

Exploring the linkage between Premarital Sex, Masculinity and Sex Risk

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The theory and the topic

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 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. The sexual mode of transmission is highly responsible or increasing the number day by day. It is the matter of worry that, this sexual aspect the most important corner of the arena of HIV/AIDS is always hidden on the Indian soil. At this context it is important to identify the vulnerability attached to sexual behaviour. While talking about sexual behaviour, in a patriarchal set up it is important to explore it from men's point of view. But in contrasting. Entire area of reproductive health including sexuality intervention approach in India have not get a consistent male involvement. The utilization of STD/HIV services, engagement in reproductive health information, education and communication programme have not experienced male involvement in a noteworthy way. The primary care of STD and HIV is not sensitised yet to touch the appreciation for male reproductive and sexuality aspect. The fact is little understood that cultural values of man and male sexuality are closely knitted. Masculinity acts a driving force in many aspects of men's behaviours, 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 in the components of masculinity largely depends upon the early sexual history of an adolescent youth

This paper addresses the whole interlinked issues of male sexual debut, gender construction, and its associates. To be specific, it tries to examine the role of premarital sex in shaping the masculinity among male and how the masculinity acts as driving force in endangering the male sexual behaviour.

The data and the research Methods

The data presented here derived from a primary study on sexual behaviour of migrants 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 migrants workers from different part of India. The study has been conducted in the year of 2002. During the study twenty-two married male migrant worker within the age group of 19 to 40 were interviewed depthly and a survey has been carried out with one hundred men of the same sample criteria.

Entry to the community was obtained through the community gatekeepers, who were found to be the key informants in latter stages. As an introductory part the free listing and pile shorting exercise was done among twenty-five men on the perception about masculinity. It not only gave a detail in-depth knowledge about cultural perception of male gender, but “the card-game” exercise created a conducive atmosphere for discussing the sensitive issue in the community. In-depth interviews has been coded and analysed in the software package Atlas-Ti, where the survey data has been entered and analysed in the SPSS.

Constructing the composite variable of masculinity:

An attempt has been made to quantify the perception-based response on masculinity obtained from the survey data. The responses on masculinity have been runned through the reliability analysis. After improving the reliability (Alpha value=. 7098), different scores has been assigned to each statement according to their degree of hegemony. Then a masculinity index has been prepared to examine the relationship of masculinity with " history of premarital sex", " sexual relation with commercial sex worker" , " other extramarital sex" , " Risk factors attached to sexual relation ships" etc.

Salient findings

Findings of the study indicate a relatively higher degree of premarital (22%) sex is reported though it is a taboo in Indian culture. 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* (a typical 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..."

Further it has been found that those having a history of premarital sex a majority (59%) of them are reporting their masculinity in comparatively higher degree of hegemonic way. The nature of first intimate encounter enables them to perceive the male sexual image as an important needing factor for the counter gender. It drives them to define the man-woman relationship giving emphasis to sexual base. It is revealed that men recognize 'sexual role' and 'status within family' as two important component of measuring masculinity. There is a strong perception that dominancy within the domains of "family", "sexuality", "community" and "work" is well expected from a real man.

Out of some interesting quotes of in depth interviews, few are like this, " ...A *mard* (real man) is known if you see his conversation with his wife and children", "... those who dance on the tune of his *aurat* (wife) are not real men at all..." , " ...A real man is always ready for sex..." , "... he should satisfy any number of women..." , "... a real man can produce a male child..." , "... A real man should always respond to the sexual invitation of a women... yes it is his moral duty..." , "... A real man should capable of dominate others..." ". No real man gets afraid of his work... he never thinks the hazardous nature of work"

Again it is found that men perceive the male gender value widely allows unbarring sexual relation. Commonly it is believed that the participation in each available sexual relationship shows the ability of a man's vigour and vitality. This vigour and vitality is considered as the major sign of the manliness. Further it is found that this attitude drives the male workers not only to use the occupational network, for persuading extramarital sexual relationship with subordinate women workers but many times to ignore the risk factor attached to commercial sex workers too.

To quote few sayings, " ... nothing bad in it ... how a man can live without testing different...", "...It is a sign of *Mardangi*(Masculinity) ...", "...If you not accept the relationship then the woman is the first person to think that you are not perfect...", "...Why guilty? ...she is getting job for me only .. and what harm in this.. do you say she is not enjoying?..." , "...Nothing happens to a man..." , "... Sex workers here never go outside this place.. they are clean too ... if you have that fear in your mind then anything can happen to you .." , "... after all man is man *soona* (gold) never gets rust.."

Many times, it is seen that the premarital relationship gets so strong that, it exists after the man's marriage. This premarital relationship gets too casual, which attaches the chance of risk. This existing premarital relation some times causes the unhealthy spousal relationship that again drives the mismanaged sexual relationship.

Looking at few in depth quotes, "... whenever I go there I go to her, and we do it when her husband is not around..." , "...how I can forget her? After all she is my first love..." . " ...I never care , my wife should understand this...she came to my life before her.. she likes more than my wife ..." , "... I have faith on her she likes me only.. there is no harm I keeping relationship with her..."

Finally this paper tries to light the whole network between sexual history, construction of gender values and present risky sexual life style and points need for intervention beyond community awareness, and condom promotion for a healthy manly life for a healthy tomorrow.

