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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



United Nations Population Fund – India



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Prepared by

Priya Nanda  
Gillian Gaynair



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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Global initiatives aimed at achieving positive reproductive health outcomes for women, such as reducing unintended pregnancy, increasingly recognize the importance of addressing the unequal gender relations and gender roles commonly ascribed to women. In response, governments and international donor agencies have focused on strategies that support women's empowerment and gender equality in reproductive health policies and programs. At the same time, to enable these strategies, policy makers and program planners recognize that, rigorous data are needed on both women and men's gender-related attitudes and behaviors.

Indeed, since the mid-1990s, several studies have shown a significant association between inequitable gender attitudes among men and their likelihood of violence towards a partner or reluctance to use a condom (Pulterwitz et al, 2010). While the mandate after the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) encouraged engaging men to improve reproductive and sexual health outcomes for women, over time, research and advocacy began to highlight the importance of engaging men to improve their own reproductive and sexual health needs. As efforts to involve men multiplied, the need to better understand their behavior emerged.

One ground breaking effort that provided credible evidence to fill this research gap on men's attitudes about gender equality and its association with violence was the 2011 International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), conducted by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and Promundo. One of the most comprehensive surveys ever carried out on the attitudes and behaviors of men aged 18-49, IMAGES addressed issues related to gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, gender-based violence and men's participation in care-giving and family life (Barker et al, 2011). With studies taking place across several countries, and most recently in Nepal and Vietnam by ICRW, IMAGES findings reinforced the strong relationship between masculinities and violence. The data also placed evidence on men's attitudes about gender equality at the center of all key policy discourse on improving gender and health outcomes for women. What has been less explored, however, are the areas of son preference and to some extent intimate partner violence, and how each relates to men's attitudes and more broadly, to masculinities.

In the present study conducted by ICRW in collaboration with UNFPA, we further adapt the IMAGES methodology to more deeply understand masculinity's intrinsic relationship with son preference and intimate partner violence in seven Indian states. Our primary objective was to assess the dimensions and determinants of men's knowledge, attitudes and behavior on issues related to gender equality, son preference and intimate partner violence. The specific objectives were to:

- Assess men's current behavior and attitudes on intimate partner violence (IPV)
- Assess men's knowledge and attitudes towards son preference and gender equality

- Explore contributing factors that can be attributed to men's attitudes and behaviors related to IPV and son preference.
- Explore factors that may explain variation in men's behaviors in their family lives and intimate and sexual relationships, including childhood experiences of violence, gender norms in family of origin, stress, and unemployment, among others.

Men and women's behavior and attitudes were explored to offer a comparative understanding and insights for gender differentiated policies and programs to address gender equity. How women internalize male dominance and control in their lives and its effect on their own attitudes towards gender inequality and son preference were important aspects of this study. The study also offers a better understanding of women's internalization of societal norms of masculinity.

## Methodology and Sample Overview

Our research took place in the following seven states across India: Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana (counted as one, since they are contiguous states with cultural overlap), Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. These states were chosen because of their large size in terms of population, diverse demographic compositions and their varying sex ratio trends – an indicator of son preference. Most states in the study had adverse sex ratio at birth (ranging from 832 to 938 girls for 1000 boys), with four of them having ratios much lower than the national average. Among the two states that had higher sex ratio at birth than the national average of 905, Odisha has experienced a worsening over time and Madhya Pradesh has seen a slight increase over the last decade.

To achieve the representative sample at the state level the sample size was fixed at 1,500 men and 500 women aged 18-49 years in each state. Considering a non-response rate of 10 percent we targeted 1,650 men and 550 women in each state. The sample was distributed in the ratio of 60 to 40 to have representation from both rural and urban areas, respectively. A multi-stage cluster sampling approach was adopted for the selection of the samples in each state. Each state was divided into regions and samples were allocated in proportion to the size of the regions. To avert bias in responses, men and women's samples were selected from different Primary Sampling Units (PSUs). For both state and at aggregate level analysis, appropriate weights were calculated and applied. With overall response rate of 93 percent among men and 97 percent among women, a total sample of 9,205 men and 3,158 women was achieved in the study.

Highlights of respondents' characteristics:

- The mean age for men was 31 years, and for women, 30.
- Three-fourths of men had attained education up to higher secondary or above whereas a little more than half of women had done so. Overall, men on average had higher literacy than women in the sample.
- More than three-fourths of the women and three-fifths of the men in the sample were currently married. The majority of marriages had been arranged and a majority of both men and women reported that they had agreed willingly to the marriage.
- More than three-fourths of the men and women reported that dowry was given in kind or cash in their marriage.
- Across the study states, a little less than one-third of the men reported having no relationship, and just over one-fourth of them reported that they had never had a partner.
- Nearly three-fifths of the men and more than half of women surveyed did not live in a nuclear family.

## Understanding Masculinity

The past two decades have witnessed increasing interest in engaging men and boys to ensure their role in achieving gender equality. Notably, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and later, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, marked turning points in the manner in which men and masculinities were conceived and situated within the discourse of women's empowerment and gender equality. Previously, men and boys were often seen as part of the problem and obstacles to women's struggle for equality; they were rarely identified as an essential part of the solution (Connell, 2005).

Over the years, however, in-depth research on gender, power and masculinity and various programmatic efforts to engage men made it abundantly clear that men and boys must be an integral part of efforts to promote gender equality. Research also revealed that masculinity is not a monolithic concept; all men are not the same. Various ideas of masculinity are constructed under differing social, economic and cultural contexts – and these are evolving, multifaceted and dynamic (Hearn, 2010, Connell, 2000).

This is especially relevant in India, where caste, class and linguistic ethnicity have tremendous influence on how men construct their sense of masculinity and define what it means to be a “real man” or what is expected of them (Verma et al, 2008; IMAGES, 2012). To achieve gender equality, it is important therefore to identify the diverse expressions of masculinities and power or lack of power due to marginalization or social expectations that men experience – and the implications for women and girls.

At its core, “masculinity” is characterized by two dimensions, namely “relationship control” as behavioral and “attitudes towards the gender equality” as an underlying value. In terms of the former, men most commonly express power over their partners by controlling various aspects of their partners' lives and behaviors. For instance, we found that more than three-fourths of the men in our study expected their partners to agree if they wanted to have sex and more than half of the men didn't expect their partners to use contraceptives without their permission. One in three men didn't allow their wife/partner to wear certain clothes and one in five agreed with the statement, “When my wife/partner wears things to make herself look beautiful, I think she may be trying to attract other men.” A substantial number of men (66 percent) agreed with the statement, “I have more say than she does on important decisions that affect us,” and only 15 percent said that “my wife expects me to ask her approval for big decisions in the home.”

In terms of the attitudinal dimension of masculinity – which relates to beliefs that men hold about the roles and expectations of men and women – we found women and men to be similar in their outlook. For example, one-fifth of men believed that it's a woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant, a statement with which 31 percent of women agreed.

Ultimately, we found 45 percent – the majority – of the men we surveyed to be moderate in the degree to which they exercised control in their intimate relationships and in their beliefs about gender equality. Thirty-two percent of the men demonstrated a more rigid masculinity, in that they were extremely controlling over women and also believed that women and men are inherently unequal. Men who we categorized as equitable in their attitudes and behaviors towards women (based on responses gathered) constituted 23 percent of the total sample.

Overall, neither age nor location of residence determined men's attitudes and behaviors – whether rigid or equitable – in their intimate relationships. However, with increasing education and wealth status, men were less likely to exercise control over their partners and more likely to respect equitable norms. Men who had graduated from higher secondary or above were two and a half times more likely to hold equitable traits, and men who fell in the highest wealth tertile were twice as likely to be less rigid.

Education certainly provides a higher level of exposure to new gender norms, and educated men may be more likely to have educated spouses. Education and economic status may also create less pressure for men to conform to dominant societal expectations to behave in a rigidly masculine manner. If the spouse is educated then she is likely to have more autonomy and will be more resistant to her husband exerting control over her.

Families in which both parents make decisions jointly were 1.4 times more likely to socialize boys to grow into men with gender equitable attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, men raised in families where their fathers participated in household chores were two times more likely to be equitable and less rigid. These results strongly demonstrate a positive influence on boys who witness their parents sharing household responsibilities, from making critical decisions to doing routine chores, and an increased likelihood for them to have gender equitable attitudes and behavior when they become men.

As we mentioned earlier, the notion of masculinity may be expressed in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this analysis, the role of masculinity was explored in two areas in the Indian context: intimate partner violence and son preference. What follows is a summary of the findings that emerged from the survey across seven states.

## Men and IPV: Insights and Interconnectedness

Socially prescribed gender norms in India often create rules so that the distribution of power between men and women is unequal and in favor of men. Men often act violently towards women as a way to sustain this power imbalance and control their wives/partners. The gender norms that drive this intimate partner violence include those around masculinity, where “being a real man” is characterized by authority, and being a woman, or femininity, by acceptance and tolerance. Women who do not fulfill the socially ascribed roles may be construed as challenging men’s masculinity, and risk provoking a violent reaction against them. Men, who may feel incompetent in terms of not being perceived as a “real” man, may also exert violence against women to realize their power and dominance.

### Key findings

The data that emerged from the study spotlight the high prevalence of IPV in India, with 52 percent of the women surveyed reporting that they had experienced some form of violence during their lifetime; and 60 percent of men saying that they had acted violently against their wife/partner at some point in their lives. A higher proportion of women reported experiencing physical violence (38 percent) followed by emotional violence (35 percent), which includes insults, intimidation and threats. These were followed by 17 percent of women reporting that their husbands/partners had been sexually violent against them, and 16 percent saying they were economically abusive (husband/partner prohibits her from working, takes her earnings against her will, etc.).

Interestingly, except for physical and economic violence, men’s reported perpetration of all other kinds of violence was higher than women’s reported experience of violence. Some of these differences may arise due to shame and stigma associated with experiencing certain forms of violence, such as marital rape. Women may also under report emotional violence because some believe such acts are normal in a relationship and many expect men to exert some control on their lives.

Men who did exert control through violence were diverse in age, education status, place of residence and caste groups according to the study. Educated men and women who were 35 years old or more, were less likely to perpetrate or experience violence. We believe this is because younger men in India may be under more stress to establish themselves financially as well as their positions within the family, which can increase their chances of being violent with a partner or spouse. Meanwhile, younger and less educated women were more likely to be vulnerable

to intimate partner violence due to their lack of agency and ability to negotiate conflict or stress from their spouse/partner. A higher proportion (35 percent) of younger women (18-24 years) reported experiencing violence in the past 12 months than older women (35-49 years), but the difference was not statistically significant.

Regardless of age, men who experience economic stress were more likely to have perpetrated violence ever or in the past 12 months. This may be because of norms related to masculinity, which reinforce the expectation that men are primary economic providers for their households. Economic stress can therefore threaten men's belief in their own abilities and may lead them to be more controlling and violent towards their partners.

Another determinant of IPV was whether men experienced discrimination frequently as children – if so, we found that they were four times more likely to perpetrate violence, than men who never experienced childhood discrimination. Meanwhile, women who were discriminated against as children were three to six times more likely to experience IPV – a highly significant finding from our study. Women who experienced and observed discrimination or violence growing up are more likely to justify it as adults and may therefore not resist circumstances that may trigger intimate partner violence. Women who faced rigid masculinity, i.e., who were greatly controlled by their partners and who consider men and women unequal, were also 1.35 times more likely to experience IPV.

These results reinforce the importance of understanding the relationship between intimate partner violence and masculinity and men's behavior. Many men in India act in a manner that is fairly predetermined by their gendered roles and expectations, socio-economic characteristics and childhood experiences. Masculinity, which is a combination of men's attitudes towards gender equality and the control they exert in their relationships, also defines their aggression and proclivity to violence against their wives/partners. Economic stress also can trigger men's violent behavior due to the deeply ingrained societal expectation that they must be providers for their families. Women, too, are shaped by the same factors in their predictability around experiencing violence, with their childhood experiences and gender attitudes acting as strong determinants.

## Men and Son Preference: Analyzing the Connections

A preference for sons over daughters has been pervasive for centuries in India and represents the most powerful and fundamental manifestation of gender inequality in the Indian context. Male children in India hold a central identity in the familial structure, for they inherit property, carry forward family lineage and perform specific family rituals. Son preference also socializes boys in the stereotypical perceptions of masculinity and reinforces their role as custodians of patriarchal values, one of which is the higher value given to sons.

Meanwhile, daughters are seen as a socio-economic burden due to the dowry and cost of marriage, which is followed by girls severing ties to their natal families. India's level of discrimination against girls is among the strongest worldwide and is demonstrated early, in the pre-natal stage, through sex selection to ensure the birth of sons. Although recent data shows that the desired number of children is reducing, the preference for sons remains. Results from this study too showed that a higher proportion of women than men believed that a woman's most important role is to produce a son for her husband's family.

Numerous studies have examined the causes and consequences of son preference in India but few have linked it with the attitudes of men and women towards sons and daughters or tried to assess what factors determine these attitudes. This study on masculinity attempted to fill this gap in knowledge by identifying traits of men and women for whom having sons over daughters is highly desirable, and by examining the extent of son preference in India, which we conceptualized as the magnitude of one's attitudes towards the importance of sons.

## Key findings

In the analysis of men and women's desire for more sons or daughters, we examined their underlying socio-demographic characteristics that determine their desires as well as other determinants, such as their attitudes regarding national laws that protect daughters' rights, their childhood experiences of discrimination and men's roles in the domestic sphere.

For our exploration of the extent of son preferring attitudes among men and women, we analyzed how their preferences are affected by their socio-demographic characteristics and childhood experiences of male dominance as well as their awareness and views on laws and policies protecting women and girls. The analysis also examined whether the preference for sons was associated with the extent of desire for more sons, and how men and women differed in this regard.

Among our key results from the study, we found that a majority of men (67 percent) and women (47 percent) in the sample professed an equal desire to have a male or a female child. This did include the desire to have at least one son but it was an equal number of sons and daughters. Of those who expressed a preference for more sons or daughters, almost four times as many desired more sons than daughters. Men and women who wanted more sons were typically older, less literate, poorer and more likely to live in a rural setting. Almost one-fifth of the men in the highest age bracket of 35-49 years expressed a desire for more sons (compared to only 11 percent in the 18-24 age group). At older ages preferences may be more entrenched as they get further layered by social norms and expectations. While masculinity expressed by relationship control may ease with age, attitudes towards sons may become more resistant with age due to the need to have a son for one's old age support.

An overwhelming majority of men and women considered it very important to have at least one son in their family. In fact, more women (81 percent) than men (76 percent) felt so. Men and women have slightly varying priorities for why they want a son but it is broadly for lineage, old age support and sharing workload for men and for the first two sets of reasons for women. Almost a third (29 percent) of the men who already had more sons than daughters expressed a desire for additional sons. This is contrary to what we would expect which would be men with more daughters exhibiting a higher desire for sons.

The research showed that economic status played a very significant role in determining men's preference for sons, as men with higher economic status were only half as likely to have a high preference compared to poorer men. Men's past experiences in childhood also had a significant impact on their adult "masculine" behavior, such as preferring sons over daughters. Men we categorized as having rigid masculinity and women experiencing rigid masculine control showed a significantly greater desire for sons than those with more moderate or equitable masculinity.

Finally, almost half the men and women in our sample were unaware of India's Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 2003, which prohibits sex determination for non-medical reasons. And almost all the men and women (55 percent and 52 percent respectively) who were aware of the law felt it was important to ensure there were sufficient women for men to marry. About one-third of the total sample of men and women believed the law should allow sex selection for couples without sons. Attitudes around this very important law suggest ambivalence about legislating sex determination for a third of the people (allow for families with only sons to sex select). It also suggests the primary reason to have daughters is to ensure that there are enough women in the population for men to marry – an outlook that demonstrates gender unequal attitudes.

Our findings demonstrate that masculinity, childhood discriminatory experiences and economic stress have a considerable influence on both the attitudes of men and women and perhaps their subsequent decisions to act on their preference for sons over daughters.

Overall, we find that masculinity and its correlates have a high influence on both desire for sons and high son preferring attitudes. Moreover both attitudes and desires are important to unpack to really understand the complexities around son preference. Even where attitudes were highly son-preferring, men and women expressed a desire for the sex composition of their children to include at least one son and not necessarily for more sons than daughters. With declining fertility and expectations and desires for smaller families, and policies driving a small family norm, the desire is expressed for equal sons and daughters as long as there is at least one son. Son preference is also distinct from daughter discrimination and each operates differently for men and women

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The study findings emphasize that in India, masculinity strongly determines men's preference for sons over daughters as well as their proclivity for violence towards an intimate partner – both of which are manifestations of gender inequality. And given the results that showed a significant prevalence of intimate partner violence in a lifetime and during the last 12 months – both on the aggregate and across most states – it is important to identify how India can improve the policy and programmatic response towards gender-based violence by involving men and boys.

National policies and programs aimed at involving men, promoting gender equity and diminishing socio-cultural and religious practices that reinforce gender discrimination, should be implemented and promoted. In developing more focused initiatives that take into account the role of masculinity in achieving gender equality, there is a need to emphasize programs and policies that build men's confidence to behave differently. These efforts must also engage with men to evolve different ways to empower them and participate in peer-to-peer learning, which can help reduce the perpetration of various forms of traditional masculinity and resulting behaviors, such as violence against women.

Programs also need to break the cycle of childhood discrimination, which impacts on the expression of masculinity as well as the desire for sons. This would mean working with institutions starting with the household to the workplace that need to renounce violence as unacceptable. A remedy lies in reducing exposure to direct or indirect violence for the next generation to imbibe notions of masculinity that are not based on power and authority exercised through violence.

These efforts by nature have to be iterative and not a linear set of prescriptive time bound interventions. They would also need to be adaptive and flexible adhering to certain core principles of reflective learning, dialogue and action. These efforts cannot be scaled at a global and national level without creating a mass base of change agents at community level that understand the contextual realities of working with men and challenging deep-seated patriarchal attitudes and practices. There are a few noteworthy interventions underway that have begun the process of engaging with men to change social norms. Building on learning from those and based on the findings of this study, some of the ways in which we need to amplify our efforts to engage with men are articulated below.

*Implement comprehensive reflective learning programs on gender equality in school settings:* To curb this type of violence as well as the overwhelming preference for sons in India, it is imperative that programs focus on the early years in a man's life, by utilizing various platforms to reach young boys. Our findings also suggest the importance of consistent efforts in developing comprehensive reflective learning programs on gender equality in school settings, especially in secondary education, to promote better awareness and internalization of more equitable gender norms at early ages. Revising education curricula, materials and textbooks to eliminate gender stereotypes can do this. It's also important that school curricula incorporate knowledge on larger societal issues, including relevant laws protecting the rights of women and girls. It is equally important that girls learn to express than accept masculinity as a given and this can only happen through constructive and guided interactions that enable both boys and girls to step out of rigidly held gender role expectations that are conditioning their attitudes and behaviors.

*Continue to keep literacy and improving access to quality education top priorities in national policies and programs:*

Study findings illustrate that education, for both men and women, appears to reduce the prevalence of IPV. This is perhaps because being educated likely enhances the economic status of a household and increases communication and understanding between couples. Education is also empowering for women as it arms them with the ability to gather and assimilate information, negotiate circumstances and thus protect themselves from multiple forms of violence (Kishor, 2000; Kishor & Johnson, 2004; Malhotra & Mather, 1997). Men with a higher level of education were found to have low son preferring attitudes, high gender equitable attitudes and a high level of awareness on laws related to reproductive health and women's rights. Therefore, enhancing access to quality education and school completion should continue to be top priority in national policies and programs.

*Create programs that promote healthy and meaningful dialogues between men and women:* Policy makers often fail to address the contextual issues facilitating IPV; these are largely left to small grassroots or civil society pilot initiatives. Moving forward, there is an urgent need to design holistic, effective intervention programs that simultaneously recognize and address men's role in perpetuating IPV as well as in being a part of the solution to this national problem. Behavioral change communication initiatives that help to challenge IPV as an acceptable expression of masculinity need to be designed and implemented. Engaging men and entire communities in efforts to promote healthy and meaningful dialogues between men and women, with a focus on the impact of IPV on peoples' lives, is a critical foundational step to increasing men's awareness of and sensitivity to IPV.

*Create a mass base of men as change agents:* Through community level efforts that understand the contextual realities of working with men there is a need to engage men to become agents of change both for themselves and for other men. Their work is to internally reflect and challenge deep-seated patriarchal attitudes and practices. The process of peer learning is important because evidence now suggests that men learn from other men – men in positions of authority, men in family, men as friends – they also need to unlearn from men and therefore the need for change agents and positive role models (Das and Singh, 2014). These are not men who are unique or different to begin with but those that have undergone transformation and are willing to affect the change in others. There are interventions like Men's Action to Stop Violence Against Women (MASVAW) and Parivartan (ICRW) that have begun the process of engaging with men to change social norms. Building on learning from these and based on the findings of this study, we need to create many more mini movements of social change that are iterative and grow in their own contextual realities.

*Design national and state-specific public educational campaigns that focus on redefining gender roles:* Developing public educational campaigns that focus on redefining men and women's role in the family need to be encouraged. Any public awareness and advocacy intervention should focus on creating a more supportive environment for India's women and girls, who continue to experience severe discrimination. Again, it is critical that these messages redefine norms of masculinity and men's role in the family to discourage IPV as well as attitudes towards gender inequality. Such campaigns also can have the power to trigger social change. These particularly need to be calibrated to address caste-specific and socio-religious practices that reinforce son preference in India.

*Strategically merge women's empowerment with men's engagement programs:* It is critical to bring men and women together in a strategic manner across different types of programs and sectors to create platforms and avenues where traditional gender roles are confronted and challenged. For example, micro-finance institutions (MFI) and self-help group programs that are largely and often exclusively targeting women should find ways to engage men to create synergistic and mutually reinforcing platforms within the gender framework. On the other hand, agriculture and/or producers cooperatives that are often male-dominated with little role for and engagement with women need to infuse women's empowerment frameworks within their scope. Youth and sports programs also happen to 'naturally' target men and boys whereas reproductive health programs think exclusively in terms of women as the audience.

*Inclusion of men as a category in policies:* 'Men' as a category is absent in most policy documents assuming policies need to be women focused and gender neutral. Gender is often routinely replaced by 'women's empowerment' undermining the understanding that men need to be held accountable for creating spaces for women's empowerment and gender equality. Such 'gender-neutral' policy statements tend to perpetuate gender stereotypes, as they do not recognize the role of masculine ideology that underlies many of the social, economic and gender inequities. Policy documents must explicitly recognize gender injustice as an integral part of social injustice and hold men – both within programs and also outside – responsible and accountable for engendering social change.

*Implement more operations research to identify innovative models:* At the programmatic level, working with men and boys is an immense challenge. We need operational research approaches to identify and model innovative and culture-specific ways to engage men and boys in gender equality promotion programs. Use of social media, sports programs, creative campaigns and men's networks are some of the ways that have been tried but need greater attention, research and resources. Qualitative and longitudinal research is also required to understand the process of change as it unfolds and the perceptions, motivations, and triggers behind the change. It will also allow assessing the environmental and circumstantial nuances that contribute to actual manifestations of rigid or unequal attitudes into unequal behaviors. As this study revealed, even rigid attitudes were often modulated by socio-economic conditions not always resulting in inequitable behaviors.





**ICRW Asia Regional Office**  
C-59, South Extension, Part II  
New Delhi - 110 049  
Tel: 91-11-46643333  
Website: [www.icrw.org/asia](http://www.icrw.org/asia)

**ICRW Headquarters**  
1120 20<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Suite 55, North  
Washington, DC 20036  
Tel: 202.797.0007  
Website: [www.icrw.org](http://www.icrw.org)

**United Nations Population Fund - UNFPA**  
55, Lodhi Estate,  
New Delhi - 110 003, India  
Tel: 91-11-24628877  
Website: [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org) / [india.unfpa.org](http://india.unfpa.org)