



# MASCULINITY, INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND SON PREFERENCE IN INDIA – FINDINGS FROM ODISHA\*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade there have been many efforts to understand the underlying reasons for extreme gender inequality and its outcomes. In particular, research evidence on the role of men and masculinity has reinforced that men's attitudes and more broadly, masculinity, perpetuate son preference and to some extent, intimate partner violence in Asia<sup>1</sup>. Studies have also shown that men and boys must be an integral part of efforts to promote gender equality. The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), in collaboration with UNFPA, adapted the International Men and Gender Equality Survey methodology, to deeply understand the intrinsic relationship between masculinity, son preference and intimate partner violence (IPV) in seven states<sup>#</sup> of India<sup>2</sup>. The aggregate level results show that masculinity is a key determinant of IPV and son preference in the Indian context. This research brief presents and discusses the findings of this study for the state of Odisha.

## STATE PROFILE

Odisha with a population of 41 million is the 11<sup>th</sup> most populous state in India<sup>3</sup>. It contributes to 3.4% of the total population of the country. The demographic indicators for Odisha are presented in Table 1. The sex ratio at birth (females per 1,000 males) in Odisha is higher than the national average of 909 (2011-13) and it has improved significantly over the past few years<sup>4</sup>. The overall literacy rate for the population ages seven and above is on par with the overall national average of 74% in 2011 (men literacy rate 82% and female literacy rate 65%)<sup>3</sup>.

Although equal to national averages on some of the core socio-demographic indicators, the status of women and girls in Odisha continues to be low. Almost four in ten ever-married women in Odisha have experienced spousal, physical or sexual violence, which is higher than the national prevalence of 37%<sup>5</sup>. Nearly half of the women (47%) who have only daughters desire for more children as compared to 10 percent of women who already have two sons. According to National Family Health Survey-3 (NFHS-3) data a high proportion of girls continue to marry before the legal age of 18, while lower than the national average that is 37% of women of ages between 20-24 got married before 18. The data suggests that the prevalence of child marriage is greater in rural areas where a significant proportion of women ages 20-24 years wed before

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Table 1: Demographics of Odisha at a Glance

Indicators	Estimates (Year)	
Sex ratio at birth (SRB: girls per 1,000 boys) <sup>4</sup>	937 (2006-08)	956 (2011-13)
Literacy rate <sup>3</sup>	63 (2001)	73 (2011)
Male literacy rate <sup>3</sup>	71 (2001)	82 (2011)
Female literacy rate <sup>3</sup>	51 (2001)	63 (2011)

<sup>1</sup> Das Gupta, Monica., (2003) Why son preference is persistent in East and South Asia? A cross country study of China, India and Republic of Korea, Journal of Development Studies, 40(2), 153-187

<sup>2</sup> Nanda P, Gautam A, Verma R, Khanna A, Khan N, Brahme D, Boyle S, Kumar S (2014). "Study on Masculinity, Intimate Partner Violence and Son Preference in India". New Delhi, International Center for Research on Women (Available at: [www.icrw.org; india.unfpa.org](http://www.icrw.org; india.unfpa.org))

<sup>3</sup> Census 2011, Office of Registrar General of India

<sup>4</sup> Sample Registration System, Office of Registrar General of India

<sup>5</sup> National Family Health Survey Round -2 and 3

# Seven states: Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra



turning 15 (11%) and 18 (40%). Only 17% of girls' ages 15-17 years are currently in school in Odisha where a majority of girls (87%) discontinue their schooling in rural areas at the secondary level as per NFHS-3. According to Census 2011, the female work participation rate in the state is low (27%) and varies widely among the districts<sup>3</sup>.

These development indicators are reflective of the low status of women and girls in Odisha. Given this backdrop the study aimed to understand men's attitudes and behaviors around son preference and IPV to recommend how men can be engaged in efforts to address gender inequality.

## OBJECTIVE

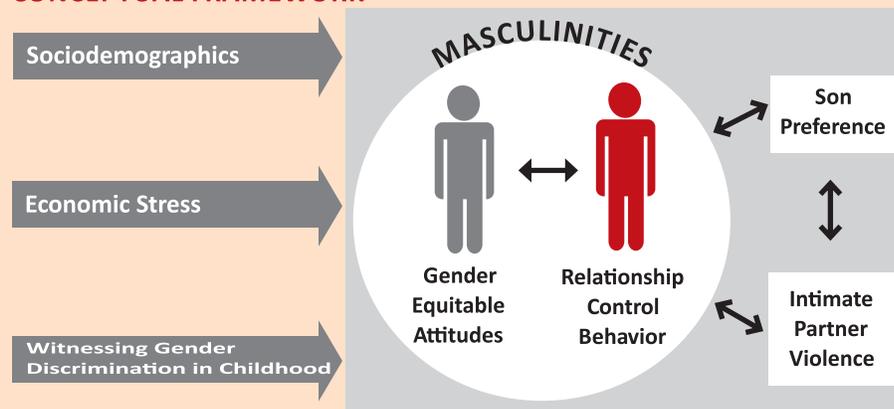
The primary objective of the study was to examine the dimensions and determinants of men's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors on issues related to gender equality, son preference and IPV. The specific objectives were to:

1. Assess men's current behaviors and attitudes on intimate partner violence.
2. Assess men's knowledge and attitudes towards son preference and gender equality.
3. Explore contributing factors that can be attributed to men's attitudes and behaviors related to IPV and son preference.
4. 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 their family of origin, stress and unemployment, among others.

## FRAMEWORK

The study was conceptualized to examine the role of masculinity as a determinant of son preference and IPV. It also looks at the underlying determinants of masculinity, particularly economic stress and experience of childhood discrimination, and the role that those factors play in understanding son preference and IPV.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



**Methodology:** The study was carried out in the following seven states of India: Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

These selected states were not only fairly large in terms of population and geographical spread but also had diverse sex ratio at birth. To achieve a representative sample at the state level the sample size was fixed at 1,500 men and 500 women, ages 18-49 in each state.

Sample Size	Total All State	Odisha
Men	9,205	1,611
Women	3,158	566

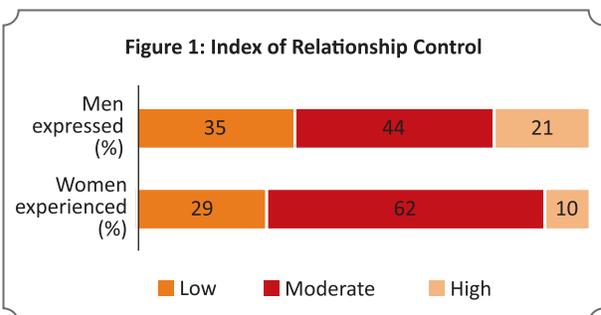
A multistage cluster sampling approach was adopted to select the samples. Each state was divided into regions and samples were allocated in proportion to the size of the regions. To have representation of both rural and urban areas, samples were further distributed in the ratio of 60 to 40, respectively between rural and urban primary sample units. The primary sampling unit in urban areas was census enumeration blocks and in rural areas it was villages or a group of villages (in case of small linked villages). Appropriate weights were calculated at the state and aggregate level and applied during analysis.

## BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS IN ODISHA

The mean age of surveyed male respondents was 32 and for female respondents it was 30. Three-fifths (59%) of men and 62% of women in the sample were from rural areas. Nearly a quarter (24%) of women were illiterate while among men less than 5% of the sample was illiterate. Similarly a small proportion of respondents (16% of men and 10% of women) reported attaining higher education (graduation or above). One-third men (34%) and one-fifth of women (20%) were not married at the time of the survey. Among those who were married, more than half of the men (55%) and 84% of the women reported that their marriage was arranged and they had agreed willingly. Around one-third of the married men reported that their marriage was arranged but they had to agree, while the proportion of women reporting the same was only 4%. In a nutshell, a majority of the respondents were in their early 30s and lived in rural areas. Most had completed high school education and were married at the time of the study.

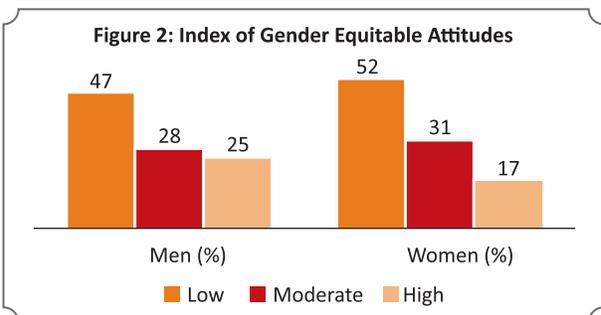
### MASCULINITY

Masculinity is a set of socially constructed attributes, behaviors and roles generally associated with boys and men. It is influenced by a variety of social and cultural factors that create attributes of what it means to be “a real man”, although there are characteristics that may be similar across contexts. Women, too, possess attributes of masculinity, which tend to be expressed in their own attitudes towards gender equality as well as how much control is exerted over them - by an intimate partner or others - in their lives. For this study, it was defined by two aspects: “relationship control” as a behavioral dimension and “attitude towards gender norms” 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. Nine statements such as “I want to know where my wife/partner is all the time” and “My husband/partner won’t let me wear certain things”, capturing men’s expressions and women’s experiences of relationship control were combined and a summarized score was used to develop an index of relationship control. In Odisha, slightly more than one-fifth of men (21%) expressed excessive control while only 10% of women reported experiencing high control in their relationships, much less as compared to other study states.



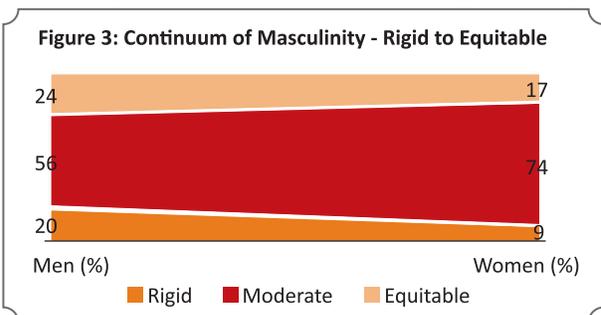
Index of Relationship Control: Average across the states		
Relationship Control Index	Men	Women
Low	30	37
Moderate	34	39
High	37	23

In terms of the attitudinal dimension of masculinity, 27 attitudinal statements capturing perceptions and attitudes on some key gender norms were used to form an index of gender equitable attitudes. Among the statements were, for example, “Women’s most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family”; and “A woman should tolerate domestic violence in order to keep her family together.” The distribution of men and women’s responses on these statements were quite similar, however there are certain domains on which men hold more equitable attitudes compared to women. It is evident that only one-fourth of men and less than one-fifth of women held positive and equitable attitudes towards gender equality, while others were either moderately or highly negative. While not exerting high control in their relationships, as compared to average across states, the proportion of men and women with unequal attitudes were higher in Odisha.



Index of Gender Equitable Attitude: Average across the states		
Gender Equitable Attitude	Men	Women
Low	38	39
Moderate	32	32
High	30	29

The combined scores of “relationship control” and “attitudes to gender equal norms” provided different categories of men and women, which were further trichomatized into three categories – rigid, moderate and equitable. Rigid men are those who not only exercised excessive control in their intimate relationships but



Continuum of Masculinity: Average across the states		
Masculinity Index	Men	Women
Rigid	32	21
Moderate	45	52
Equitable	23	27

While not exerting high control in their relationships, as compared to average across states, the proportion of men and women with unequal attitudes were higher in Odisha.

Table 2: Odds of Equitable Men and Women		
Determinants	Odds for men	Odds for women
<b>Type of residence</b>		
Rural (R)		
Urban	1.44	0.41
<b>Current age</b>		
18-24 years (R)		
25-34 years	1.38	1.89
35-49 years	1.06	1.33
<b>Level of education</b>		
Up to Primary (0-5 class) (R)		
Up to higher secondary (6-12 class)	1.48	0.98
Graduate and above	4.38**	4.56*
<b>Type of family</b>		
Nuclear (R)		
Non-Nuclear	1.58	0.37*
<b>Wealth Index</b>		
Low (R)		
Middle	1.16	3.70
High	1.28	18.15*
<b>Economic stress</b>		
Yes (R)		
No	1.89	
<b>Decision making in family</b>		
Father (R)		
Both Together	1.58	0.86
<b>Witnessing male participation in household chores</b>		
Yes (R)		
No	0.46*	0.36
<b>Witnessed/Experienced discrimination/harassment during childhood</b>		
Yes (R)		
No	0.80	0.60

Note: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01

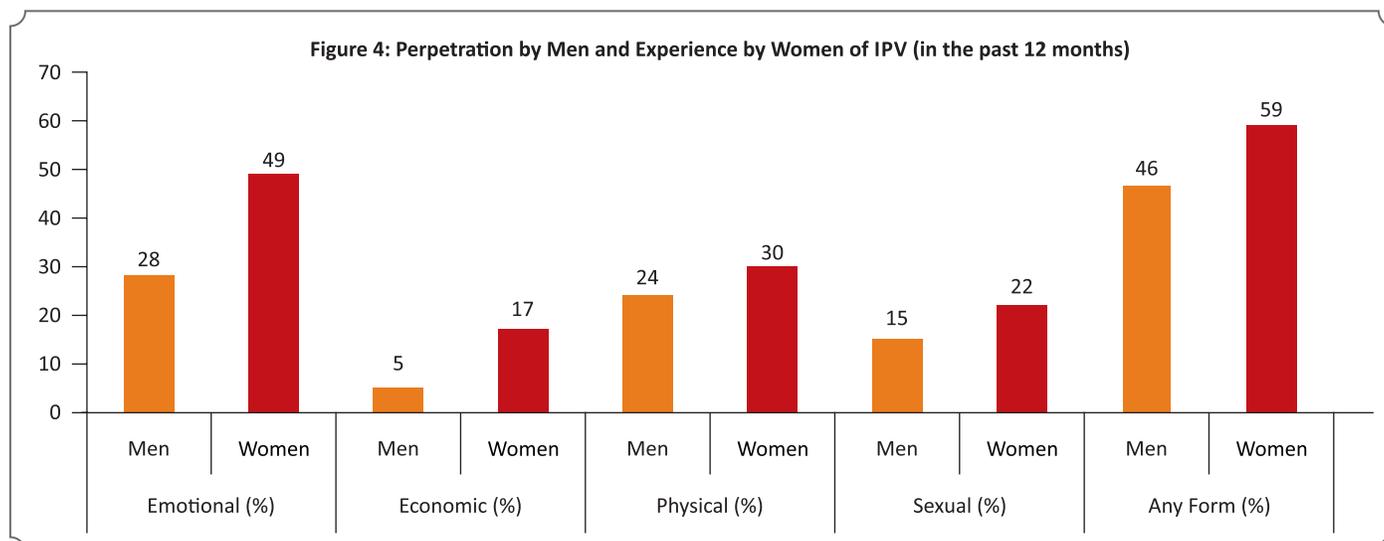
also believed that women and men are unequal and held negative attitudes about gender norms. On the other hand, men who are less controlling in their intimate relationships and believed in gender equality were considered as equitable. In Odisha, “rigid masculinity” was manifested and enacted by one-fifth of the men in the study, which was less than the proportion of men at the aggregate level across all states in the study. However, the majority of men in Odisha fell in the “moderately rigid” category. Among women in Odisha, only 17% reported having equitable attitudes and being in a highly equitable relationship. This was quite less compared to the average proportion of women across the state in equitable relationships. Overall, a larger proportion of men and women in Odisha expressed moderately rigid masculinity compared to other states.

The multivariate analysis to decide the key determinants of equitable men reveals that education is a significant predictor of masculinity for both men and women. Men and women who have attained higher education are nearly four times more likely to have gender-equitable behaviors and attitudes compared to their counterparts. Living in a non-nuclear family shows different results for men and women. Women who stay in non-nuclear families were significantly less likely to report experiencing low control by intimate partners and were inequitable in their own attitudes; while the results were opposite, but not significant, among men. Both men and women belonging to higher wealth strata were more likely to be equitable compared to those from a lower economic status. Economic strata and education may affect equitable behavior possibly due to the fact that more women are likely to be working and able to negotiate rights for themselves. This relationship was very significant for women. Interestingly, unlike in other states, witnessing or experiencing discrimination/harassment during childhood were not significant influences on rigidly masculine behavior for men or women. However, witnessing men participating in household chores was a positive and significant influence on equitable attitudes and behaviors for both men and women.

Across the states men’s perpetration of any form of violence in the past 12 months is 34% while reported experience of any form of violence by women is 31%.

### INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND MASCULINITY

In the study, men and women who have or ever had a spouse were asked a series of questions to assess the prevalence of intimate partner violence. The questions covered acts of emotional, economic, physical and sexual violence. The sample of men and women were independent of each other. The response to the series of questions for



each form of violence was taken into account and a composite variable for each form of violence was created.

Nearly half of the men (46%) reported perpetrating and more than three-fifths (59%) of the women reported experiencing any form of violence in the past 12 months. The prevalence of IPV is highest in Odisha compared to all the other states, with the highest form of violence reported by men and women being emotional violence. Almost half of the women (49%) reported experiencing this form of violence and a little more than a quarter of the men reported perpetrating it in the past 12 months. This is unlike other states where physical violence tends to be most common. Interestingly, men’s reports on all forms of violence were less than the proportion of women who reported similar forms of violence. Men were possibly under-reporting economic and emotional violence, since these are not culturally associated with control or violence by men.

The key determinants of IPV include socio-economic characteristics, economic stress and experience of inequalities in childhood and masculinity.

For both men and women, education plays a significant role in reducing the prevalence of violence. With higher levels of education the perpetration of violence reported by men and experienced by women reduces significantly. From the multivariate regression analysis, men and women who have higher education levels (graduation or above) are 0.4 times (CI: 0.19-0.89) and 0.16 times (CI: 0.05-0.57) less likely to perpetrate and experience any form of violence in the past 12 months, respectively.

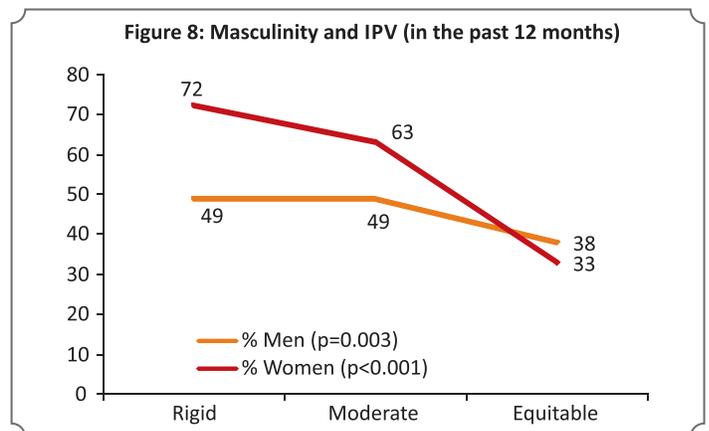
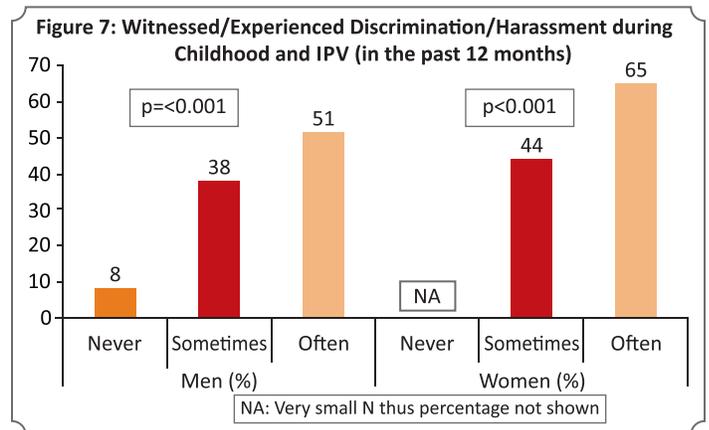
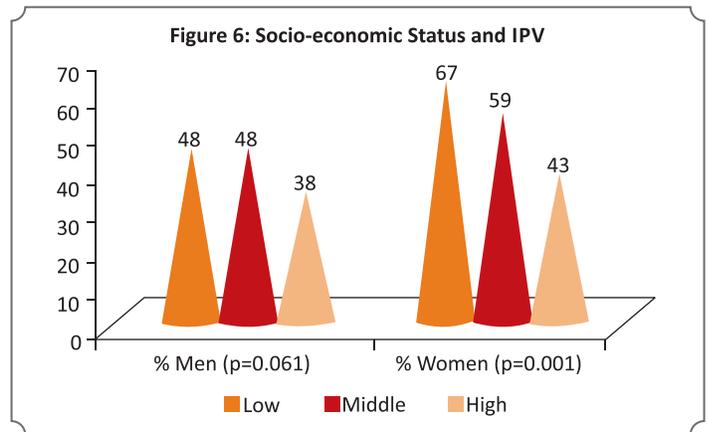
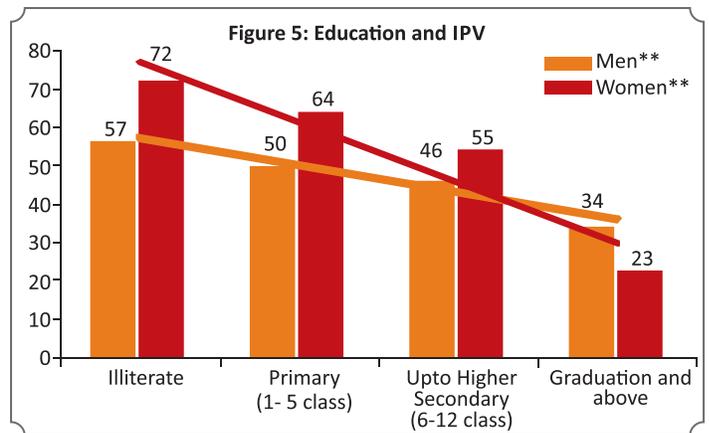
The socio-economic status of men did not show significant differences in their perpetration of violence. The difference between the experiences of violence by women belonging to different socio-economic strata is clearly significant. This may be because at higher economic strata women have more economic autonomy and therefore may be cushioned from some of the experiences of violence.

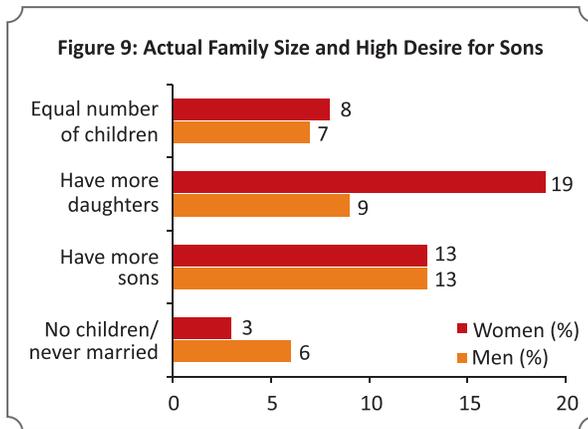
Violence and discrimination may get internalized as normal if a child observes or experiences it during his or her formative years and as an adult may likely perpetrate it. More than half of the men as well as two-fifth women who have often witnessed or experienced discrimination or harassment during childhood reported perpetrating or experiencing violence in the past 12 months.

Finally, masculinity is a strong predictor of IPV, and as we move along its continuum from rigid to equitable, any form of violence perpetrated by men and experienced by women reduces significantly. Even though the drop is quite steep, a significant proportion of women (33%) having equitable attitude and in equitable relationship reported experiencing IPV.

**SON PREFERENCE AND MASCULINITY**

Son preference is strongly correlated with the actual number of sons a couple has at the national levels. In Odisha, an equal proportion of men and women who already have more sons

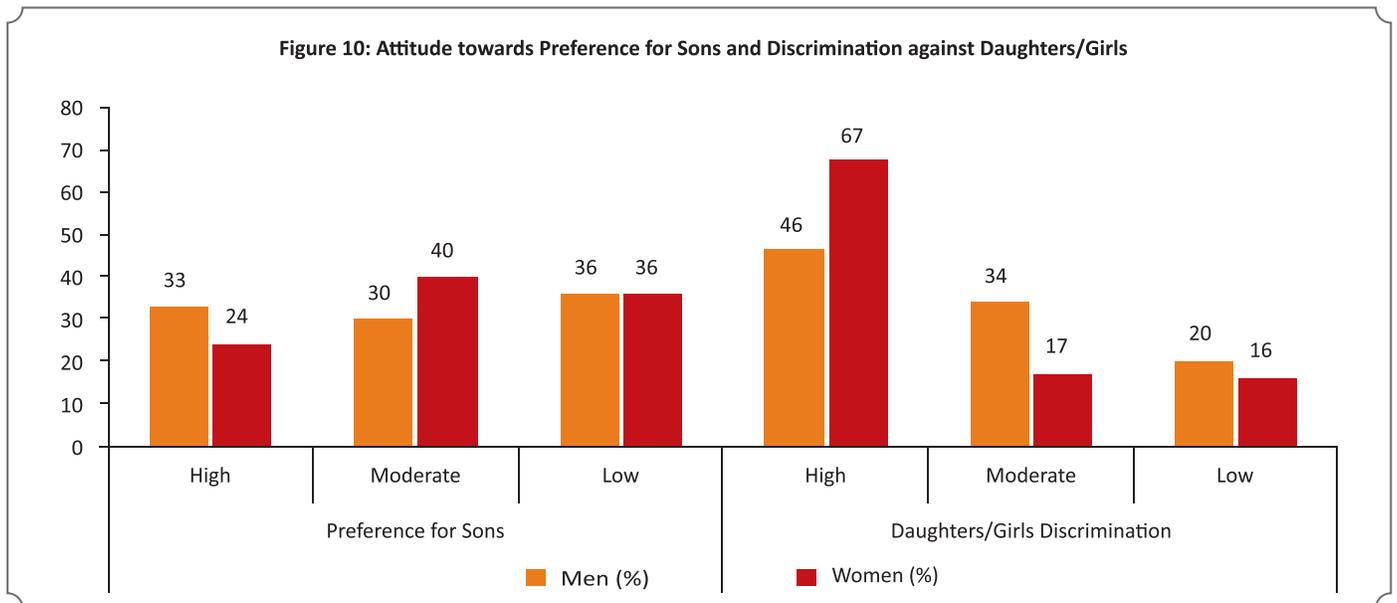




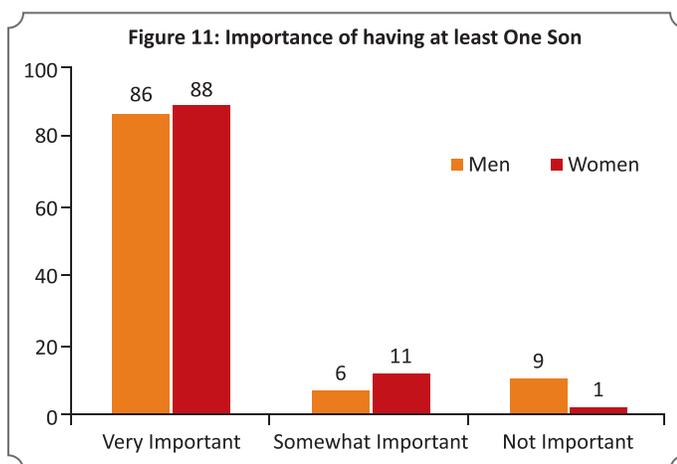
than daughters reported a high desire for sons. Interestingly, among men and women who have more daughters in their family, the proportion of women wanting sons was higher. Nearly one-fifth of women with more daughters (19%) had a high desire for sons while less than 10% of men showed such a desire. Among those men and women who have an equal number of sons and daughters, a fairly low percent (less than 10%) desired sons. These were people who already had at least one son, which may be the reason there was a lower desire for another son.

In the study we also used attitudinal statements to measure preference for sons among men and women, and assess their attitudes against daughters/girls. Different sets of statements were used to measure attitudes towards son preference and discriminatory attitudes against daughters/girls.

One-third of men and almost a quarter of women showed a high preference



for sons, while more than two-fifths of men (46%) and three-fifths of women (67%) exhibited high discriminatory attitudes against daughters/girls. This discrimination was higher among women than men and highest across all states. Attitudes towards preference for sons are lower than the discriminatory attitudes against daughters/girls. Son preference cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the dispreference for daughter's which appears to be high in Odisha.



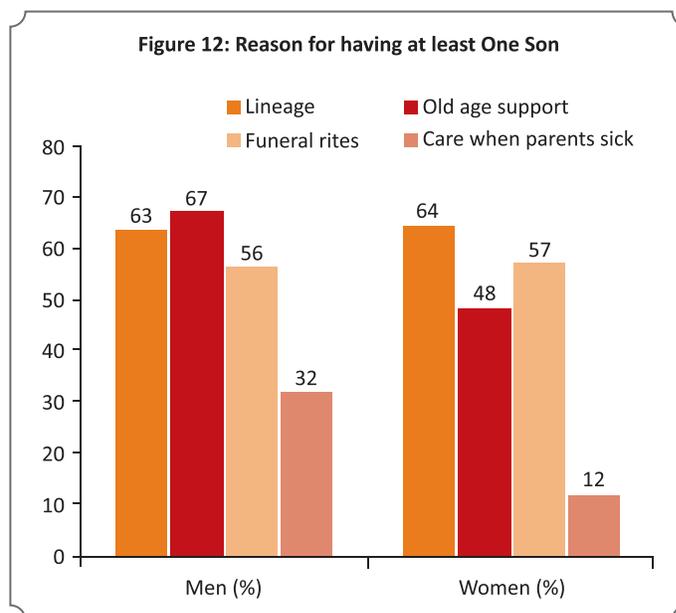
**IMPORTANCE OF HAVING AT LEAST ONE SON**

The overwhelming majority of both men and women considered it very important to have at least one son in their family. In fact, more women (88%) than men (86%) had this conviction.

On average, the proportion of men and women in all states who thought it is important to have at least one son was quite high (76% men and 81% women), the levels registered in Odisha were even higher at more than 81% for both men and women. Meanwhile, nearly three-fourths of the men (74%) and 78% of the women in Odisha believed it was important to have at least one daughter. Across states, an average of 68% of men and nearly three-fourths (74%) of women thought this to be very important.

### REASONS FOR HAVING AT LEAST ONE SON

Both men and women agreed that the most important reasons to have a son were to carry on the family name and to provide support in their old age, although men’s desire to have a son for old age support was far higher (67%) than women’s (48%). The third most important reason to have sons was for their role in the performance of funeral rites (56% of the men and 57% of the women). Another reason for having a son was to take care of ailing parents, which was reported by more men (32%), than women (12%). As for having daughters, more than half of the men (56%) stated that it is important to have at least one daughter to perform rituals such as *kanyadan/rakshabandhan*; while only 13% of women reported this as an important reason. Among women, daughters were most often desired for sharing the household workload (62%). More than half of the women (53%) and a little less than half of the men (45%) said it is important to have one daughter to take care of parents when they are sick.



### DETERMINANTS OF HIGH SON-PREFERRING ATTITUDES

In the multivariate regression analysis, education emerged as a strong and significant predictor of son-preferring attitudes: Half of the men (49%) with no education had a high preference for sons, compared to 16% of men who had graduated or attained higher education (OR: 0.25; CI:0.08-0.79). Similarly, among women, more than two-fifths (44%) who were illiterate had a high preference for sons, while among those who were graduates or had higher education, only 2% had a high son-preferring attitude.

As for other determinants, men living in rural areas were nearly twice (CI: 1.14 – 2.53) more likely to have a high preference for sons compared to urban men. Among women, those in rural areas were three times (CI: 1.69 – 7.71) more likely to have high son-preferring attitudes, compared to urban women. Men (42%) and women (37%) belonging to low wealth strata had son-preferring attitudes, compared with 16% men and 4% women in the higher wealth strata. Masculinity is a strong predictor of these outlooks toward sons; rigidly masculine men were more likely to have high preference for sons (66%) compared to men who are equitable (5%). The pattern was also true with women respondents.

### REFLECTIONS

The findings from Odisha reveal that a large proportion of men (56%) and women (74%) report being moderately masculine and less than a fifth manifested rigid masculinity. In comparison to other states, only a small proportion of women (17%) and men (24%) held positive attitudes towards gender equality. Low levels of education and childhood experience of discrimination and violence are strong predictors of masculinity in the state.

The overall prevalence of IPV is high at 46% for men’s reported perpetration and 59% for women’s experience. The study results also indicate that almost half of the women had experienced emotional violence in the past 12 months, unlike other states where physical violence tends to be higher. The difference between the experiences of violence faced by women belonging to different socio-economic strata was also significant. For

Socio-Demographic Factors	Men (%)	Women (%)
<b>Education</b>		
Illiterate	49.2	44.4
1-5 standard	48.3	36.1
6-12 standard	29.9	14.3
13+ standard	15.9	1.8
<b>p-value</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
<b>Residence</b>		
Rural	41.5	32.1
Urban	21.4	11.1
<b>p-value</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
<b>Wealth Index</b>		
Low	42.3	37.0
Middle	27.2	20.7
High	16.1	3.7
<b>p-value</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
<b>Masculinity Index (Gender Attitude and Relationship Control)</b>		
Equitable	5.4	0.0
Moderate	38.5	30.6
Rigid	65.9	36.2
<b>p-value</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>

High	Uttar Pradesh
Son Preference, Intimate Partner Violence and Masculinity	Odisha
	Madhya Pradesh
	Punjab and Haryana
	Maharashtra
Low	Rajasthan
<p><b>Note:</b> The states are arranged based on the aggregate ranking on prevalence of masculinity, son preference and intimate partner violence for both men and women combined.</p>	

instance, a large proportion of women in Odisha are employed as non-workers in the agricultural sector and their contribution to household income is negligible or largely invisible<sup>6</sup>. Since the state lacks industrial development and has poor job opportunities, researchers posit that women have fewer opportunities to find employment.

We also hypothesize that women at higher levels of earning are cushioned from some experiences of violence due to their economic autonomy. The key to help women gain agency and negotiate power to counter some of the risk of IPV are to bring opportunistic programs for women to earn an income and visibility to show how working women's income and domestic labor can contribute to their households. Skill-building, income-generation and entrepreneurial activity are required as they would help give women economic autonomy and a sense of self worth. Equally important is also to invest in skill-building among adolescent girls and provide platforms that enable their economic empowerment besides changing their social standing in the community. Programs such as Mission Shakti that have been initiated in Odisha to develop women's collectives through self-help groups may be considered important in this context. Additionally other campaigns need to signify the role of women in different aspects of their lives not just as mothers or wives but in the alternative spaces they occupy in society.

The sex ratio at birth in Odisha indicates parity with the national average yet results from this study show that both men and women hold highly discriminatory attitudes towards daughters. Odisha has possibly recorded a limited use of the medical technology for sex selection which has prohibited the propagation of attributing negative values towards daughters unlike trends in other states. However, given the high daughter aversion, it does not negate the possibility of future increase in access and misuse of this form of technology. Thus the state needs to have measures and systems in place that keep a check on the accessibility to pre natal sex determination technology. Additionally, there is a need to implement programs that educate communities on the value of girls to alter the gender stereotyping of girls' and boys' roles in society. Such efforts would help counter negative values against daughters. Education is strong in its association with lowering the risk of IPV and masculinity. There are many state level Conditional Cash Transfer schemes underway in Odisha to incentivize girls' education. Enhancing access to quality education and encouraging school completion should continue to be the top priorities. Within school settings, it is imperative to carry out reflective learning programs on gender equality to reach young boys early in their lives as these will amplify the effect of education and help bring about changes in attitudes around gender inequality.

With such poor indicators of gender equality, prevalence of IPV and son preference in Odisha, there is an immense potential for creating messages, campaigns and community-level outreach around redefining traditional gender norms. Campaign messages must recast norms about what it means to be "a real man" and discourage intimate partner violence as well as attitudes that support gender inequality. Finally, in every effort aimed at eliminating son preference and IPV, it is essential to bring men and women together in a strategic manner, across different programs and sectors, to create spaces where traditional gender roles are confronted and challenged.

<sup>6</sup> Pathak, B. "Economic Empowerment and Women of Orissa." Orissa Review (2011): 65-67. Government of Odisha. Web: <http://orissa.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/2011/Apr/engpdf/66-68.pdf>

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