

Migration, Conceptions of Masculinity and Femininity and Changing Gender Norms

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Background and Objectives of the study

- ❑ “Masculinity and Gender Equality Study South Asia ” is part of a wider series of initiatives by the World Bank to expand research on male gender roles – regional initiative
- ❑ Commissioned by Social Inclusion Team and supported through the South Asia Gender Equality Initiative (SAGE) Trust Fund.
- ❑ main objective of the Bangladesh Country Study was to explore the dynamics of gender norms and masculinity in the midst of changes in the labour markets and migration.
- ❑ Gain a more nuanced understanding of gender relations and how they impact constructions of both ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts

Methodology of the study

Study area: two urban slums and a peri-urban area

- ❖ Kalyanpur slum at Mirpur
- ❖ Comfort housing society slum at Mohammadpur
- ❖ Dohar in Dhaka (peri-urban), known to be a source of international migration.

Sampling and methods:

- In-depth interviews with 24 male respondents of two age groups (16 to 35 and 36 to 55)
- 11 in-depth interviews were conducted with women related to the men interviewed
- 11 Key Informant Interviews

Respondent profiles

- Purposively selected respondents from the following categories:
 - International migration returnees (from urban and peri-urban areas)
 - Husbands of female international migrants (from urban and peri-urban areas)
 - Migrants from rural to urban areas married to garment workers (from urban slums)
 - Husbands of home-based workers (from urban slums and also mainly migrants)
 - Students/job-seekers (from urban and peri-urban areas)

Data collection period: December 19, 2013 to January 26, 2014

Conception of masculinity

- Adult men were conceived as responsible,
- male breadwinner and guardian role is emphasized
- earning an income for their families either through an employment or some kind of occupation,
- caring for their elderly parents,
- being mature and
- Marriage is seen as a key event
- Marriage is also important because a man needs a wife to care for him when he comes home after a hard day's work: entitlement.
- Marriage and having children is also a way of proving one's virility.
- Men are seen as belonging to the public sphere: both working and socialising, while women should spend time in the home.
- Men are also expected to withstand various temptations - implicit understanding that they will face these temptations which include habits and addictions such as drinking, smoking, drugs and gambling.

Notions of the desired husband among women

- Responsible, industrious and not addicted to drugs, alcohol, gambling or any other “subversive” social activities.

Poor should not have any choice. I had no choice. But I knew him before marriage. He was living near my elder sister-in-law's house. When I used to travel to my sister's house, I saw him and came to know that he is earning money, isn't associated with any bad habits like drug addiction, doesn't play cards etc and so I liked him and agreed to marry him.' (Parvin, 26, Garments worker).

- Importance of men to be dominant and recognized as such, even if the wife was more educated or earned more.

Conception of femininity

Women's concepts

- ❖ Should be married and part of a family
- ❖ Should have children or prove fertility
- ❖ Caring for husband and in-law's
- ❖ Can't go outside without permission of husband and in-law's even being married for a long period of time because "because she has many responsibilities"

Notions of the desired wife among men

- soft, patient,
- caring of children, the elderly and the husband.
- should keep the house clean and "pure"
- beauty of the household and their role is to be beautiful, make the house beautiful
- women should do the domestic work
- earning role, which is subservient to their role of caring of for the family.
- caring about household expenditure and trying to save.

'Sabina with some other friends came to visit our house and she sought my mother's blessings by touching her feet which greatly impressed me. My mother was also happy. When Sabina was leaving my mother said to her - My child! Stay well. At that moment I decided that this girl will be gentle and I finally married her.' (Mishidul, 27, husband of home-based worker, shop keeper)

Decisions on migration and women's entry into paid work

- In most cases the women had a major role in deciding to enter into paid work
- In the case of women in garments, a number of them took the decision and then their husbands agreed.
- In the case of women doing home-based work the decision was joint
- Easy for women to get jobs in the garment factories. Men can easily get work as labourers and rickshaw pullers
- Since they feel it is difficult to live in Dhaka or save any money on a single income it is very acceptable for the men to encourage their wives or allow them to join garments factory.
- Garments work is seen as formal, taking place in an 'office' with a relatively better working environment.
- Once the couple migrates, their relatives and neighbours point out that they will be better off if their wife is also working
- Other women are compelled to go into garments by their husbands - income is needed for the family and so that they can save enough to go back home.

Family and community reactions to women's entry into paid work

- The attitudes towards women working in the garments factories vary.
 - immediate family is positive about the work in the garments,
 - extended family is sometimes supportive and sometimes very negative.
- Extended family members of home-based workers such as shop keepers have reservations about the women sitting in public and having to deal with all kinds of customers.
 - Since their shops are in their own locality and their customers are mainly their neighbours it is seen as acceptable.

Decision making in the family

- Respondents reported that both men and women are taking joint decision more often, and sometime women's decisions get priority and also accepted positively by the male members of the family.
- Women's involvement in the decision making is seen in the following areas:
 - ❖ Decision to have children
 - ❖ Family planning
 - ❖ Choices related to children education
 - ❖ Budgeting, savings and loans

“My husband was not ready to buy land. I told him that spending money on land was not like throwing it away. The money will remain, it will be safe. My in-laws can produce rice on the land. One day they will be grateful to both of us for having bought this. They can't question me 'what you have done?'. Then I can tell them that their son did not earn the money on his own but I was also involved and I am also contributing to the well-being of the household. So they should not misbehave with me” (Sabina, 25, shopkeeper running a shop with her husband).

Divisions of household responsibilities: attitudes and practices

Attitudes

- Male respondents did not consider purchasing daily commodities from the bazaar/market as household work, because to perform this work one has to go outside or to the market.
- work done in-doors is seen as household work.
- men do not recognize or value household or care work and only do it for practical reasons if they have to.
- whatever the employment status of the wife, caring for children is valued – in all the categories that we studied.

Practices

- *We share and work together'* (Fazar Ali, 38, husband of home-based worker, Van puller).
- some husbands of migrants are taking on various family and household responsibilities.
- If women have full-time outside employment then the household work is shared and managed by others with the management being dependent on the resources available to the family (older members, daughters', domestic help
- Among the rural to urban migrants, older women family members were taking on the responsibilities of the mother
- husbands who migrated from rural to urban areas and with wives working in garments factories, cook, clean their houses, sweep, take care of their children
- if both husband and wife are operating a business or shop, the husbands are not doing any household work.. She has to adjust her business hours with household work hours
- some male respondents who are doing household work willingly and saying that they liked it- men who had done this type of work during their childhood.

Dealing with conflicts and violence against women

How conflicts form:

- respondents idealised the relations between their parents as being harmonious and positive
- conflicts range from verbal disagreements and arguments to extreme physical violence
- Out of the 18 married men interviewed five admitted to physical violence towards their wives

Issues on which conflicts are created:

Children's care and education, husband's smoking, husband not look after his business enough, spending too much money, not having work, not following instruction for business, if wife talks to other men, if wife quarrels with in-laws, when wife insults husband's parents, if wife beats the children

How dealt with:

- ❖ Employment of women gives a better bargaining position in terms of conflicts and influence the outcomes.
- Women have a way out when they can earn an income for themselves and their children and do not have to wait for remittance.
- Kashem avoids conflict by not reacting when his wife comes back from a long day at the garments factory, tired and short-tempered
- Mishidul used to beat his wife for first few years but then found that it was a "loss" - everyone would suffer – parents, children, himself if she did not cook or look after them, which she would stop doing after a beating.
- ❖ When children are older, husbands hesitate beating/scolding wife before them.
- ❖ Beating/scolding wife reduces prestige before neighborss/community people.

Violence against women

This study found that "men do not regard actual harassment or spousal violence to be as high as women do". One-third of women believe that it is usual in their communities' for woman to be beaten if they neglect home and family.

Extra marital affairs are most likely to be beaten or scold and here men and women have almost identical response, indicating that this is a norm. Most FGDs also felt that violence against women as a "last resort" was quite common (2008: 92)

Gender norms around violence

- ❑ More of the men than the women feel it is justified for men to beat their wives and the reasons are very much related to their conceptions of masculinity and femininity.
- ❑ Men are supposed to be obeyed and served – that is their privilege.
- ❑ While women might have grounds to complain about husbands not earning enough, being addicted, gambling, and both women and men recognize the legitimate nature of such complaint, the wife should not challenge the husband openly and indiscriminately
- ❑ The ideal of a monogamous marriage can be seen among both men and women. Men also feel that their wives must serve them sexually and they can punish their wives for sexuality outside marriage.
- ❑ If men fail in their responsibilities of providing for their families, both women and men recognize the right of their wives to berate them and complain to others.
- ❑ ICDDR,B study found that the most common motivation for sexual violence was the belief that sex is men's entitlement (77% of urban and 81% of rural men). Another finding was that about 29-35% of men sexually abused women to take out their anger and to punish them while about 57-67% of men sexually abused women "just for fun" (Naved et al., 2011: iii).

Community role: male and female experiences and norms

- In case of migrants as a whole, especially short-term ones, there seemed to be a disincentive to become involved in community activities, even for men.
- Women's community and political roles are looked down on by both women and men.
- Women working for an income do not have the time or opportunity for community activities
- Among the respondents there were some men who had been involved in various NGO activities in their own villages but once they had come to Dhaka they were not interested in being involved in such activities and did not want their wives to be involved either in NGO or political activities.

Lavlu, a rickshaw puller, *"I never involve myself in any politics – I do politics of survival"*

Toiyob Ali, Rickshaw puller. *"I fend for myself"*

Bacchu Mia, Rickshaw puller, *"I don't do anything beyond working, eating and sleeping"*

- The male and female respondents from Dohar, were even more negative about women's public roles and did not feel that they should be active in either political demonstrations, meetings or events
- The male international migration returnees were also not very involved in community work or in politics

Norms related to gender equality

Level of education: Most of the respondents said that higher education is needed more for boys than girls.

Age at marriage:

According to most of the respondents group; average age at marriage is 23-25 years for men and 18-20 years for women.

Equal performance:

Most of the respondents said that men and women can't perform equally . Main reasons are: women are not physically as active as men, Socio-economic and political situation are negative, social and religious constraints.

Decision making:

When the respondents were asked that whether the men and women can take decision equally or not, a little less than half said 'no'. The reasons mentioned, included: the feeling that men are more industrious, intelligent and advanced, women do not have knowledge of outside matters and women take decisions on matters inside the house while men take decisions on matters outside the house.

Romantic proposal:

Most of the respondents felt that only boys/men can make romantic proposals

Equality possible: A significant number respondents, both male and female, said that gender equality is not possible (20/24). Even female respondents with higher education and jobs with good salaries reject the possibility of gender equality saying that traditional roles do not allow this and men mentioned that various social and religious norms do not allow for gender equality.

Potential Driving Factors of Change

Childhood experience on gender roles, gender discrimination

- Some of them appreciated what their mothers had done for them to raise them they were not happy or proud about their having to work outside the home.
- Few respondents used to have no sister or elder sister to conduct household works. So the boys helped with work inside home (such as: collecting water, cooking, looking after younger siblings).
- Some of male respondents with “earning” mothers also had wives working outside, earning an income. They had seen their mothers working outside the home and it seemed natural to them that their wives could also work outside the home, to provide for the family.

Economic pressures

- economic pressures are making the model of a double income family more prevalent and acceptable. With women’s visible economic contribution to the family income, there is a greater valuing of their contribution, their role in the family and a willingness among men to take on additional family roles and responsibilities.
- While women are providing for the family’s future (which is an accepted and socially valued role) they are also able to influence the decisions related to what assets to buy (e.g. land) and where (Own village, husband’s village) and in whose name (own, husband’s, children’s’).
- Greater education of girls and their entry into more skilled and socially “valued professions” such as government jobs and formal employment also creates new opportunities with men providing them more respect and being willing to practice greater gender equitable behavior.

Migration

- ❑ urban context with its anonymity and scale is a driving factor of change is clear from the cases we reviewed. Families, couples and individuals are able to undertake activities, roles and behaviours that they realize they could not have done in their villages.

Others

- Whether men have flexibility in their work timings. The kind of informal work and flexible timings available to men in the informal sector and urban slums gave them opportunities of taking on greater family and household roles. Childcare is valued and done willingly, if men have the time and scope to do so.
- Another driving factor for change is the greater public visibility and acceptance of women in political and national roles.