryana. On the contrary, in Rajasthan those who experienced economic stress were significantly less likely to perpetrate any form of intimate partner violence.

In all states as well as at the aggregate level a significant and positive relationship is observed between intimate partner violence and experience of discrimination during childhood. At the aggregate those who have faced childhood discrimination are three times more likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence- across states the likelihood of this association is anywhere between two (Uttar Pradesh) to nine times (Odisha).

Predictably men who are educated are less likely to perpetrate violence across all states. This was significant at the aggregate level and in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Older men (older than 24 years) are less likely to be violent against their intimate partners and this is significant across all states.

Masculinity and Son Preference

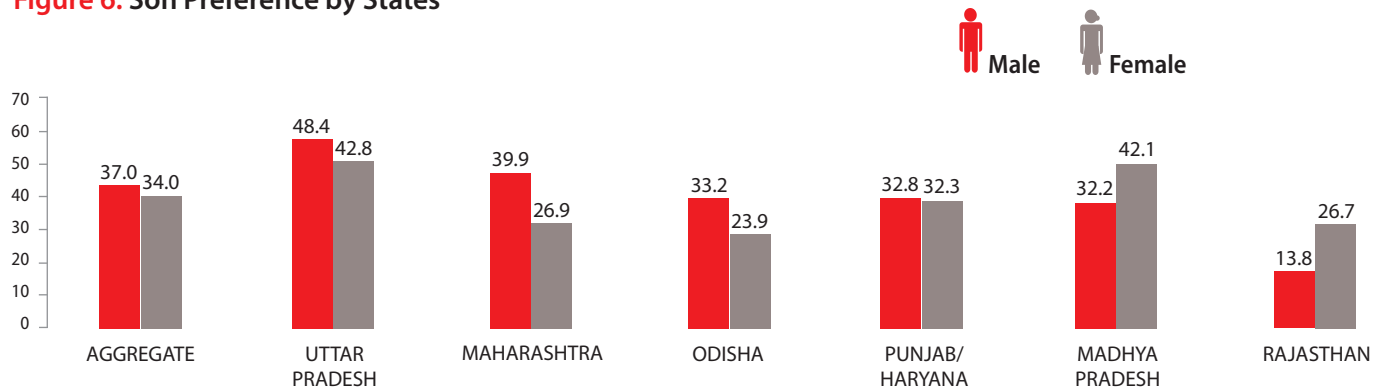
We measured son preference by developing an index made up of a series of statements to gauge support for the practice. For example, men scored their preferences on a range

Men, part of the solution not the problem

of attitudinal statements such as: *having a son is important for carrying on the family name, sons are needed for old-age care, having a son makes you a real man, having a daughter is unfortunate, not having a son is enough reason to divorce a wife or partner, it is reasonable to abort a pregnancy if a couple learnt they are going to have a girl child.*

Son preference is stronger for men than women across all states except Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh where men have lower son preference than women. On average, there is a negative effect of wealth on son preference, that is poorer men had higher son preference except for Rajasthan where we see an opposite trend.

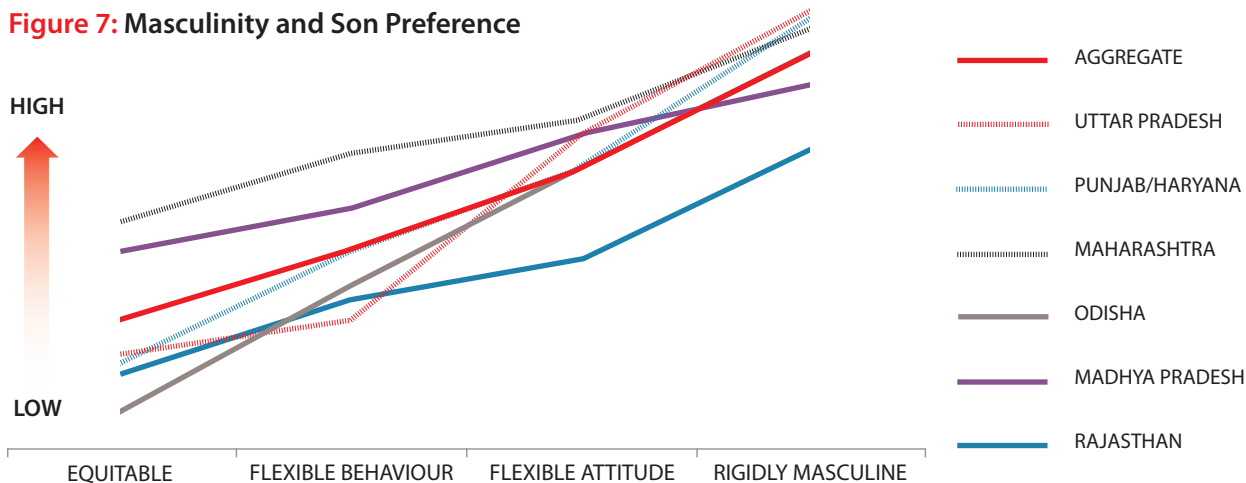
Figure 6: Son Preference by States



Men who are more rigidly masculine are much more likely to have preference for sons. The trend is very clearly in this direction across all states although the relationship is strongest in Odisha followed by Uttar Pradesh. At the aggregate level, 72% of rigidly masculine men have high son preference versus 19% of equitable men. The difference is significant across all states.

Those who have witnessed greater influence of fathers as key decision makers in their childhood have higher son preference than those respondents who have witnessed their mothers or female members making decisions alongside male members. These are significant associations in all states except Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. In Madhya Pradesh the relationship is significant although in the opposite direction.

Figure 7: Masculinity and Son Preference

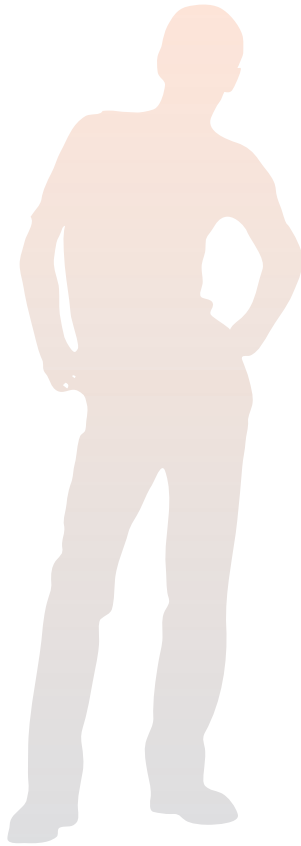


Experience of childhood discrimination is positively related with high preference for sons. This is significant at the aggregate level and in all states except Punjab and Haryana and Madhya Pradesh.

Masculinity, Son Preference & Intimate Partner Violence

POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

The study reinforces the finding that men can and do have an influence on gender equality and need to be treated as a part of the solution not the problem



IN OUR STUDY we have looked at how controlling men are in their intimate relations and whether they have attitudes that promote gender equality. The combination of these two characteristics creates different typologies of masculinity. Further masculinity is both predictive of high son preference as well as intimate partner violence with rigidly masculine men showing the most adverse behavior. About two fifths of the men overall in our sample are rigid and reinforce traditional norms of masculinity with consequences for both violence and son preference. A quarter of the men are equitable and the rest fall somewhere in between. Therefore not all men are uniform and these different types need to be understood and treated differently in program and policies that seek to attain gender equality.

The study confirms that masculinity is a critical determinant of son preference and it needs to be understood in its complexities of men's experiences of childhood discrimination, their perpetration of violence and gender expectations that are triggered by their economic role as providers. Masculinity is not only about attitudes but also includes how men behave to ensure their place in society, that in turn is shaped by gender relations that exist in their context. The study reinforces the finding that men can and do have an influence and need to be treated as a part of the solution to gender inequality.

The less than 20% of men who have controlling behavior and are highly equitable in their attitudes, need to be given more visible space in the discourse around men and masculinities. These men have equitable attitudes but are conforming to norms of masculinity. They need to be exposed to new understanding and definitions of rigid masculinity. They will need to be inspired by positive role model men who are considered strong and masculine (as men in sports) and yet are gender equitable in word and deed. With these men we need to challenge gender stereotypes and encourage more positive behavior.

The other set of men who are not controlling and have gender inequitable attitudes, the flexible behaviour men, need to understand why gender equality is important. The most challenging task is to work with rigidly masculine men as they do not espouse any values of equality. They have been exposed to norms and standards that are inequitable as well as their experiences have reinforced that pattern. Since these are highly masculine men with them we need to create and promote alternative masculine norm around gender equality, and focus on men's roles that are more caring, sharing, non-aggressive and respectful.

In order to work with men we need to utilize various platforms so that we can work at younger ages as well as in institutions where men work or congregate. We need to work with diverse institutions that uphold traditional norms of masculinity, be it workplaces, schools, panchayats or religious or social communities. The states that are different need their own differential emphasis. There may be need to undertake in-depth programmatic research in different states to inform context specific and relevant programs for men. Each cultural context will inspire its own ways in which masculinity is associated with power.

In developing more focused programs and policies on masculinity and gender equality, we must highlight what people actually do, not only what is expected or imagined. Policy that builds men's confidence to behave differently, and teaches men different ways to empower themselves, can help in reducing the perpetuation of forms of traditional masculinity and behaviors like violence against women. Thus boys and men can be very effective change actors for gender equality.

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