

## **Real Man Does: Premarital Sex, Masculinity and Sex risk among male workers in an Indian Slum.**

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Abstract:

The paper throws a light on the process of male gender value construction and its risk associates. It says how the premarital sexual history contributes in shaping the masculinity and in what way this masculinity endangers the male sexual behavior. The data has been collected through twenty-two in-depth interviews followed by survey of one hundred married male workers of a slum in Orissa. Findings show that "male sexual role" and "status within family" are perceived as two most important components of masculinity. It is also believed that male dominancy in domains like "family, 'sex role', "community" and "physical appearance" is expected from a real man. Further it is revealed that premarital sexual encounter influences the construction of male gender role that holds male sexual image closely. In ahead, this stereotypical masculine attitude endangers the male sexual behavior in the context of HIV infection.

Keywords: *masculinity, premarital sex, condom, sex risk, intoxication*

### **Introduction**

In the age of AIDS pandemic the situation of developing countries like India gradually gets more vulnerable for spreading up the virus. India is experiencing a hasty increase in HIV and other sexual transmitted infections. UNAIDS (2000) figure placed India in the highest absolute number of HIV infected population. It estimates four million Indians are living with the virus. An ample researches and discussions opine that the sexual mode of transmission is highly responsible for the rapid infection rate in many developing countries including India. Paradoxically this important aspect of HIV/AIDS,

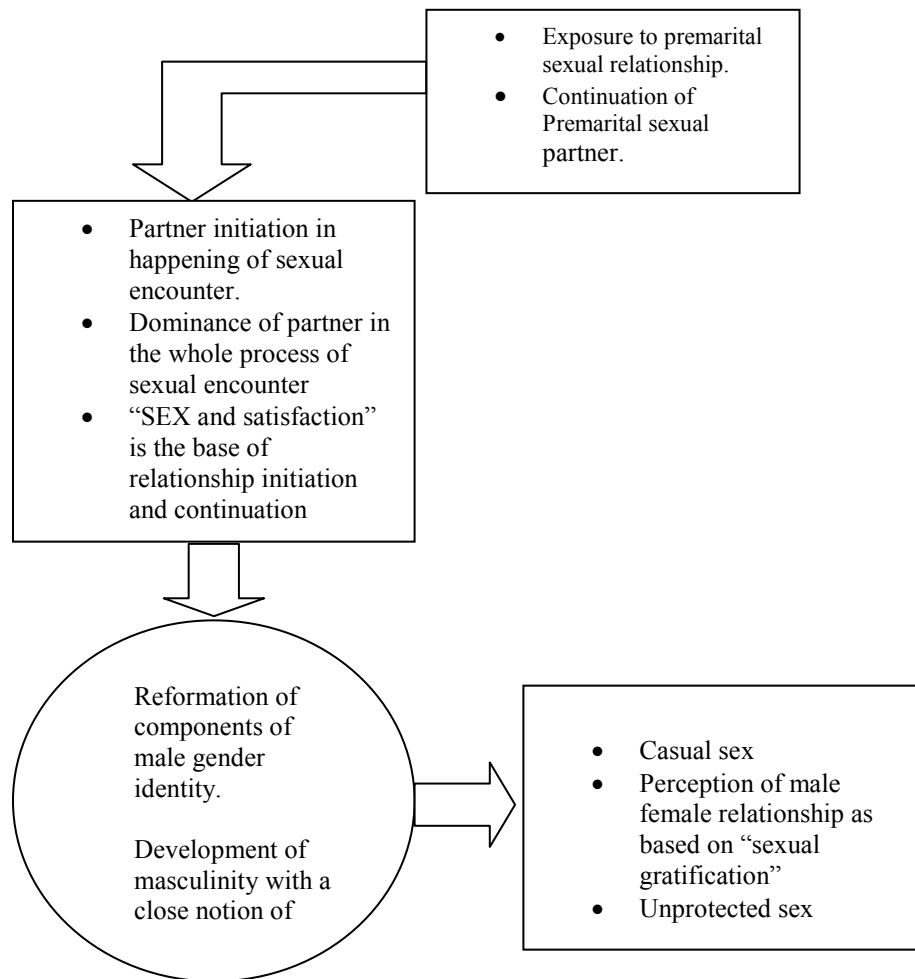
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sex and sexuality is always less talked and veiled on the Indian soil. At this context it is a need to identify the susceptibility attached to the sexual behaviour. While talking about sexual behaviour, in a patriarchal set up it is equally important to explore it from men's point of view. Although there is now considerable agreement that gender is central to any understanding of male-female sexuality and the virus transmission, the social values surrounding manhood have been little examined (Mane and Aggleton 2001). The limited existing researches have focused on women in view of the disproportionate impact of HIV epidemic and their vulnerability due to the gender. Men have been conspicuously absent in discussion around sexuality (Hawks et al 2002) and its vulnerability despite of the fact that in a patriarchal society understanding the male gender dynamics is an apex priority for any behavioral issue. However the post ICPD revolution has generated the need to address the Men's sexuality and reproductive issue for achieving the over all sexual and reproductive well being. A large number of articles (Aguma,19996;Clelnad,1993;Davis et al,1987;Green,1990;Khan et al,1997a,1997b, Ringheim,1993;Schuler et al,1995;UNFPA,1995) and growing number of conferences ,research projects and debates on this subject bear testimony to the importance of the issue, both from programmatic point of view and as a process for bringing about gender balance in men's and women's reproductive rights and responsibilities (Khan,M.E and Patel,B 1997). This internalization has boosted up the researches and talk about male gender, sexuality, responsibility and over all male role as a sexual partner. Yet studies have shown benefits of such approach. In south Africa violent control over women, demand for "flesh to flesh" sex and celebration of multiple partners is closely associated with dominant masculinity (Campbell, 1997, Wood and Jeweks 2001, Hunter, 2002). Similarly in Indian context though there are few studies, the consensus prevails that the unhealthy male sexual image or sexual role expectation is closely associated with the masculinity. Having children and sexual prowess emerge as critical component of masculinity in Rajasthan (Kumar 2002).In Gujrat (Khan et al 198) masculinity is equated with the forced sex with wife in case they failed to oblige the husband's sexual demand, and the pregnancy soon after marriage is also another critical component of man hood. They also find the wide reporting of unsafe sex and a less use of condom.

Masculinity acts a driving force in many aspects of men's behaviour, specifically the sexual behaviour. Further these male gender values are socially constructed with the interactions of men's lifestyle, culture and over his entire encounter with social environments. Particularly, the perception of sexual image as a component of masculinity largely depends upon the early sexual history of an adolescent youth. In this out set the present paper tries to look into the interlinking of the premarital sexual episode and its effect on construction of the components of masculinity which endangers the male sexual behaviour.

### **The concept**



## **The Organization**

In its first phase of discussion the paper unfolds the perception of masculinity .in second stage it shows the linkage of masculinity with the behavioural pattern including sexual and how the hegemonic masculinity tags the risk string to it. . Further it reveals the association of premarital sexual encounter with the hegemonic masculinity construction. In latter the paper points out the potential vulnerable nodes in male sexuality and gender identity on basis of which it recommends the intervention strategies.

## **Participants and procedure**

Broadly this paper attempts to see the interlinking of male non marital sexual debut, gender construction and its behavioral associates. The data presented here derived from a primary study on sexual behaviour of male workers carried out in a slum in Orissa, which is demographically important state in India. The chosen slum is the largest one in the capital city of Orissa. As the city is expanding, there is a huge demand for migrant workers from different parts of India. The study has been conducted in this outset in the year of 2002. Within the administrative jurisdiction of Bhubaneswar , there are eight numbers of big and small slums in current situation. The slum *saliasahee* is one of the big slums in the city. In the second step out of the twenty two *Sahees* (hamlets) two were selected randomly. Keeping the sensitivity of the issue before sight, the purposive sample technique found to be the suitable one. The sample size was decided to be hundred and from each *sahee* first fifty married male migrants in the determined age group were selected. Selection of the respondents for the in-depth interviews was also done in the similar fashion.

### ***Construction of the composite variable of masculinity:***

Apart from other open ended questions the survey has a section that asks about self perception of masculinity. A number of responses were recorded for the above asked question. These responses show a wide variance in perception of masculinity. This broad range of responses covers four major domains of life, such as in social aspect how a man should be, as well as in familial, cultural and sexual aspect what should be a man's role. This four domain and its variables will be discussed in separate section. The domain has nothing to do with the composite variable construction. After testing and improving the reliability of the responses (alpha value=.7098) fourty two variables were finalized for

calculation. The next exercise was to select and cluster the variables according to their direction. The categorization of the forty two responses was made into three ranks on the basis of their closeness to the rigidity<sup>2</sup> of the masculinity. Each of the three categories contains fourteen different responses of masculinity of similar degree. The responses which reflect the high risky attitude was scored “two”, the responses lie under mediocre values were scored “One” and the other fourteen responses that go in a different direction from macho attitude were assigned as score of “zero”. The weight was given to each respondent according to their responses. The value of the clustered responses lies between “twenty eight” to “zero”. After observing the distribution three categories, high, mediocre and low were constructed. The value of Low category ranged from “zero to nine”, mediocre category ranged from “ten to nineteen” and the High category ranged from “twenty to twenty eight”. This composite variable of masculinity is used further knowing the effect of masculinity and behavioral dimensions.

### **Salient Findings**

The study population was from a typical socioeconomic slum dwelling characteristics. Major chunks of the population are engaged in daily waged construction work. Looking at the over all background profile of the respondents, a majority of the respondents belong to the age group of thirty five and above. Approximately one fourth of the male workers are illiterate. Only seventeen percent of the respondents have completed middle school or higher education. A large sect (more than eighty five percent) of the slum dwellers are of Hindu religion. Only fourteen percent are from other religions Nearly about two thirds of the respondents are having a age gap of five years between themselves and their wives. For the rest (one third) of the slum dwellers the husband wife age gap is more than five years. Less than one tenth of the male workers have no living children. Another one tenth of them have only sons. Half of the respondents reported to have both living sons and daughters. The rest (twenty eight percent) are reported to be the father of only daughter children.

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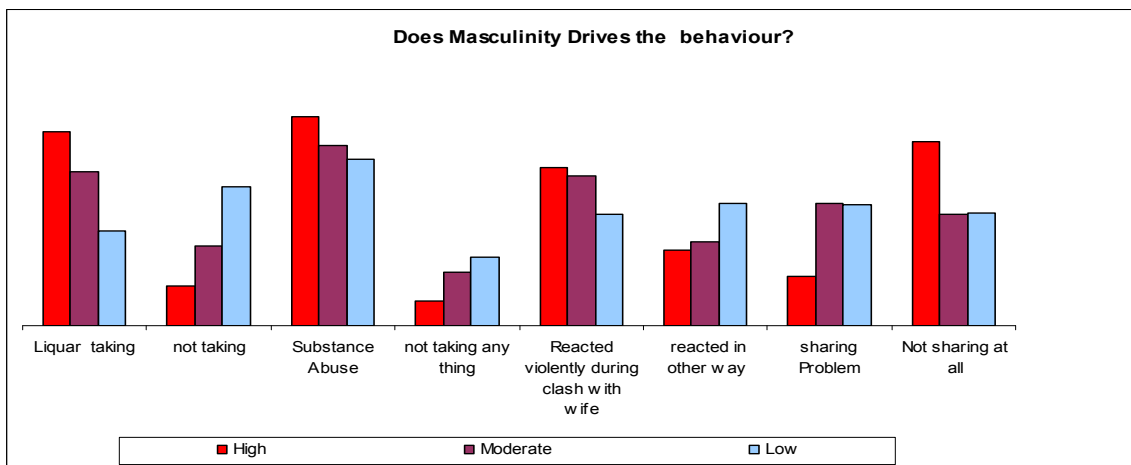
<sup>2</sup> *In this study the perceived male characteristics that reflect the traditional machismo is considered as risky attitude .Further in this paper it is assumed that the higher the risky factor attached to the perceived male gender role higher is the masculinity degree.*

***Unfolding Masculinity:***

The domains like “Physical”, “Familial”, “Social” and “Cultural” are visualized as the arena of performing masculinity by the men of the study population. However it is interesting that within each domain a bipolar expression is found. One type of response is giving the message of traditional macho scent where as the other one is inclined towards a sensitized and rational attitude. About two thirds of them describe the masculinity as muscular appearance, physical resistance power where more than half of responses saw the working skill and ability as an indicator of masculinity. More than two thirds of the male migrants saw masculinity should enables man to act as a controlling mechanism within family set up. At the same time half of the male argue a masculine man should as a responsible member of the family. Almost all the respondents described masculinity as a cause of strong sexual urge where as less than one fourth said a man should respect the marital values.

A twenty eight year old, who drives taxi often go for long trips responded “man have to release that... it is not important each time your wife should be there...a man is pure always.... if you don’t get an opportunity to have sex you cannot concentrate on work...” Another twenty two year old construction worker said “a man should satisfy the women on bed. I have to do sex till she cries out otherwise she will think I am not a man.”

***Masculinity and the behavioural pattern:***



Findings revealed that there is a reinforcement between high masculinity orientation and unhealthy behavioural pattern. Liquor intake is positively related with the masculinity index value. Similarly those who are reporting their perception of masculinity in a

hegemonic way are found to contribute largely to substance abuse. One thirty one year old unskilled worker shares his view, "...what is harm is taking liquor?... we are eating more hazardous food than this...staying in more risk places... nothing is happening to us!... what liquor can do ?..." . Another twenty five year old youth says, "...alcohol is man's drink...u feel like lion when you take it..."similarly the domestic subjugation of women is justified as a man's duty. One twenty nine year old skilled construction workers justifies , "...if husband will not say *right* and *wrong* to is wife then why he is husband?...if you give a little chance to women you cant control them..."

### ***Masculinity and Sex Risk***

Commercialization of sexual gratification is not uncommon in human society, however the risk attached to it the commercial sector of sex is universally accepted. More than seventeen percentages of the male workers having a high masculinity index value are going to the commercial sex workers. Where as the percentage among mediocre and low masculinity index value holders is seven and five respectively. The quantitative findings show that the higher the masculinity value greater the chance of availing the sexual service opportunities. The qualitative findings also do support the findings of survey. A wide range of justification came out for going to the commercial sex workers. Many of them are in a defensive tone. One twenty five year old worker in contrutcion field often visits commercial sex worker for sexual gratification, says "...doing *kama* (sex)with *dhandabali*( sex worker) certainly is not good...it affects your familial relation ...but a man needs some sexual entertainment, else you cant work...nothing happens ...all the diseases are for *paisabala*( wealthy) people...", A thirty one year driver a frequent visitor of commercial sex worker says, "...sex with wife does not give that much satisfaction...you can do sex with a sex worker in the way you want...the way you see in films..."

Apart from it the soliciting and accepting the casual sex out side of the marital arena is also equally at risk. Among the respondents those who hold a high masculinity attitude a majority (more than fifty eight percent) are going for sex with other regular or casual partner. Where as the corresponding percentage for mediocre masculinity is seven . None from the low masculinity value holder are going for an extramarital or casual sexual adventure. Such risk taking behaviour shows the association with the male gender value

while the statements like “to response the sexual invitation of a women is a man’s duty”, “a male should have sex with many women” came out form the respondents. One construction skilled worker who employs the women labourer in his project defends about his sexual negotiation with his co workers, “...what harm in it?...only due to me she gets a regular income...she is also agree to this relation...actually she enjoys my company...”Another thirty one year slum dweller who woks in a garage says, “...sometimes it is not good to show a *bholabhala*(innocent) face...if you don’t do it you are a *mahia*( gay) before her eyes...you should accept the invitation...”

Safe sex is always barred due to the lack of inhibition. Liquor intake or any kind of intoxication is the major cause of going for unsafe sex irrespective of sexual orientation.. Among the respondents who hang a high masculinity index value twenty percent are reported to be intoxicated during their sexual encounter where the reference period is six months prior to survey. The percentage goes down to fourteen and eleven in case of mediocre and low masculinity rank holders. The pressure to perform is found to be main cause for such at risk behaviour. The statements like “it gives courage”, one can hold your ejaculation for long” etc show the gender value endorsement to it. Apart from it the concept of *maza* (fun), “winning the game” are also few justification for such kind of male pathological behvaiour.

#### ***Premarital Sex and Masculinity:***

Not only the current sexual behaviour is guided by the structured gender identity but the latter also gets reshaped by the sexual history Tthe importance of sexual image and the constructed sexual notion certainly rooted in the past experience and encounter. Findings of the study indicate a relatively higher degree of premarital sex (twenty two percent) is reported though it is a taboo in Indian culture. The respondents who had a history of non marital sexual debut, among them nearly about sixty percent report their masculinity in a hegemonic way. Through out the findings it is found that this hegemonic masculinity attitude or high masculinity value holders are acceptors of the risk taking behvaiour. Further, thirty two percent fall under the mediocre and only nine percent of the respondents who had a history of premarital sex fall under low masculinity index value. It has been also revealed that while decomposing the high masculine, risk takers the number of male who have premarital sexual history is much more than the others. In the similar way it was found that the male having an exposure to premarital sex perceives the



masculinity that hold the sexual image closely and in a endangered way. This strong nexus is well understood when we look back the entire premarital sexual happening. In most of the cases the initiation was from the partners, who were comparatively older. The unexpected occurrence of male sexual debut and partner's forceful-like move is a common characteristic in entire episode of premarital sex. To quote some in-depth findings, '...I was shocked when she suddenly put hand my *lungi* (atypical Indian men's clothing, it is like a wrap up around the waist) I could not decide what to do I got afraid as it was a daytime. I got up and wanted to move. But she caught hold my hand and said that no need to be afraid as her husband was not there we were along that time. She said she would die if I say no to her ...", "...She took me to the *khala* (place near the paddy field used for winning the paddy ) and hugged me. I pushed away as she my friend's *nuabou* (sister-in-law)... she cried and said how her husband does not care her and how she loves me...". Another saying reveals the perception about woman sexuality which is major shadow factor for construction of male gender image, "...she used to pamper me a lot...she always wanted me to make love when her husband was not around...I was in wrong impression ...she was not in love with me...what she needed from e is sex only sexual satisfaction..."The nature of first intimate encounter forces them to perceive the male sexual image as an important need factor for the counter gender. It drives them to define the man-woman relationship giving emphasis to sexual base.

Finally this paper discusses detail the male vulnerability and the male subjectivity to the social construction process. It throws a light to possible intervention ways which may lead to a better sentient world where men will be free from scandals.



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