

MAPPING MINDSCAPE OF BOYS

Understanding Social Construction of Masculinities among Adolescents

A Brief Report

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INTRODUCTION

Background & Rationale

Talash has been implementing the “**Preventing Early Marriage through Personal Safety & Wellbeing Education**” project within twenty eight Gram Panchayats spread over four blocks in the district of Malda. Supported by UNICEF, Kolkata Field Office, and in collaboration with the District Administration of Malda, *Talash* started the process of implementation in 2012 and is continuing till date. Primary focus of the intervention has been to empower girls to take charge of their own lives by developing understanding about informed consent, safer decision making and learning to deal with victim mode. The intervention also looks into developing leadership skills for collective actions and work with adults to promote a child marriage free environment.

Trained as leaders, the adolescent girls started taking collective actions within their communities. Initiatives and collective actions of the girls generated interest among adolescent boys – they too started pouring in with information of child marriages, school drop outs and other issues. This exchanges and sharing gradually opened up a space and the boys started expressing desire to be included into the programme. *Talash* initiated a process of dialogue with them to understand how they can be included; what role they can play apart from being advocates for stopping child marriage of girls. During these dialogues it was realised that there is a dearth of knowledge about the mindscape of boys – their belief system around gender roles, their expectations from their own selves, their response to the social expectations and their perspectives about women. The experience brought to the fore necessity of understanding social constructions of masculinities in this context. This prompted *Talash* to undertake a mapping exercise to understand the beliefs/ perceptions/ compulsions that determine boys’ behaviour.

The mapping exercise entails to plot the belief patterns of adolescent boys in rural areas of Malda and semi urban and urban areas of Kolkata on the issues of Gender Socialization & Masculinity. Gender Socialization refers to an individual’s pattern of being relating and acclimatizing with the society through gendered roles, beliefs and values. Masculinity refers to a singular, dominant, hegemonic notion of what it means to be a man or a boy.

Backdrop

Gender socialization begin from the very young age when children identify gender characteristics as they grow up and learn about socially desirable behaviours for boys and girls in their daily interactions.

Boys learn about behaviour expected from men, who in most cultures is synonymous with being *physically and emotionally strong, being competitive, dominating and controlling others* (Thomson, 2002). Girls learn that being *submissive, shy, and obedient and not expressing one’s thoughts and feelings are desirable feminine attributes*.

Various experiences in day-to-day living reinforce gender stereotypes and thinking of masculinity and femininity. These notions not only reflect the traditional value of girls in comparison to boys, the compartmentalized roles and responsibilities that society ascribes to them but also affect access to education, health, employment, income within family and society (Krishnan et al., 2008; Sen & Ostin, 2007).

Normative Concepts of Gender & Masculinity

Masculine Roles & Body Images: The dominant perception about masculinity among young men is described in physical and social attributes of a ‘Real Man’. Overall, a ‘Real Man’ is someone who is *handsome, strong, muscular and virile*. These attributes are considered important because they help attract women and enhance men’s sexual prowess so that they can sexually satisfy women.

Socially, a real man is someone who takes care of his children, wife, parents and siblings or a **Provider** as well as a **Protector**.

Masculinity & Violence Against women: Several studies among adolescents have documented that harmful notions of masculinity and male aggression are not only prevalent, but often expected and normalised in relation to violence against women (Hines, 2007). Various aspects of sexual and gender norms (gender socialization) are present in societies that are associated with adolescent sexual aggression and violence perpetration.

Masculinity & Sexual Aggression: Studies from across the globe highlight that boys may experience pressure to behave in sexually aggressive ways, and that expectations for male and female sexual and intimate involvements are often different, where girls are often expected to accommodate male needs and desires (Abbey & McAuslan, 2004; Cleveland et al., 2003; Foshee et al., 2001; Tolman et al., 2003).

Recent studies: South East Asia and India

Recent studies over the last few years have established the connections between masculinity and violence against girls, domestic violence, impaired ability of decision making among young men and high risk behaviours. Pronounced masculinity is associated with higher occurrences of violence against girls, beliefs and attitudes supporting wife beating and indulging into high risk behaviours. Whereas, impaired decision making regarding caring for their families is seen as outcome of social construction of masculine beliefs and perceptions.

Masculinity & Violence against Girls: A study published in 'International Journal of Adolescence & Youth' on 'Gender attitudes and violence among urban adolescent boys in India' (2013) draws attention to the prevalence of inequitable gender attitudes and attitudes condoning violence against girls and the association of such attitudes with histories of exposure to violence in homes and communities as well as with self reported violence perpetration. A critical finding is that one in five boys aged 10 – 12 reported high levels of condoning violence against girls. These findings are consistent with the growing literature on the role of gender inequitable attitudes in the perpetration of violence against women (Anderson et al., 2004; Dalal et al., 2012; Heise, 1998; Reed et al., 2011; Santana et al., 2006; Verma et al., 2006).

Masculinity & Domestic Violence: Another population based study from South Asia found a range of 28 –51% of adolescent males aged 15– 19 years holding attitudes supportive of wife-beating (Dalal et al., 2012).

Masculinity & High Risk Behaviours: Evidence from a study conducted in India by the Population Council suggests clear linkages between inequitable gender attitudes and traditional masculinity norms on the one hand, and high-risk behaviours among men, including unprotected sex and gender-based violence, on the other (Verma et al, 2006). These inequitable gender norms curtail women's autonomy while expanding men's authority and control over women, affect the individual attitudes and behavior of men and boys, condone or justify violence and have been linked to adverse sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Achyut et al, 2011).

Masculinity & Impaired Decision Making & Caring Ability: Emerging evidence from a small number of studies indicates that the social construction of masculinity may undermine young men's decision making abilities as well as their involvement in care and support of their wives in sexual and reproductive health matters and their ability to adopt caring behaviors. (Santhya & Jejeebhoy, 2012).

RESEARCH CONCERNS, METHODOLOGY & CONSTRAINTS

The objective of the mapping exercise is to measure relative strength of different sets of beliefs among adolescent boys of different demographic background and age group. Set of beliefs or perceptions are classified into four major categories:

- Belief or perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of a *Provider*
- Belief or perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of a *Protector*
- Perception of their *Body Image* &
- Perception about *Women*

The mapping aimed at

- Identifying prevalent belief systems around masculinity among adolescent boys (10 - 17 years) in rural and urban and semi urban areas of Malda and Kolkata

Key Concerns

The key concern of the study was to investigate prevalent set of beliefs and perceptions among adolescent boys about gender and masculinities. The second concern was to estimate whether the pattern of prevalence of certain sets of beliefs is determined by socio demographic factors such as age, rural/urban geographic locations and other. During the planning stage, it was decided that outcome of the exercise could be organised into two sets of factors.

- *Common Factors*: Which sets of beliefs are most prevalent among adolescent boys across:
 - Age groups and
 - Geographical locations (rural and urban)
- *Differential Factors*: Are there significant differences among the groups (rural, urban and younger, older adolescent boys) regarding the pattern of beliefs maintained by them?

Parameters of the Mapping

Roles and responsibilities refer to the stereotypical roles and responsibilities in a gendered society and how an individual relates to these or challenges these. E.g. The Provider roles or Protector roles are the most commonly identified and demonstrated among adolescents which they internalize during early years of their socialization.

Body Image refers to one's perception about her/his own body and how far the individual is satisfied with the same or has discomforts regarding the same or challenges the conventional concepts of gendered bodies

Perception about Women refers to how women or female entities are perceived by young men and how the same is reflected in their attitude and behavior towards the same.

METHODOLOGY

This mapping exercise has been a cross sectional survey using a questionnaire with pre-determined set of belief statements. Each belief statement was associated with a Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) ranging from - 10 to + 10.

Developing the Questionnaire: We conducted series of interactive sessions with adolescent boys, to develop an understanding about their thoughts on the issue. Participants of the interactive sessions came from similar backgrounds from Kolkata and Malda. Based on the findings of interactive sessions, the questionnaire was developed. This was then tested among one batch in Kolkata and another in Malda.

Selection of Participants: Participants for the exercise were identified from the areas where *Talash* is engaged in implementing the activities. Adolescent boys, aged between 10 – 17 were identified for the process. Most of the boys are school going, with a handful of drop outs.

Process of Data Collection: Observation and insights of data collectors played a significant role in the scoring; particularly observation about *how* they are responding; whether there has been a *pause/ hesitation* in responding; whether the question made him *ponder*, has he been thoughtful; is he being *defensive*; his *behaviour* that is being observed; is there a silence; is he responding without thinking.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The mapping exercise has been conducted with 95 adolescent boys in the age-group of 10 – 17 years in Kolkata and Malda. The respondents were almost equally divided between Hindu and Muslim communities, with significant section of them belonging to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe segments. Most of the boys are school going, with a few dropouts.

Average Family Size & Economic Status

Thirty-five of the adolescent boys interacted with were from BPL families, while another 30 boys were from families with a monthly income of less than Rs 2000, but possessing no BPL cards. Among the boys from non-BPL families, only 13 are from families with a monthly income of Rs 5000 – 8000, while the rest are from families with an average monthly income between Rs 2000 and Rs 5000. With the average family size ranging between five and seven members, such monthly incomes are indicative of resource-constrained situations.

Occupation

Majority of the respondents (51) interacted with are involved in economic activities to support their families. They work as labourers in the fields, work in neighbourhood factories or assist in local shops. In Kolkata, boys mentioned about earning through doing odd jobs, assisting in shops or even doing periodic door-to-door marketing jobs.

In Malda, almost all the families interacted with, fathers and/or brothers are the principal earners. They are mostly farmers with small land holdings (2-5 *bighas*). A considerable number of families also earn their livelihood as landless labourers working in someone else's land. Seasonal migration of male family members to other states to work as labourers under a labour contractor, most often a man from a neighbouring village, was found to be another source of income earning. This migration is particularly seen among families in the Sripur II Gram Panchayat (GP). In the other GPs there is a mix of both farmers and men migrating for work. Of the 95 boys interacted with, approximately 25% have their mothers working. Mothers are mostly working as ICDS workers (helpers) or cooking mid-day meals in schools as part of some Self-Help Groups (SHGs). A small section of women also work in the fields, assisting their husbands and sons. There are still others who bind *beedis* to earn whatever they can for their families.

In Kolkata, majority mentioned their mothers as principle bread earners, working as Ayas, domestic help or vendors. Fathers are mostly van & rickshaw pullers, vendors, milkman, masons or engaged in other works in the unorganized labour market. They also mentioned that fathers are not regular for work and in most cases contribute a minimum to the family.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Common Factors: Beliefs about expecting to be in the Protector and Provider Roles

- Sets of belief indicating boys/men are expected to play the protector role for girls/women (Q9) is the strongest (58.57%), which is prevalent across all age group in both rural and urban groups
- The sets of belief indicating boys/men are expected to play the provider role within family (Q 7, 8, 10, 11 & 12) are also strong (49.78%)

Differential Factors: Beliefs about perception of women & body image

- Beliefs regarding perception about women (Q14, 15, 16, 17 & 18) have yielded significantly different scores among rural and urban groups. While rural groups indicated a moderate degree of agreement (21.12%) with the stated belief statements, the urban groups on the contrary indicated a moderate degree of disagreement (-23.95%) with same set of belief statements. (The minus sign in the score indicates overall disagreement with the belief statements provided).
- Beliefs regarding the body image (Q 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6) have yielded significantly different scores among boys of different age groups (one group less than 12 years, another group 12 & above). The younger boys showed a relatively stronger agreement with the related belief statements (34.35%) compared to the same indicated by the older ones (17.14%).

Key Conclusions

The study clearly identifies a need to facilitate better functional belief patterns that are foundations of a gender equal environment, through trainings, curriculum development and development of IEC materials which would minimize harmful and dysfunctional patriarchal patterns and promote reconstructed notions of personal values and beliefs regarding roles of male, body images and perceptions about women.

Scope for Future Interventions

Common Aspects:

- To design and develop appropriate curriculum, IEC materials etc. for bringing a shift in perception of adolescent boys regarding role perceptions

Differential Aspects:

- For younger boys (less than 12 years) issues related to Body Image should be addressed through appropriate curriculum development and training, while male perception of women is required to be addressed in the curriculum for rural boys.

DATA ANALYSIS

Plan of Data Analysis

- First enquiry: whether any of the four groups of beliefs (Protector Role, Provider role, Body Image & perception about Women) show a significantly different strength of agreement among the whole population of boys. A single factor ANOVA test taking four different categories of beliefs as grouping variables for this purpose was done.
- A post-hoc assessment was done using visual inspection in order to identify which particular group shows a significantly different trend and in which direction.
- Second enquiry: whether rural and urban populations of boys show any significantly different trend. Another single factor ANOVA test, taking Malda & Kolkata as grouping variables, has been conducted for the purpose.

- Third enquiry: whether age also plays a significant differentiating factor determining the belief scores indicated by the participants. Another single factor ANOVA test, taking two age groups (less than 12 years and 12 & above) as grouping variables, has been conducted for the purpose.
- Finally, we plotted the belief scores in grouped bar charts (with respect to categories of beliefs, geographical locations and different age groups) in order to visually inspect and identify some more common trends as well as differential trends in the data.

Results

The ANOVA test 1 (Table 1) shows p-value = 0.003, which is less than 0.05.

Interpretation:

- 1 group shows significant difference (confidence level 95%)
- This means, if the sample size is increased, or if randomly sample is chosen from the same population, 1 section will continue to show a different trend
- To identify the section that is different, a post-hoc assessment is done using visual inspection

Table 1. Single-factor ANOVA Test 1

SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Protector Role	3	177.29	59.10	3.28		
Provider Role	3	142.67	47.56	58.61		
Body Image	3	55.00	18.33	84.87		
Perception about Women	3	5.86	1.95	541.84		

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F critical
Between Groups	6196.44	3	2065.48	12.00	0.002	4.07
Within Groups	1377.21	8	172.15			
Total	7573.65	11				

Post-hoc assessment by visual inspection in grouped bar chart (Figure 1)

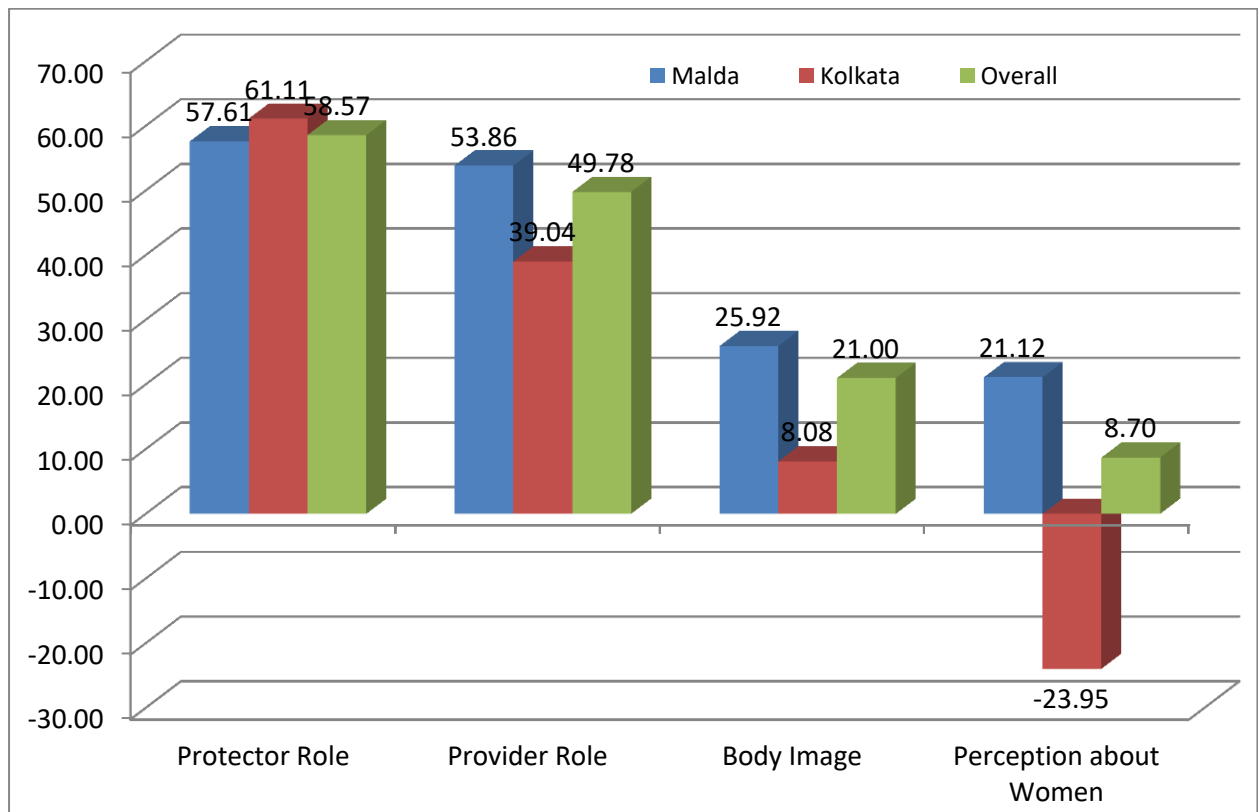


Figure 1. Relative Agreement Scores (%) against different categories of belief statements indicated by boys from Malda (blue), boys from Kolkata (red) and the overall average trend (green)

Observations from Figure 1

- The chart shows that the overall trend (green) has a clear divide among the categories of beliefs. The common factors in belief (expected roles) have been clearly and distinctively separated by the different factors (body image and perception about women) in belief
- The protector role and the provider role have significantly higher scores (58.57% and 49.78% respectively). On the other hand the other two categories – body image and perception about women have relatively low scores (21.00% and 8.70% respectively).
- Also, Belief scores in Provider Role in Malda (53.86%) ranks higher in comparison to belief scores of Kolkata (39.04%). Kolkata scores are higher (61.11%) than Malda (39.04%) in Protector Role.
- Perception about women has not emerged as issue of concern in study with the adolescents from Kolkata with a surprisingly high negative belief score (-23.95%) indicating a disagreement to the belief statements while Malda scores are positive indicating a distortion in perception about women (21.12%)

The ANOVA test 2 for comparing scores of boys from Malda and Kolkata. (Table 2) shows p-value = 0.01, which is less than 0.05.

Table 2. Single-factor ANOVA Test 2

SUMMARY				
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Malda	18	609.08	33.84	528.18
Kolkata	18	161.07	8.95	1040.14

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5575.37	1	5575.37	7.11	0.01	4.13
Within Groups	26661.46	34	784.16			
Total	32236.83	35				

Interpretation of Table 2:

- 1 group shows significant difference (confidence level 95%)
- This means, if the sample size is increased, or if randomly sample is chosen from the same population, 1 section will continue to show a different trend
- To identify the section that is different, a post-hoc assessment is done using visual inspection of Figure 1.

Post-hoc Assessment using visual inspection of Figure 1 indicates:

- In case of beliefs regarding perception about women (Q14, 15, 16, 17 & 18) – boys from urban (Kolkata) and rural (Malda) show significantly different trends. While rural groups indicated a moderate degree of agreement (21.12%) with our belief statements, the urban groups on the contrary indicated a moderate degree of disagreement (-23.95%) with same set of belief statements. (The minus sign in the score indicates overall disagreement with the belief statements provided).
- At the same time, the belief indicating boys/men are expected to play the protector role for girls/women (Q9) is the strongest (58.57%), which is prevalent across all age group in both rural and urban groups
- The beliefs indicating boys/men are expected to play the provider role within family (Q 7,8,10,11 & 12) are also quite strong (49.78%).
- These detailed trends can be more clearly appreciated in a more detailed chart (Figure 2).

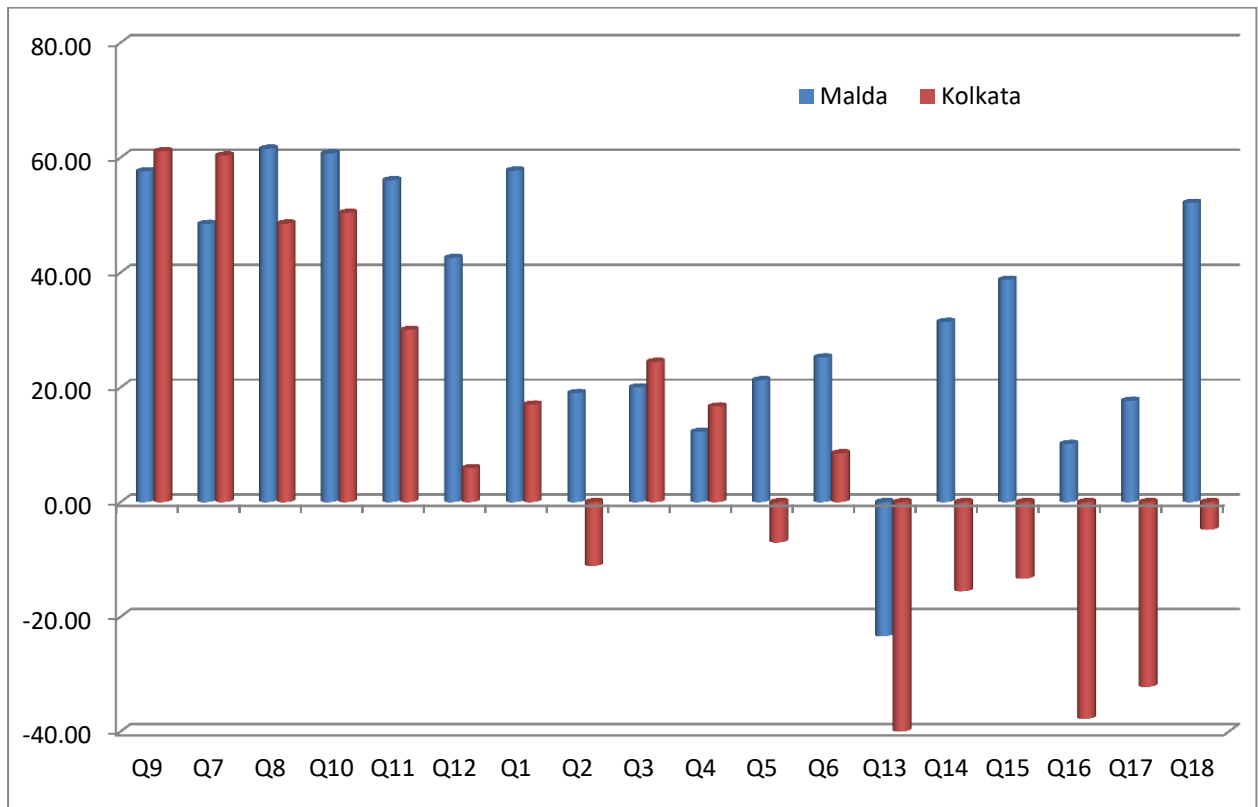


Figure 2. Grouped bar chart comparing responses from rural (blue) and urban (red) group of boys against each particular belief statements. The order of the belief statements has been rearranged so that the set of beliefs of same category can be placed together.

Interpretation of Figure 2:

Common Factors

- Both urban and rural boys showed strong concern regarding the protector role of men (Q9).
- Both groups strongly agreed with the beliefs which says boys are expected to take responsibilities of financial aspect of family and become desirable as potential grooms (Q 7, 8 & 10)

Differential Factors

- Rural boys showed significantly more concern compared to urban boys regarding developing a social identity which is accepted and endorsed by family and community (Q12)
- Rural boys showed concern about getting accepted by girls within intimate relationship (Q 14 &15), on the contrary urban boys showed a moderate degree of disagreement against such concerns.
- Regarding intimate relationship with girls, rural boys showed moderate to high degree of concern (Q16, 17 & 18); whereas urban boys showed different degree of disagreement with the same.
- Body image related issues (Q1, 2, 5) seem to bother rural boys much more compared to urban boys.

Next, to investigate the effect of age on the agreement score, we conducted another single factor ANOVA test, result of high is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Single-factor ANOVA Test 3: All Q Combined
SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Below 12 yr	18	497.83	27.66	539.82
12yr and Above	18	485.88	26.99	652.85

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F critical
Between Groups	3.97	1.00	3.97	0.01	0.94	4.13
Within Groups	20275.41	34.00	596.34			
Total	20279.37	35.00				

Interpretation of Table 3:

- There is no significant difference (at confidence level 95%) between the two age groups (p-value = 0.94, which is greater than 0.05)
- This means, if the sample size is increased, or if randomly sample is chosen from the same population, the two groups might actually display similar distribution

However, the detailed plot (that is the grouped bar chart with respect to two different age groups) reveals some significant differences against specific belief statements.

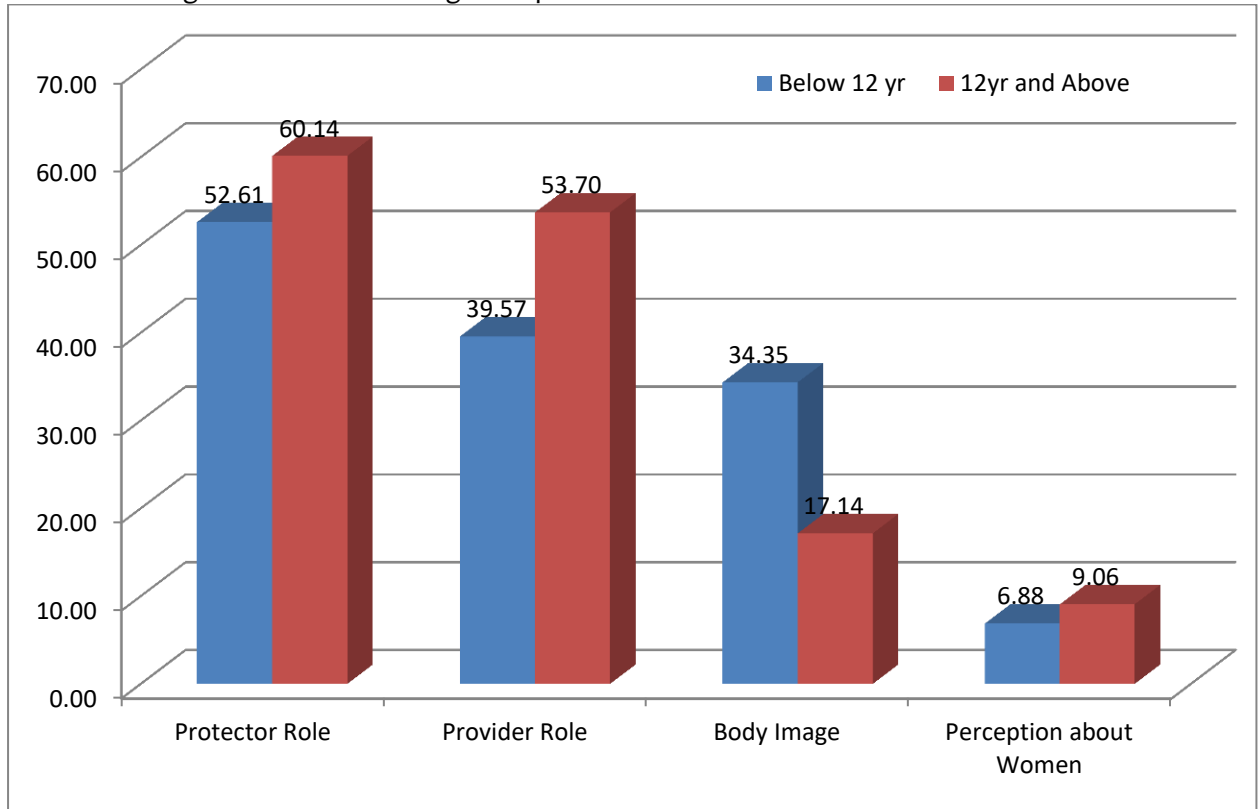


Figure 3. Grouped bar chart with respect to different sets of beliefs and two different age groups: below 12 years (blue) and 12 years and above (red)

Interpretation of Figure 3:

- The two age groups show significantly different degree of agreement with respect to belief statements related to body image (Q 1 – Q 6).
- The younger age group shows considerably more degree of agreement (34.35%) compared to the older boys (17.14%).
- The other three categories show similar trends for both age groups.

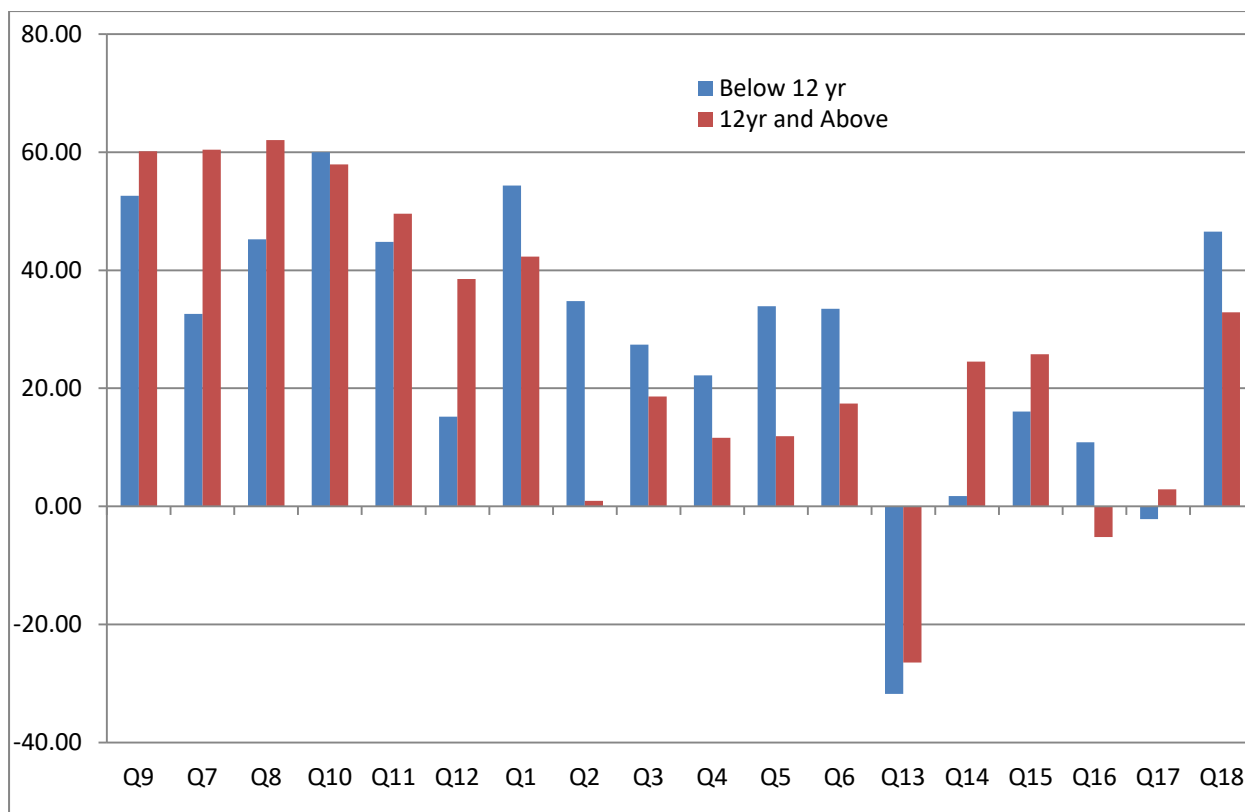


Figure 4. Grouped bar chart showing agreement scores against different belief statements (Q 1 – Q 18) with respect to the two age groups: below 12 years (blue) and 12 years and above (red)

Interpretation of Figure 4:

Common Trends

- Both age groups have shown relatively strong agreement with the belief statement regarding protector roles of men (Q9) and provider role of men within families (Q 10 & 11). Both the statements are centred around sense of self esteem and worth.

Differential Trends

- In general younger age group showed more agreement with all the body image related belief statements compared to older ones.
- The older boys showed more agreement with the belief statement (Q 12), which indicates a strong need to develop social identity accepted and endorsed by family and community.
- The older boys seemed to show concern regarding the belief statements related to engagement with females in intimate relationships (Q 14 – Q 17)

LEARNING FROM THE MAPPING EXERCISE

Key learning from the exercise is as follows:

- **Broadening choice base for boys:** Playing the role of Provider has scored high in this exercise. While documenting their profile, we observed that respondents are engaged in less-skilled, low paid jobs. Thus, getting inducted into labour trafficking or risky and hazardous jobs is higher for them. Focusing on continued education and increased skills can offer the boys with an array of livelihood options, which could be helpful.
- **Knowledge about their aspirations:** We understand that knowledge about boys' aspirations around nature of jobs and their perceptions about livelihood, dignity and safety would be

significant for intervention designing. Thus, focus on these areas in future studies would be necessary.

- **Causes require deeper probing:** Role of protector too has scored very high in this exercise. Yet, in reality we find very few boys/men take a proactive role in stopping violence against women. This aspect requires deeper understanding.
- The following questions have emerged:
 - What are meanings, qualities and attributes do they attach to the belief of emerging as an efficient/capable provider/protector?
 - What skills do they perceive should be acquired to emerge as an efficient/capable provider/protector?
 - What are their perceptions about sharing of this role with their partners?
 - How could they do the same more effectively through awareness and education, broadening their choice base to facilitate informed decision making.
 - Perceiving that women can also be providers/protectors could only be possible if this is going to create a visible and tangible social or economic advantage in the society vis-à-vis the family?

GAPS & LIMITATIONS

1. While there has been a detailed understanding about the background and the forms of gender based violence in the areas in which the mapping exercise was conducted, a structured design for studying the relationship between the occurrences of child marriage and the findings from the mapping exercise is yet to be established.
2. This study and some of the studies cited in the section on normative concepts of masculinity and recent studies: India & Southeast Asia, though touches upon the concepts of masculinity and its relationship with aggression, violence against girls, sexual violence and domestic violence and reveals some interesting beliefs there is a scope for undertaking a much more detailed study on the existing perception about women and its relationship to increasing trend of gender based violence among respondents.
3. Identification, collection and documentation of the contributing & maintaining factors (fear, anxiety etc.) of the emergent belief patterns would have also helped to interpret the results from the mapping exercise in a more comprehensive way. This would also have helped to design future interventions to minimize and eliminate these contributing and maintaining factors.

Further Readings & References:

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