

# Formation of Traditional Gender Attitudes among Young Married Women in Rural North Dinajpur, West Bengal: Does Religion Play A Role?

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## Abstract

*Despite the prevalence of gender inequality in developing countries like India, little attention has been paid on the process of gender norm acquisition among its population. This study thus, addresses the gap by exploring formation of gender attitude among women (specifically about their appropriate roles and their rights as well as legitimacy of domestic violence) taking religious affiliation and other possible determinants into account. Data was obtained and analyzed from a population-based survey among 500 young married women (18-30 years), Hindu and Muslim, in rural North-Dinajpur district of West Bengal, India. The results indicated a fairly patriarchal view of gender relations whereby respondents supported traditional division of roles between men and women, inequitable attitude towards girls and justified wife beating on various grounds irrespective of religious affiliation. However, the Muslim women had somewhat more non-egalitarian attitude. We found that higher autonomy among the respondents' mothers (decision making and mobility) led to more egalitarian gender attitude whereas adverse experiences like witnessing parental violence during childhood led to more traditional attitude. Indicators of women's empowerment such as higher age at marriage, higher education, mass media exposure and engagement in income generating activities were pacifiers in the development of non-egalitarian gender attitudes. Policy implications of the findings are also presented and discussed.*

## Keywords

*Traditional gender attitude; sex role stereotyping; girls; wife beating; religion*

## Background

Gender gaps especially favoring men are prevalent in South Asian countries where societies are inherently gender stratified, characterized by patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence and patriarchal decision making which isolate women even within their households (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001; Jayachandran, 2015). In this context, India stands out for its unequal opportunities and outcomes for women. Son preference and daughter discrimination are widespread in India in varying degrees across the socio-cultural and geographic spread of the country which reflect the most powerful and fundamental manifestation of gender inequality. Male children in India have a central identity within the family, as they inherit property, carry forward family lineage and perform specific family rituals (Daininger et. al., 2013; Jain, 2014). Indeed, societal importance given to boys has translated itself into deep-

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seated discriminatory practices against women and girls, and an enormous pressure to produce sons having devastating effects on the former's development, health and wellbeing.

The question here is, where do these gender preferences and gender attitudes come from? One study points towards deep historical and cultural roots of gender attitude prevailing in Indian societies that has sustained itself through generations (Dhar, Jain & Jayachandran, 2015). The transmission of ideologies, orientations, and behavior across generations can be explained by the socialization of young boys and girls, early childhood experiences and social learning, either in terms of role modeling or verbal exhortations. Studies argue that a mother's own identity in the family during her childrearing years influences her daughter's gender attitudes (Moen, Erickson & Dempster-McClain, 1997). This transmission of attitudes from one generation to the next is explained in many studies from developed countries and is often argued in terms of social transmission of behavior where the behavior of one individual enhances the likelihood that a second individual will adopt a behavioral trait characteristic of the first (Thornton, Alwin & Camburn, 1983; Glass, Bengston & Dunham, 1986; Kulik, 2002; Fernandez, 2007). The masculine sex-role stereotypes, negative and traditional attitudes toward women, non-egalitarian marital role expectations, and familial patriarchal beliefs internalized through a lifelong process of socialization act as a precursor to their future actions (Haj-Yahia, 1998, 2003; Zakar, Zakar & Kraemer, 2013). Studies on domestic violence indicate that at the individual level, especially in case of men, witnessing violence between parents or caregivers and being abused as a child have very strong effects on their future behavior (Kalmuss & Straus, 1984; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986). The social learning theory (Bandura, 1971) suggests that violent behavior is learnt through personal observation and experience of violence during childhood. However, the intergenerational transmission of gender attitude is different in the developing countries which suggests a very strong influence of older generations because of the existence of large joint families and parental control over their children's lives (Dhar, Jain & Jayachandran, 2015). A recent study in Haryana, India suggested that parents were responsible for transmitting gender attitudes to their children (Dhar, Jain & Jayachandran, 2015).

Studies also suggest that formation of gender attitude may be influenced by religious doctrine (Psacharopoulos & Tzannatos, 1989; Seguino 2011). Studies in India point to the role of religion in determining the status of women (Basu, 2004) reflected in its distinctive rituals and customs. Hindus and Muslims, the two dominant religious groups in India, have big differences in their attitudes and behaviors towards women (Basu & Amin, 2000; Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001; Bhat & Zavier, 2003; Borooah & Iyer, 2005). Studies argue that Muslim women have an inferior role in their family and community (Bhat & Rajan, 1990; Roy & Niranjana, 2004; Kulkarni & Algarajan, 2005). According to Chattopadhyay and Goswami (2007), Das and Chattopadhyay (2012), Hindu women in West Bengal have greater autonomy and decision-making powers compared with their Muslim counterpart. On the other hand, demographic indicators such as higher sex ratio, lower levels of female infant mortality among Muslims confirm that son preference and daughter aversion are less pronounced among Muslims. Therefore, girls face less risks in Muslim communities as they do not view the birth of a girl with the same degree of dismay as Hindus (Bhat & Zavier, 2003; Borooah & Iyer, 2005). However, the concept of gender relations is multidimensional and complex, especially in its relationship with religious identity (Desai & Temsah, 2015) and therefore, there is no reason to assume that they will interact in the same way everywhere over different geographical locations. The concept of region, place of residence and the local contextual factors are put forth to demonstrate how Muslim women in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia are better than the minority Hindus in terms of their gender behavior and having greater autonomy (Desai & Temsah, 2015; Morgan, 2002). There is evidence from Hindu scriptures as well on the social doctrine about true womanhood

which is centered around the concept of 'stri-dharma or pativrata-dharma' (duty of wives towards their husbands and his family) and how the identity of married women is associated with that of their husbands; women's lives are confined to serving their husbands and his family, bearing and rearing children for the continuation of their blood line (Tharakan & Tharakan, 1975; Chakravarti, 1993).

There has been a growing interest in gender research in India especially over the past few decades mainly driven by prevailing gender inequality. However, it is surprising that very little attention is paid on the acquisition of gender attitude among young people in developing countries like India. The only pioneer study that focused on gender role acquisition during adolescence is the Youth in India: Situation and Need (2006-07), a sub-nationally representative survey in six Indian states. To the extent that gender-specific socialization of young boys and girls and formation of gender attitude in Indian context are explained theoretically in the studies on women's status and domestic violence (Visaria, 2008; Jejeebhoy, 1998; 2002), there is lack of empirical evidence of the process. Understanding gender role acquisition is important for many reasons, especially for what it may foretell adult behavior, including reproductive behavior, access to and control over resources, especially relating to investments in children, physical mobility and labor force participation of women, and the family relationships the boys and girls will eventually form (Mensch, Ibrahim, Lee & el-Gibaly, 2003). This study is an attempt to close this research gap by examining the formation of gender attitudes among young women in India. Hinduism and Islam as the two most dominant religions in India are culturally diverse. Therefore, the study also addresses the question: does religion play any role in the acquisition of gender attitude by young women?

## Objective

The main objectives of this study were to:

1. Investigate gender attitude among young married women in terms of their 'appropriate' roles of women in society, rights of women and girls and 'legitimacy' of domestic violence,
2. Evaluate if there is any difference between Hindus and Muslims regarding attitudes towards appropriate male-female behaviors, and
3. Investigate factors associated with married women's gender attitude with a special focus on their religious affiliation.

## Methods

### 1. Study area

Data was obtained from a primary survey conducted in West Bengal, an eastern state of India. In terms of human development, West Bengal secures a medium position among all Indian states. In Dyson and Moore's classic work (1983), West Bengal has been referred to as an outlier on the basis of its overall performance in various socio-demographic parameters such as sex ratio, fertility and gender gap in mortality among others. However, results of the current survey show around 40% of ever married women aged 15-49 years reported to have experienced physical/sexual/emotional violence perpetrated by their husbands. In addition, more than 40% of ever married women aged 15-49 justified the act of wife beating for various reasons. Only 24% of currently married women participated in the decision making

(second lowest in the country after Rajasthan). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect a significant variation between macro level and micro level studies in the situation of women within the state. Hence, the present study proposed a detailed micro level exploration of different dimensions of woman's status through studying different stages of her life in this state.

The survey was carried out in the rural areas of North Dinajpur district. It has been designated as one of the most backward districts in the state and the country by Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2006. In this district, 88% of the total population live in rural areas and which are characterized by low sex ratio, low effective female literacy rate and a high gender gap in literacy rates (below state average). According to Census of India (2001), this district has one of the largest concentration of Muslim population - 47.4% while the rest were Hindus. There exists a considerable gap between these two religious groups in terms of basic indicators of women's empowerment: sex ratio, female literacy rate and female work participation. Therefore, this area was considered suitable for addressing the objectives of the proposed study.

## **2. Data**

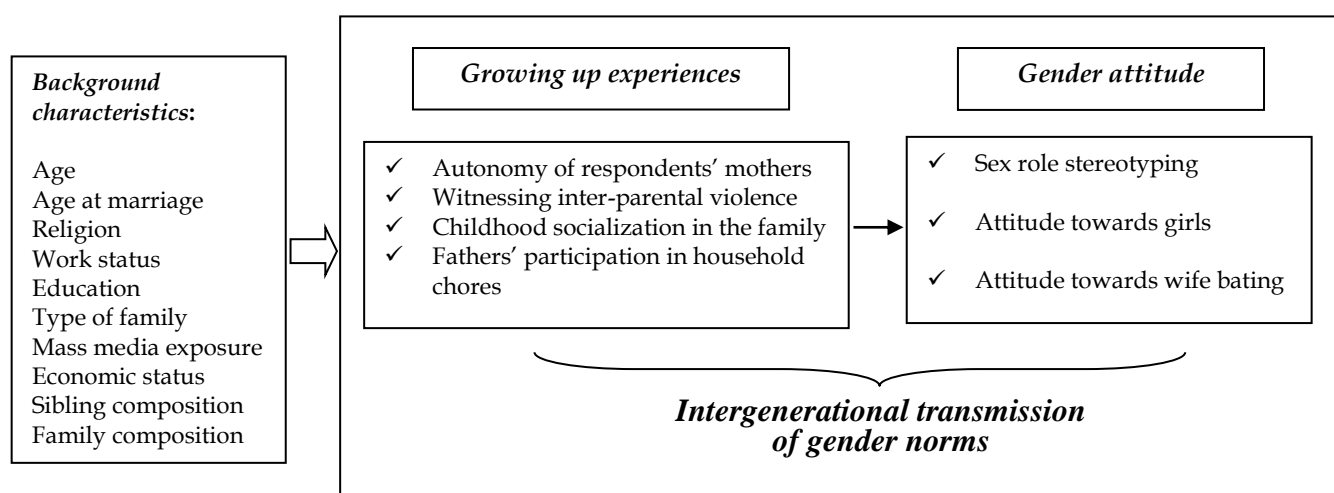
Data was gleaned from a primary survey of young married women aged between 18 and 30 years. A sample of 500 young women (250 Hindu and 250 Muslim), who were married for at least two years and co-residing with their husbands at the time of survey, were interviewed during April to August 2015. A multistage sampling design was adopted. In the first stage, Raiganj [66.4% Hindus & 32.7% Muslims (Census, 2001)] and Islampur [28.7% Hindus & 71.1% Muslims (Census, 2001)], the two sub-divisions of the district, were purposively selected out of a total of 9 CD Blocks, primarily based on the dominant religious group. In the second stage, 10 villages were identified based on their religious composition and distance from the nearest town. In the final stage, 50 households were selected from each village through systematic random sampling.

The interviews were conducted using various sets of structured questionnaires. All ethical protocols were adhered to and ethical clearance was obtained from The Students Research Ethics Committee (SREC) of International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai. Before commencing the field work, written permissions were obtained from concerned authorities in the district head-quarters as well as villages. The purposes of the survey, procedures of interview, associated risks and benefits were thoroughly explained to each one of the participants and their immediate family members and informed consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted. Complete confidentiality was assured to the respondents. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary and without any monetary compensation.

## **3. Analytical approaches**

### *Conceptual framework*

A conceptual framework was developed to represent the possible linkages among different variables included in the study (Figure 1). The main outcome of interest for the present study was women's gender attitude. It was conceptualized that women's gender attitude would be determined through the interplay of various factors such as their basic background characteristics as well as their growing up experiences.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework

It was assumed that experiences acquired during childhood, as an important intermediate factor, might influence women's perception and attitude towards gender; this process was termed as 'intergenerational transmission' of gender attitude. Different variables included in the study are described below:

*Variables: Outcome variables*

Women's gender attitude was measured in three domains: sex role stereotyping, attitude towards girls and attitude towards wife beating. Three separate composite indices were developed.

**Sex role stereotyping index (SRSI)** - Traditional notions about sex roles among women was measured using a set of 16 attitudinal statements, each having a response set on five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) (see Table 1). The items were partly adopted from Dunn (1990) and Burt (1980) and modified subsequently to fit the context of the study. A summative composite index score of sex role stereotyping was generated after testing the validity and reliability of the items. The values of scale ranged from 17 to 69; higher value indicates greater stereotyping of the sex role attitude.

**Attitude towards girls' index (AGI)** - Women's attitude towards girls was measured using a set of 10 attitudinal statements each having a response set on five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) (see Table 1). The questions were partly adopted from Dunn (1990) and Burt (1980) and modified subsequently according to the context of the study. A summative composite index score of attitude towards girls was generated after conducting tests of validity and reliability. The scale ranges from 10-47, higher value indicating more inequitable attitude towards girls.

**Attitude towards wife beating index (AWBI)** - Respondents' attitude towards wife beating was measured using a set of 10 items each having a response set on five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) (see Table 1). The questions were adopted from Saunders (1987) and IIPS & ORC Macro (2007) and modified subsequently as per the requirements of the study. A summative composite index score of attitude towards wife beating was generated after testing validity and reliability of the items. The scale ranges from 10-50, higher value is indicative of greater justification towards the act of wife beating.

### Covariates

A set of socio-economic and demographic factors that were likely to be associated with women's gender attitude were controlled. Background characteristics such as age of the respondents, age at marriage, religion, wealth index, work status, educational attainment, mass media exposure, sibling composition, actual family composition, respondents' fathers' participation in household chores and type of family were analyzed.

Other variables studied were autonomy of respondents' mothers, measured in terms of their decision making authority in household matters and freedom of movement (mothers having high status were coded as '1' and '0' as otherwise), witnessing parental violence where respondents were asked whether they have ever seen their father hitting or beating their mothers when they were child (women who responded yes were coded as '1' and '0' as otherwise), and gender socialization - measured in terms of women's experience of gender discrimination and teachings of gender specific norms during childhood (women having high gender biased socialization were coded as '1' and '0' for less biased socialization).

**Table 1:** Properties of the three attitudinal scales

	Range	Mean	SD	Cronbach's $\alpha$	N=
<b>a. Sex Role Stereotyping Index (SRSI)</b>	<b>(17-69)</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>0.861</b>	<b>435</b>
1. Men should not do household chores					
2. Women's most important role is to take care of her family and cook for them					
3. Changing diapers, giving children a bath are a mother's responsibility					
4. To work outside and earn for the family is a man's responsibility					
5. A woman cannot refuse to have sex with her husband					
6. A woman should always seek her husband's permission in whatever she does					
7. A real man should always be rough & tough					
8. It is a man's responsibility to always protect the girl he is with					
9. A real man should never cry					
10. A woman should always obey her elders					
11. Women can work but she must prioritize her family					
12. A woman should not raise her voice in any circumstances					
13. A man should have the final say about decisions in the household					
14. A wife's opinion should not have equal importance as husband's in family matters (family planning, children's future planning)					
15. A woman should tolerate domestic violence in order to maintain peace at home					
16. A man should always decide what type of contraceptive to use					
<b>b. Attitude towards Girls' Index (AGI)</b>	<b>(10-47)</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>0.740</b>	<b>481</b>
1. Boys are more valuable than girls					
2. Education of boys is far more important than that of girls					
3. A man deserves to be always respected by women					
4. Girls are not as good as boys in studies					
5. Girls should not get equal freedom as boys to go out					
6. Daughters cannot select the person whom they want to marry					
7. Daughters cannot decide when they want to get married					
8. Daughters cannot ask for a share in their natal property					
9. Educating daughters is meaningless as they have to be married off					
10. A girl/woman deserves to be teased if she wears skimpy clothes/dresses improperly					

**Table 1 Continued**

	Range	Mean	SD	Cronbach's $\alpha$	N=
<b>c. Attitude towards Wife Beating Index (AWBI)</b>	<b>(10-50)</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>0.939</b>	<b>500</b>
A husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife if:					
1. She goes out without telling him					
2. She neglects children					
3. She does not cook food properly					
4. She disrespects her in-laws					
5. She lies to her husband					
6. She disobeys her husband/argues with him					
7. She disrespects her husband in front of others					
8. Things are not according to husbands' wish who is the bread winner of the family					
9. Her Husband suspects her of being unfaithful					
10. She refuses to have sex with him					

*Note: Responses for all items are coded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.*

## Analysis

All the analyses were performed using SPSS statistical software Version-21.0. First, a detailed socio-economic and demographic profile of the women from two religious groups is presented before describing gender attitudes of young women in the two religious groups in terms of their various attitudinal statements and the composite indices. Mean scores of the indices were considered to assess their attitude based on their background characteristics. 'F' test was applied to assess if there was any significant inter group difference. Lastly, the factors associated with formation of women's gender attitudes were examined by applying OLS regression models. Before applying the regression analysis, all variables were tested for multi-collinearity and variance inflation factor (VIF) confirmed that the variables included in the three models were not affected by multi-collinearity effect.

## Results

### 1. Socio-economic and demographic profile of the study population

Table 2 shows that both joint and nuclear types of families were common in the study area; while a slightly higher proportion of Hindu women belonged to nuclear families, there was a prevalence of joint family among Muslims. Around 52% of the Hindu respondents belonged to general caste and the rests were scheduled caste (SC).

Major differences between the two religious groups were observed in terms of economic status, educational attainment, mass media exposure, age at first pregnancy and total number of surviving children. Household economics was better among Hindu respondents compared with their Muslim counterparts. It was found that 63% of the Hindus lived in pucca and semi pucca houses while more than half of the Muslims in the study sample lived in kachcha houses. More than 90% of the Hindu respondents were literate but it was only 58% among their Muslim counterparts. More than 80% of the Hindu respondents were educated above primary level and a third had more than 10 years of schooling. In case of the women from the local Muslim communities, 46% had education above primary level and only 17% had more than 10 years of schooling. Exposure to mass media was also higher among Hindu respondents (76.8%) compared with their Muslim counterpart (39%). Participation in any income generating activities was very low in both the groups, and more than 80% of the respondents did not work.

The demographic characteristics show that among Hindu respondents, only 20% were teenagers, followed by one third (30%) in their mid-20s and 50% in their late 20s. On the other hand, there is an almost equal distribution of Muslim respondents in teenage and mid-20s age group (31% each) and around 38% were in the 26-30 age group. It is observed that a large proportion of the study population was married before the legal age irrespective of their religious background. However, the proportion of Muslim respondents who were married before attaining 18 years of age was comparatively higher. There was not much difference regarding mean age at first marriage and mean age at first pregnancy among the two religious communities. The proportion of those having fewer number of children, namely 1 or 2, was more among Hindus (86.9%) than their Muslim counterparts (65.5%). While only 13% of the Hindu respondents had three or more children, it was 35% for the Muslim respondents indicating higher fertility and family size among the latter.

**Table 2:** Socio-economic and demographic profile of the study sample

Characteristics	Percentage of women:		
	Hindu (n=250)	Muslim (n=250)	Total (N=500)
<b><u>Socio-economic characteristics:</u></b>			
<b>Type of house:</b>			
Kachha	36.8	52.8	44.8
Pucca	49.2	36.0	42.6
Semi pucca	14.0	11.2	12.6
<b>Type of family:</b>			
Nuclear	51.2	47.2	49.2
Joint	48.8	52.8	50.8
<b>Household wealth index (HWI)</b>			
Lower	19.6	46.4	33.0
Middle	36.8	28.0	32.4
Upper	43.6	25.6	34.6
<b>Caste composition*</b>			
General	51.6	NA	-
Scheduled caste	48.4	NA	-
<b>Literacy:</b>			
Literate	93.2	58.4	75.8
Illiterate	6.8	41.6	24.2
<b>Educational attainment (years of schooling)</b>			
No schooling	6.8	41.6	24.2
1-4	11.6	12.4	12.0
5-7	19.6	15.6	17.6
8-9	29.6	13.2	21.4
10-11	16.8	12.8	14.8
12 & above	15.6	4.4	10.0
<b>School dropout (discontinuing school before class 10)</b>	65.2 (233)	70.5 (146)	67.3 (379)
<b>Current Work status:</b>			
Working	16.4	13.6	15.0
Not working	83.6	85.6	84.6
<b>Any mass media exposure (Reading newspaper/magazine or watching TV)</b>			
No	23.2	61.0	42.1
Yes	76.8	39.0	57.9
<b><u>Demographic characteristics:</u></b>			
<b>Age group (in years):</b>			
18-21	19.6	31.2	25.4
22-25	30.0	31.2	30.6
26-30	50.4	37.6	44.0
<b>Age at first marriage (in years):</b>			
<15	10.4	19.6	15.0
15-17	55.2	60.8	58.0
18 & above	34.4	19.6	27.0



**Table 2 Continued**

Characteristics	Percentage of women:		
	Hindu (n=250)	Muslim (n=250)	Total (N=500)
Mean age at first marriage (in years)	16.9	15.9	16.5
Mean age at first pregnancy (in years)	18.0	17.0	18.0
Total number of surviving children:			
1-2	86.9	65.5	76.3
3+	13.1	34.5	23.7

Note: \* Information on Caste composition was obtained only from the Hindus

## 2. Women's attitude towards sex roles

The results presented in Table 3a show that a majority of the young married women in the study area possess traditional attitudes towards sex roles. More than 60% of the women agreed that men should not participate in household chores such as cooking and cleaning among others and nearly 80% of the respondents believed that 'women's most important role is to take care of family and cook for them', 'changing diapers and giving kids bath'. A whopping 77%-82% held the following opinions - women's employment is acceptable but marriage and family must be her top priority, women should always seek her husband's permission in whatever she does, they should always obey their elders and should never raise their voice in any circumstances. More than half of the respondents agreed to the following statements: 'working outside and earning money is a man's responsibility' and 'a man should have the final say about decisions in his home'. On the other hand, a considerable proportion of the respondents accepted women's submissiveness in marriage and their husbands' authoritarian role. Around 50% of the respondents believed that a woman should tolerate domestic violence in order to maintain peace at home and more than one fourth opined that 'a woman cannot refuse to have sex with her husband'. Around 10% of the women said that a 'man should take final decision on contraceptive use and family planning'. They also held a typical perception on real manhood. According to the majority (92.6%) of the respondents, 'a real man should never cry', 'it's a man's responsibility to always protect the girl he is with' (82.2%) and 'a real man should always be rough & tough' (58%). Although the levels are varying and respondents from Muslim community held comparatively more traditional notions, stereotypical attitude towards sex roles was widely prevalent in the study area irrespective of the respondents' religious affiliation.

Table 3b shows the average scores of sex-role stereotyping (SRSI) for the Hindu and Muslim respondents. It revealed higher average scores in both the groups; Muslim respondents, however, scored an average of 53.8 (43.5 by Hindus). Thus, Muslim respondents had somewhat higher stereotypical attitude regarding sex roles than the Hindu respondents in the selected areas of the district.

**Table 3a:** Percentage of young married women (18-30 years) according to their attitude towards sex roles

Percentage women who agreed:	Hindu	Muslim	Total
1. Men should not do household chores	52.4	80.4	66.4
2. Women's most important role is to take care of her family and cook for them	61.6	94.8	78.2
3. Changing diapers, giving kids bath are a mother's responsibility	71.6	92.0	81.8
4. To work outside and earn for family is a man's responsibility	34.0	73.6	53.8
5. A woman cannot refuse to have sex with her husband	15.9	37.1	26.3
6. A woman should always seek her husband's permission in whatever she does	68.4	87.2	77.8
7. A real man should always be rough & tough	62.0	54.0	58.0
8. It is a man's responsibility to always protect the girl he is with	77.8	86.7	82.2

**Table 3a Continued**

<b>Percentage women who agreed:</b>	<b>Hindu</b>	<b>Muslim</b>	<b>Total</b>
9. A real man should never cry	90.4	94.8	92.6
10. A woman should always obey her elders	62.8	91.6	77.2
11. Women can work outside but she must prioritize her family	74.4	80.0	77.2
12. A woman should not raise her voice in any circumstances	71.6	92.8	82.0
13. A man should have the final say about decisions in his home	34.8	68.0	51.4
14. Wife's opinion should not have equal importance as husband's in family matters (family planning, children's future planning)	9.2	15.6	12.4
15. A woman should tolerate domestic violence in order to maintain peace at home	32.4	65.6	49.0
16. A man should always decide what type of contraceptive to use	6.0	11.1	8.5
<b>Total, N=</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>435</b>

**Table 3b: Mean score of the sex role stereotyping index in the study sample**

	<b>Mean score</b>			<b>Score difference (H-M)</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Hindu</b>	<b>Muslim</b>	
1. Men should not do household works	3.7	3.3	4.1	-0.8
2. Women's most important role is to take care of her family and cook for them	3.8	3.3	4.4	-1.1
3. Changing diapers, giving kids bath are a mother's responsibility	3.9	3.5	4.3	-0.8
4. To work outside and earn for family is a man's responsibility	3.1	2.5	3.8	-1.3
5. A woman cannot refuse to have sex with her husband	2.1	1.8	2.3	-0.5
6. A woman should always seek her husband's permission in whatever she does	3.7	3.4	4.1	-0.8
7. A real man should always be rough & tough	2.6	2.6	2.6	0.0
8. It is a man's responsibility to always protect the girl he is with	3.5	3.5	3.5	0.0
9. A real man should never cry	1.9	1.9	1.9	0.0
10. A woman should always obey her elders	3.8	3.4	4.2	-0.9
11. Women can work outside but she must prioritize her family	3.2	3.1	3.3	-0.2
12. A woman should not raise her voice in any circumstances	3.8	3.5	4.2	-0.7
13. A man should have the final say about decisions in his home	3.0	2.4	3.5	-1.1
14. Wife's opinion should not have equal importance as husband's in family matters (family planning, children's future planning)	2.3	2.0	2.5	-0.5
15. A woman should tolerate domestic violence in order to maintain peace at home	2.8	2.3	3.3	-1.0
16. A man should always decide what type of contraceptive to use	1.8	1.7	2.0	-0.2
<b>Sex Role Stereotyping Index (SRSI)***</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>44.1</b>	<b>54.1</b>	<b>-10.0</b>

Note: The inter group difference is found significant in 'F' test ( $F=135.129$ ); \*\*\*  $p<0.001$

### 3. Women's attitude towards girls in society

Results shown in Table 4a reveal women's attitude towards girls. It was observed that around 20% of the respondents believed that 'boys are more valuable than girls' and around 10% thought that 'educating boys is more important than educating girls'. A majority of the respondents (80%) opined that a man always deserves to be respected by women. More than one third of the respondents agreed that girls should not get equal freedom as boys to go out. Around one fifth of the respondents believed that daughters should not have the freedom to decide when to marry or whom to marry. A majority of women (67.6%) from both the religions believed that daughters cannot ask for share in their natal property. Nearly four in every 10 women agreed that 'a girl deserves to be teased if she dresses improperly'. Muslim women in the study population expressed more inequitable attitude towards girls especially in terms of freedom of movement, freedom to take decision on marriage, freedom of choice of clothes and showing reverence to men compared with their

Hindu counterparts. However, interestingly, the proportion of Hindu women denying girls' right to natal property was higher than the Muslim women in the selected areas.

Table 4b presents the average score of women's attitude towards girls (AGI) for the two religious groups. Out of the maximum score of 47, the young married women in the study area scored 24.2 and the mean score for Hindu respondents was somewhat lower (22.0) than that of Muslims (26.0). Data shows that Hindu women in the study area fared better than the Muslim women in almost in all the items.

**Table 4a:** Percentage of young married women (18-30 years) according to their attitude towards girl children

Percentage women who agreed:	Hindu	Muslim	Total
1. Boys are more valuable than girls	16.5	23.4	19.9
2. Educating boys is more important than girls	4.0	16.1	10.0
3. A man deserves to be always respected by women	66.8	93.2	80.0
4. Girls are not as good as boys in studies	2.8	2.4	2.6
5. Girls should not get equal freedom as boys to go out	17.6	50.8	34.2
6. Daughters cannot select the person whom they want to marry	10.8	29.2	20.0
7. Daughters cannot decide when they want to get married	9.6	30.4	20.0
8. Daughters cannot ask for a share in their natal property	71.0	64.3	67.6
9. Educating daughters is meaningless as they have to be married off	1.6	4.8	3.2
10. A girl/woman deserves to be teased if she wears skimpy clothes/dresses improperly	31.2	49.8	40.4
<b>Total, N</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>481</b>

**Table 4b:** Mean score of the attitude towards girls' index in the study sample

	Mean score			Score difference (H-M)
	Total	Hindu	Muslim	
1. Boys are more valuable than girls	2.0	2.0	2.1	-0.1
2. Educating boys is more important than girls	1.9	1.8	2.0	-0.2
3. A man deserves to be always respected by women	3.8	3.4	4.3	-0.9
4. Girls are not as good as boys in studies	1.6	1.6	1.6	0.0
5. Girls should not get equal freedom as boys to go out	2.6	2.1	3.1	-1.0
6. Daughters cannot select the person whom they want to marry	2.3	1.9	2.7	-0.9
7. Daughters cannot decide when they want to get married	1.6	1.5	1.6	-0.1
8. Daughters cannot ask for a share in their natal property	2.5	2.3	2.6	-0.3
9. Educating daughters is meaningless as they have to be married off	3.6	3.7	3.6	0.1
10. A girl/woman deserves to be teased if she wears skimpy clothes/dresses improperly	2.3	1.9	2.8	-0.9
<b>Attitude towards Girls' Index (AGI)***</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>-4.4</b>

Note: The inter group difference is found significant in 'F' test ( $F=77.659$ ); \*\*\*  $p<0.001$

#### 4. Attitude towards wife beating

Results as presented in Table 5a, reveal that a substantial proportion of young married women justified the act of wife beating on various grounds and there was a significant religious difference. The top three reasons for which respondents accepted wife beating were: if wife lies to her husband (56%), if wife disobeys her husband or argues with him (56.2%) and if wife disrespects her husband in front of others (54%), followed by suspicion of being unfaithful, going out without informing him, disrespecting her in-laws (47.8%, 43.8% and 41.8% respectively). Over one fourth of the respondents believed that a husband is justified in beating his wife if she doesn't cook properly and neglects children. Interestingly, 20% of the respondents felt that a husband can beat his wife if she refuses to

have sex with him. Women belonging to local Muslim communities showed a greater justification of wife beating compared with their Hindu counterparts.

Table 5b shows the average score of the composite index of women's attitude towards wife beating (AWBI). It reveals that out of the maximum score of 50, the study population scored 25.1; Muslim respondents scored 28.7 as against 21.5 for Hindus and thus, indicating that in the study area Muslim women had higher acceptance for the act of wife beating.

**Table 5a:** Percentage of young married women (18-30 years) according to their attitude towards wife beating

Percentage women who agreed:	Hindu	Muslim	Total
<b>A husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife if:</b>			
1. She goes out without telling him	30.8	56.8	43.8
2. She neglects children	16.0	38.0	27.0
3. She does not cook food properly	16.0	35.6	25.8
4. She disrespects in-laws	26.0	57.6	41.8
5. She lies to her husband	42.0	70.0	56.0
6. She argues with him	42.8	69.6	56.2
7. She disrespects her husband in front of others	42.0	66.0	54.0
8. She disagrees with husband's opinion who is the bread winner of the family	15.2	43.6	29.4
9. Her husband suspects her of being unfaithful	36.0	59.7	47.8
10. She refuses to have sex with him	10.0	28.7	19.5
<b>Total, N =</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>500</b>

**Table 5b:** Mean score of the attitude towards wife beating index in the study sample

	Mean score			Score difference (H-M)
	Total	Hindu	Muslim	
<b>A husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife if:</b>				
1. She goes out without telling him	2.7	2.2	3.1	-0.9
2. She neglects children	2.1	1.8	2.4	-0.6
3. She does not cook food properly	2.1	1.8	2.3	-0.5
4. She disrespects her in-laws	2.5	2.1	2.9	-0.9
5. She lies to her husband	3.1	2.6	3.5	-0.9
6. She disobeys her husband/argues with him	3.0	2.6	3.4	-0.9
7. She disrespects her husband in front of others	2.8	2.5	3.2	-0.7
8. Things are not according to husbands' wish who is the bread winner of the family	2.2	1.8	2.6	-0.8
9. Her husband suspects her of being unfaithful	2.6	2.3	2.9	-0.6
10. She refuses to have sex with him	2.1	1.8	2.3	-0.6
<b>Attitude towards Wife Beating Index (AWBI)***</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>-7.2</b>

Note: The inter group difference is found significant in 'F' test ( $F=73.492$ ); \*\*\*  $p<0.001$

## 5. Determinants of women's gender attitudes: Results from liner regression

Table 6 shows the coefficients from linear regression analysis and highlights the confounding factors influencing gender attitude of the study population. Three models were run separately for each attitudinal scale and after controlling for all the background characteristics of the respondents. In Model 1, determinants of young women's attitude towards sex role are presented. Results reveal that respondents' age at first marriage, religion, work status, educational attainment, mass media exposure, witnessing parental violence, autonomy of respondents' mothers and family composition were the significant factors determining women's sex role attitude. Respondents' age at marriage had a negative relationship with their sex role attitude whereby women married at higher ages i.e. after

attaining the legal age, had lesser stereotypical attitude than their counterparts. Working women also had lesser traditional attitude towards sex roles. Higher educational attainment and exposure to any mass media also attributed to lesser stereotypical attitude. Similarly, respondents who had more number of daughters and whose mothers enjoyed the privileges of higher autonomy in natal family, had lower stereotypical attitude towards sex roles. On the other hand, women belonging to the Muslim community in the study area had higher stereotypical attitude compared with their Hindu counterparts. Witnessing parental violence as a child also had a significant positive relationship with sex role stereotyping; women who had seen their father beating their mothers during childhood held more stereotypical attitudes than those who were not exposed to parental violence.

**Model 2** shows the factors determining women's attitude towards girls. The significant correlates were their religion, work status, educational attainment, mass media exposure, sibling composition and family composition. Respondents belonging to the Muslim communities held more inequitable attitude towards girls compared with Hindus. Similarly, women who grew up with male siblings only during childhood had more inequitable attitude towards girls. On the other hand, higher educational attainment, exposure to any mass media and having more numbers of daughters had significant negative relationship with women's negative attitude towards girls.

**Model 3** shows factors shaping young married women's attitude towards wife beating. Age at marriage, religion, work status, education, witnessing parental violence and family composition played significant roles. It was found that higher age at marriage was negatively related to justification of wife beating meaning that women married at younger ages expressed more acceptance towards the act of wife beating. Muslim women had higher justification towards wife beating compared with Hindu women. Women who had witnessed parental violence during childhood expressed greater justification for wife beating. On the other hand, respondents engaged in any income generating activity, having more than 10 years of schooling and having equal number of sons and daughters indicated less acceptance towards wife beating.

**Table 6:** Correlates of the composite indices of women's gender attitude in the study sample  
- OLS regression coefficients

	<u>SRSI</u> Standardized $\beta$ (Model 1)	<u>AGI</u> Standardized $\beta$ (Model 2)	<u>AWBI</u> Standardized $\beta$ (Model 3)
<b>Age at marriage</b> ©	-0.142 **	-0.054	-0.165 **
<b>Religion</b>			
Hindu ®			
Muslim	0.247 ***	0.207 ***	0.286 ***
<b>Work status</b>			
Not working ®			
Working	-0.032 **	-0.075 +	-0.087 *
<b>Wealth index</b>			
Lower ®			
Middle	0.128 *	0.082	0.053
Upper	-0.039	-0.040	0.001
<b>Type of family</b>			
Nuclear ®			
Joint	0.060	0.015	-0.073
<b>Educational attainment (years of schooling)</b>			
No formal schooling ®			
<5	-0.023	-0.037	0.111 *
5-9	-0.154 *	-0.192 **	-0.042
10 & above	-0.228 **	-0.291 ***	-0.122 +
<b>Mass media exposure</b>			
No ®			
Yes	-0.161 **	-0.105 **	-0.034

Table 6 Continued

	<u>SRSI</u> Standardized $\beta$ (Model 1)	<u>AGI</u> Standardized $\beta$ (Model 2)	<u>AWBI</u> Standardized $\beta$ (Model 3)
<b>Sibling composition</b>			
Only sisters ®			
Only brothers	0.034	0.085 *	(-)
Both brothers & sisters	0.084	0.105	
<b>Childhood socialization:</b>			
Less biased ®			
Highly biased	-0.021	0.013	0.013
<b>Witnessing parental violence:</b>			
No ®			
Yes	0.121 **	0.017	0.153 ***
<b>Autonomy of respondents' mothers</b>			
Low ®			
High	-0.165 ***	-0.044	-0.052
<b>Family composition</b>			
No children ®			
More sons	-0.047	-0.117	-0.100
More daughters	-0.099 +	-0.203 *	-0.105
Equal number of sons and daughters	-0.017	-0.116	-0.150 +
<b>Respondents' fathers participated in household chores</b>			
No ®			
Yes	0.020	-0.016	0.130

Note: © Continuous variable; ® Reference category; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , +  $p < 0.10$ ; (-) variables not included in the model; Caste composition is not included in the analyses as it is available only for the Hindus in the present dataset.

## Discussion

The present study captured young women's attitude towards gender norms and discussed factors influencing the formation of such attitudes. Findings underscored that a greater proportion of young married women subscribed to non-egalitarian gender attitudes, specifically about appropriate roles of women in society, rights of girls and legitimacy of domestic violence. Oppression may have accepted such cultural norms as inevitable. Thus, they are considered inherently disempowered, although they may not realize this fact (Carlson, Kordas & Kolb, 2013). While neither Hindus nor Muslim women in the study population held particularly progressive gender attitude, women belonging to local Muslim communities expressed more traditional attitudes. Lower age at marriage, no or low educational attainment, poor economic status of the household, no mass media exposure were the major socio-economic factors shaping these women's non-egalitarian gender attitude.

After controlling for all socio-economic and demographic characteristics, religious affiliation of the respondents was one of the important and strongest predictors of women's gender attitude. It showed that Muslim women held more non-egalitarian gender attitude compared with their Hindu respondents. It is argued that women who belong to and participate in conservative denominations are typically more traditional in their gender role orientations (Bartowski & Read, 2003). A study on Arab-American women found that Muslim respondents were more traditional than their non-Muslim counterparts (Read, 2003). This finding is consistent with that of other studies in India (Desai & Temsah, 2014) and West Bengal (Das and Chattopadhyay, 2012) which suggest that Muslim women are more likely to adhere to traditional gender norms of family and society that propagate suppression of women. However, the differences between these two groups regarding women's gender attitude cannot be generalized because there may be other more localized and historically contextualized forces at play. Gender attitude, gender relations and women's status vary over space (Das & Chattopadhyay, 2012); place of residence and local

societal contexts in which religious communities organize themselves, determine specific expressions of gender as argued by Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) and Desai and Tamsah (2014). India has diverse cultures and communities with distinctive ways of treating women and girls that is specifically tied with local conditions and contexts, historical and cultural background rather than religious doctrine. Findings of this study may attract arguments that 'Islam' per se may not be the vehicle through which suppression of women takes place and that non-egalitarian gender attitude is widely prevalent in the overall study population which might be due to the fact that patriarchy is inherent in Indian society. Therefore, a more constructive approach is to recognize that formation of gender ideologies is not solely a function of religion, and the disparity existing between the two religious groups in terms of socio-economic and demographic status may be due to other driving forces leading to the differential attitudes towards gender.

Apart from religion, childhood experiences such as witnessing parental violence is an important risk marker for inequitable attitude towards gender. It is well documented that patriarchal tendencies in Indian society places women in a divinely sanctioned subordinate role and men as superior to women possessing the right to control the latter's behavior (Krishnaraj, 1991). Young boys and girls learn to behave in a certain socially desirable manner that are prescribed based on their biological sex and conform to the traditional cultural norms and beliefs, usually inherited through generations (Jejeebhoy, 1998; Visaria, 2008). When children grow up in a violent environment, they perceive physical chastisement on women as a culturally accepted entitlement of their husbands (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Jejeebhoy, 1998). To the extent that this is key for attitudinal development, childhood exposure to family violence is likely to instill adversarial attitude towards gender. Findings from the present study confirmed and reiterated that childhood experiences of young women have a strong influence on their attitude during adulthood.

On the other hand, it was found that greater decision-making autonomy among respondents' mothers played an important role in developing more egalitarian and equitable gender attitude among young women. Two predominant groups of theories, one based in "psychoanalysis" and the other in "social learning", emphasized that daughters internalize maternal values and behaviors as well as meaning of those values and behaviors either unconsciously or through role modelling (Bandura, 1971; Boyd, 1989). Studies suggest that mother's attitudes are associated with daughter's generalized beliefs (Moen, Erickson & Dempster-McClain, 1997; Witt, 1997). The findings of the current study confirmed that of earlier studies which suggest that daughters of empowered mothers have relatively non-traditional gender attitude (Spitze, 1988; Booth & Amato, 1994; Carines & Janssens, 1998). Composition of gender in the family also came out as a significant predictor of women's gender attitude showing that presence of only sisters led to a pro-girl and non-traditional attitude among women against the presence of only males or both brothers and sisters (Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande & Topalova, 2009; Dhar, Jain & Jayachandran, 2015; Finseraas, Johnsen, Kotsadam & Torsvik, 2016; Gangadharan, Jain, Maitra & Vecchi, 2016). It is likely that male children attract gender discriminatory attitudes from parents or relatives more explicitly and affect the mindset of girls growing up in the same household.

## Conclusion

The study has a few caveats. First, due to the multidimensional nature of gender relations, expressions of attitude and perceptions may be quite different from what actually happens in private. The relationship between religious affiliations and prevailing gender norms in different cultural groups is also complex and difficult to capture. However, the survey

instruments were scientifically and carefully designed taking into consideration sensitivity of the issues and utmost care was taken to capture the reality. Another problem was the social desirability bias i.e. if the respondent thinks that her opinion/perception is something which the society will look down upon, she may be reluctant to report it correctly. There is also a possibility of recall bias in case of respondents' childhood experiences. Lastly, the study being localized, any generalization of the findings is not possible for the overall district or state or any of the religious groups.

Despite the above shortcomings, the study contributes greatly to gender research as it provides important insights into the formation of gender attitude among young women which may potentially impact on their marital lives. Therefore, the findings have important policy implications. Although the state holds a distinctive position in the country in terms of sex ratio, fertility, mortality, status of women and other socio-demographic parameters, the study showed a somewhat contradictory scenario drawing from the rural and remote areas of one of the backward districts of the state. It confirmed the prevalence of stereotypical attitude towards sex roles, inequitable attitude towards girls and acceptance of interpersonal violence irrespective of the respondents' background characteristics. Although gender related norms and attitudes differed somewhat according to local religious affiliations, we should keep in mind that the problems were acute among all respondents to a large extent, irrespective of their religion, which might lead to serious consequences in the women's lives such as poor marital relationship, infliction of spousal violence, lower decision-making power and autonomy within the family as well as in the society. The study clearly depicted that early life experiences of young married women, namely childhood experiences such as witnessing parental violence, mothers' position within the household played crucial role in determining their attitude towards gender during adulthood. Thus, it is evident that family environment is important in shaping gender attitudes and therefore, policy makers and stakeholders need to focus on factors that affect children's growing up period and it should be central to creating a healthier environment for the development of children and adolescents before entering adulthood. One way is to target schools in order to provide essential gender education, and sex and family life education among girls at least up to secondary level of education in order to enable them to challenge gender stereotypes and break through intergenerational transmission of traditional gender norms. In this context, age 18, is pertinent. There is a need of effective education to make girls aware about themselves, their body and their rights. Attitude of parents must also change and awareness about ill-effects of early marriage must be created through mass awareness programs. Minimizing children's exposure to parental violence is equally important. Development of skills among the parents, especially the young couples, to strategically solve their relationship problems without affecting children, and cultivating healthy parent-child at home are pertinent in order to provide a healthy family environment for girl children. As Muslim women faced more disadvantages in the study area, support and interventions should especially be directed towards their upliftment.

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