

MARDON WALI BAATEIN

A Research Project on Men, Masculinities, and SRHR

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उस ने मेरा और मुझे से मेरी बीवी आ जाती है। बीवी और तो छोड़ कर उस से शादी कर लूं। क्या करना चाहिए?
उस औरत से साफ कह दें कि सब्कर में अपना अच्छाभला चाची के साथ जिस्मानी संबंध बना कर आप ने अच्छा नहीं किया। आप फौरन यह मिलमिला बंद कर दें, चाची की धमकी से न डरें, क्योंकि औरतें ऐसी बातें बता कर खुद मुसोबत में फंस जाती हैं।

मैं 23 साल का हूँ और मुझे क्लि फिल्में देखने की लत गई है। 5-10 मिनट फिल्म देखते ही मैं पस्त हो हूँ, मैं क्या करूँ?
क्लि फिल्में देखना बुरी आदत लिहाजा, यह आदत छोड़ दें। बाद सही तरीके से हमबिस्तरी कर लें। ठीक हो जाएगा।



का नीकरा 5-7 साला बाद बेचम निराश होने की जरूरत। दोनों किसी माहिर डाक्टर करा सकते हैं।
मैं 19 साल का लड़का हूँ मैंने 26 साल की लड़की से शादी कर ली है, जिसे साधा



मैं ही पस्त हो जात करने पर मेरा अं क्या करूँ?
बेताबी और जल्दबाजी में हमबिस्तरी करने से आप फौरन पस्त हो जाते हैं। बगैर हड़बड़ी के काफी देर तक बीवी के अंगों से खेलने के बाद तसल्ली से हमबिस्तरी करने पर आप को बेहतर नतीजा मिलेगा। फौरन दोबारा कोशिश करने के बजाय थोड़ी देर रुक कर कोशिश करें, तब आप काफी देर तक टिक पाएंगे।

रहने नहीं दे रहे. आखिर घर से भाग कर आप हैं और उसी का नतीजा भु आप के पास यही राम काबिलीयत के खोजें और रह

मैं अपने गांव के एक आदमी से प्यार करती हूँ, मेरे भी बच्चे हैं और उस

Executive Summary



Approaches to interventions with men have shifted significantly since “male involvement” was adopted as a prime strategy to address reproductive and child health (RCH). Prior to this, interventions around gender-based violence (GBV) merely viewed men as perpetrators and focussed on engaging women alone. Ever since this shift, ‘male involvement’ has picked up pace, with the dominant approach shifting towards engaging men as partners in combating GBV and, ensuring women’s access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). However, many of these interventions merely reinforce men’s image as protectors. It has remained difficult to ensure deeper reflections and questioning of patriarchal norms among men. Motivated by these shortcomings, approaches to programming with men have recently started engaging with masculinities which underlie men’s perceptions, attitudes and actions. The benefit of such an approach, which recognises the plurality of masculine expression, is that we are now able to engage with patriarchy as a system that stratifies our entire society, affecting outcomes across genders.

Going one step further, transforming SRHR outcomes requires us to understand the multiple identities that combine with gender to articulate and/or accentuate its effects of stratification. Programming which borrows this intersectional lens stresses on the importance of devising multiple nodes of action for engaging gender identities with a rights-based perspective. With the hope of informing such programming both organisationally and within the sector, this exploratory research project asks –

How are masculinities constituted and expressed by young college-going men in urban Uttar Pradesh?

The broader insights from this research can further inform programmes that seek to engage men and masculinities across a variety of issues. Mardon Waali Baatein thus addresses the following objectives:

- To explore the intersections between gender, sexuality, caste, class and religion in discussions on masculinities
- To understand the impact of social media (especially Facebook and Whatsapp) on masculinities
- To explore the value of relationships such as friendships, love, marriage and infidelity for men
- To probe men’s perceptions around consent, sexual health, contraception and violence

This study was conducted across three urban locations in Uttar Pradesh - Lucknow, Benaras and Aligarh – using qualitative tools (focus group discussions, personal interviews and life histories) to engage over 80 young men (18-26 years).

“...mardaangi is connected to everything, this threat, that incites us to be men...”[It] starts at the house only.... Ever since we are born we are told that men don’t feel pain, men are not supposed to cry like girls, men are supposed to eat more than girls, men go out a lot more than girls.... Our family plays a big role in this.... And it always tells us that you have to be a certain kind of man to be successful in the eyes of society....”

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



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HIERARCHIES, THREATS AND CONTESTATIONS WITHIN MASCULINITIES

- Contestations within the hierarchy of masculinities does not always challenge the patriarchal system. It emerged from the respondents' narratives that patriarchy is reinforced through multiple masculine expressions which may not be the hegemonic ideal. Even the ones which are routinely vilified in popular discourse (e.g. Muslim men) and, are in constant tussle with the hegemonic ideal, may deepen patriarchal oppression.
- Instead of being positive reinforcement, the pervasiveness of contemporary masculine ideals across all spaces in our respondents' lives appeared to be an imposition on them that led to immense mental and emotional pressure.
- Respondents drew a strong link between preservation of status/self-image and sexual performance. They perceived that their inability to satisfy their partner might lead to negative consequences for their relationships, which further threatens their image among their peers and own selves.
- The inextricable link between caste and gender is articulated across the hierarchy of masculinities. An example of this is visible in caste-based norms that influence men's bodies: certain castes (like Thakurs, Pathans and Jaats) emphasise physique, style of walking, etc.
- Respondents belonging to minority religious identities stated that they face increasing threats to their sense of self in the current socio-political environment. Many strongly assert their masculinities along religious lines. It is also possible that this has led many of them to rationalise inequalities which are prescribed in their religious texts. In order to further bolster their social positions, some even antagonize masculinities as a means of aggrandizing their collective behaviors.
- The relationship between space and masculinities is causal in two ways – first, norms and perceptions lead to certain spaces being deemed masculine and others as feminine (such as the household, or the kitchen within the household) which reinstates patriarchal controls over mobility; second, legitimacy of norms and perceptions (what is masculine and what is not) is contingent on spaces and their meanings for people.

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INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA OVER MASCULINITIES

- Respondents from non-heteronormative sexualities repeatedly mentioned that they were able to organise, mobilize and advocate a great deal due to social media connectivity. Social media also allowed many respondents to choose their partners. Thus it seemed to be empowering for many respondents in specific ways.
- Social media requires young men to undertake measures akin to social image building. Respondents articulated immense pressure to conform to norms of gender and sexual expression online, especially in late adolescence.
- Respondents also used caste-specific masculine images and idioms in projecting their online selves. Facebook and WhatsApp seemed to have deepened caste-consciousness among young men through (sometimes involuntary) participation in caste-based groups on these platforms.
- Our sample had many men who routinely consumed unverified data and facts that are circulated through social media websites. Much of these are drawn upon in everyday conversations to preserve masculine status among peers.
- Several respondents revealed that social media strongly contributes to promoting ideas that vilify certain men and masculinities. Specific groups are described as second-grade citizens, 'threats to the nation', or most violently as "anti-nationals".
- Respondents also shared that social media is used to share non-consensual videos of sexual violence, often to project an image of virility and readiness for violence. Perpetration of sexual violence is also a way of "getting back" at those who are considered to rank lower in men's hierarchical schema. In recording videos of perpetrating sexual violence, young men continue to associate the pride and status of a community/household with female sexuality.

MEN'S CARE NETWORKS, ROMANCE AND 'THE SUITABLE WIFE'

- Contrary to contemporary programme knowledge, respondents articulated that friendships play important roles in their lives. Male-male friendships were reported to be a stable source of information and emotional support, especially in times of intense vulnerabilities. This goes against the perception that men are emotionally stoic among their peers.
- The analysis reaffirms that caste is a major influencer in the formation of relationships and associations. Caste solidarity is repeatedly relied upon by respondents in their everyday lives to influence allocation of resources and powers.
- It emerged from the narratives that having a girlfriend becomes a marker of status among young men, leading to a great deal of pressure for men who are unable to foster romantic relationships. Women figure in this masculine hierarchy insofar as they elevate men's social status.
- Respondents stated that relationships are a strong source of information and experience. They also recounted several pressures of being in relationships: the pressure of 'being a provider' and 'taking girlfriends out'.
- Some men reported being wary of developing romantic relationships after having experienced dhoka (betrayal) by their romantic interests. The nature of this dhoka, however, remains largely ambiguous. It is possible that men interpret threats to their masculine status as dhoka: feelings of rejection are understood as their entitlements being taken away and, has little to do with their romantic interest or their actions.
- Respondents from specific backgrounds stated that law affects their choices and decisions around marriage in specific and direct ways. Several of them from lower caste or working-class backgrounds added that they would avoid getting married out of fear that the woman's family would lodge (fraudulent) police complaints against the men to end their relationship.
- Analysis reveals that characteristics of an ideal wife for men are contingent on their own status and traits and are in sharp contrast with the image of an ideal girlfriend. Decisions regarding whom to marry depend on how well men would be able to exert control over their wife. According to respondents, marrying 'upwards' compromises on their entitlement to partner control causing threats to their masculinities. This is contrast with the case of romance, where developing a relationship 'upwards' is seen to elevate men's status and self image.

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SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS, SAFE SEX AND CONSENT




- Respondents' narratives revealed that sexual behaviour and perceptions around sex did not always conform to the hegemony of heteronormativity. This also strengthens the idea that there is little correlation between sexual behaviours and sexual identities. What is needed then is to unpack the circumstances which legitimize and materialize behaviours that don't conform to sexual identity. Hence there is a need for programming to move beyond identifying beneficiaries solely through categories such as "sexual identity" and rather seek to target the entire terrain of youth sexuality in order to ensure safe and consensual sex.
- Respondents recounted multiple actors who guide their youth and adolescent sexual knowledge and sexualities such as older cousins, seniors from schools (especially in the case of boarding school) and, local CD/DVD shops which double as suppliers of local pornographic content.
- Respondents' ideas of safe sex is limited to ensuring secrecy and privacy. This is intimately tied to the image of a "good boy" as someone who is devoted towards his family and towards earning respect, status and privilege through education and employment. Men take great precautions to preserve these social codes.
- It emerged that partner control in romantic relationships seems to be based on a bargain which men make. It stands so long as status is maintained by having a girlfriend who is monogamous, 'beautiful', makes other men envious and is submissive to men's demands. This bargain is struck off when the woman exercises her choice of not being in the relationship and their actions are deemed to be dhoka (betrayal).
- The level of impunity in a marriage is very high as men are socialized into believing that they are entitled to ideal wives who are 'primarily responsible for the household, and the needs of children, him and his parents' needs'. Marriage is also considered to be a 'license' to have sex whenever they want without any regard to the choices or agency of the wives.
- It was clear that many respondents did not think consent was important in the case of all sexual relations; the identity of the woman saying "No" becomes crucial for the way it is perceived by young men and their reactions to it. In these cases, consent becomes less and less important and the perception of having been rejected leads to incidence of aggression, verbal abuse and physical and mental violence.



VIOLENCE AND MASCULINITIES

- Respondents' narratives revealed that norms around behaviour, personality, and ideal gender identities entitle them to exercise violence in the everyday. Violence becomes a normalised means of subjugating women, especially within the household, and violence upon women as a means of dishonouring another man/community/family.
- They also revealed that violence in public spaces comes from a sense of protecting your entitlements and preserving masculine hierarchies. This is true in the case of both violence perpetrated against other men or women, however it is much more amplified in the case of women. Violence against women in public spaces may be a tool to dealing with rejection and a lost sense of self by 'setting the hierarchy straight'.
- From one of the FGDs it became clear that the persistent rise in cases of gender-based violence has resulted in the masculinization of programme strategies to tackle violence. Many grassroots organisations working on violence prevention have now adopted violence itself as a strategy to 'knocking sense' into men and preventing future incidences.



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The YP foundation is a youth development organisation that builds young people's feminist and rights based leadership on issues of gender, sexuality, health, education and civic participation. We work to ensure young people's access to information, services and rights and builds their abilities to lead personal and social transformation. You can learn more about our work at **theypfoundation.org**

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