

Gender discrimination and gendered socialization by young married women in rural North Dinajpur district of West Bengal, India: An assessment of adverse childhood experiences

Atreyee Sinha

International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Govandi Station Road, Deonar, Mumbai, INDIA.

Email: atreyee_dabloo@yahoo.com

Extended abstract submitted to PAA 2019

Introduction: Adverse or traumatic experiences in childhood have strong connections with a number of detrimental health outcomes. Children exposed to domestic violence, maltreatment, family dysfunction, are more vulnerable to develop various health problems during childhood as well as in later lives (Kenney & Singh, 2016). Similarly, childhood is an important phase in one's life as it works as the foundation for inheriting values, beliefs and norms of the society and developing their own behaviour as an adult in future. In a society which is rife with gender stereotypes and biases, boys and girls are born into two different social worlds. Gender is constructed by every socializing agent or force such as parents, teachers, media, religion, culture and so on. Boys and girls get differential treatment in terms of freedom, mobility, and autonomy – boys getting more privilege than girls. As a result, unequal and stereotyped gender attitude gets intensified during adulthood (Verma & Mahendra, 2004). Experience of gender discrimination and biased socialization of young boys and girls have serious impact on their health outcomes and well-being. While existing studies have mostly focused on gender discrimination in education, health and mortality, utilization of health services, empirical knowledge is limited on what is the pattern of this discrimination and biased socialization and how this works at family level in developing countries, especially India, despite the severity of gender inequality in such settings.

Therefore, our aim in this paper was to examine the prevalence of women's self-reported adverse childhood experiences in terms of gender discrimination and biased socialization within family and find out the underlying factors.

Research questions: We attempted to find answer to the following two questions:

- 1.) Is there any religious disparity in experience of gender discrimination and gender biased socialization by women?
- 2.) Does presence of gender inequality within family increase women's adverse experiences during childhood in terms of gender discrimination and biased socialization?

Data & Methods: We used data from a population based primary survey of 500 young married women (18-30 years) conducted during April-August, 2015 in 10 villages of North-Dinajpur district of West Bengal, India. A multistage sampling design was followed: firstly, two out of nine CD Blocks were selected based on the dominant religious group; in the second stage, villages were identified based on their religious composition and at the final stage equal numbers of households were selected through systematic random sampling.

Women were asked about their childhood experiences including gender discrimination and teachings of gender specific norms in a retrospective manner i.e. going back to the time when they were 10-14 years old and unmarried. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected.

Outcome variable

An index of adverse childhood experiences was developed using the two indicators: experience of gender discrimination and gender biased socialization, after reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.685). The index score was dichotomized/trichotomized as per requirement in subsequent analyses.

Covariates

Covariates included in the analysis of this chapter were experience of spousal violence by respondents' mothers, educational attainment of respondents' fathers, occupation of respondents' fathers, birth order of the respondents, sibling composition, respondents' fathers' participation in household chores and type of respondents' natal family are also controlled in the analysis. Data was analyzed using bivariate and multivariate statistical techniques.

Results:

Experiences of discrimination: Respondents were asked about their experiences of gender based discrimination within their family. Findings underscore gender discrimination was prevalent; nearly a quarter of the women reported that their education was given less importance than boys in the family. More than half of the women reported that they were not allowed to go out much as other male members and were expected to do more household works as compared to their brothers. Experience of discrimination in allocation of food, availability of clothes, access to money and access to health care was also there but comparatively less.

Gender socialization - teachings of gender specific norms and behaviours: A majority of the respondents reported that they were told by the elders in their family that 'girls should always be obedient to the decisions taken by parents and caregivers' (84.2%) and nearly 75% reported being taught that 'girls should always control their tongues and learn patience as they are the keys to successful married lives'. Similarly, 45% of the respondents were taught that 'it is shameful to discuss topics such as menstruation, child birth in public' and nearly 40% reported being taught that 'male members should always take food before females'. Another small proportion of the respondents, around 11-12%, reported that they had heard people saying that 'girl child is a burden on parents as they have to be married off' and they had seen their sisters/females in family being ill-treated for not having son respectively.

Results from in-depth interviews added more insights into the extent of such gender specific norms being practiced in the society -

Index of adverse childhood experiences: The composite index of adverse childhood experiences revealed that around a third of the respondents experienced low gender discrimination and gender bias, whereas 42% women experienced moderate levels of gender discrimination and gender bias. There were 28% of the young married women who recognized experience of high levels of gender discrimination and bias in their family.

Factors: Bivariate analysis revealed significant and independent associations of women's experiences of gender discrimination and gender socialization with various background characteristics like religion, father's education, father's occupation, occurrence of violence between parents, sibling composition, birth order, type of family and economic condition of natal family. Childhood experiences were highly adverse among Muslim women, belonging to poor and middle class and nuclear families. It was also high for women who had male siblings. Presence of parental violence in the household, that signifies inherent gender inequality in family, increased the experiences of gender discrimination and biased socialization. On the other hand, higher educational attainment among parents, better employment of fathers, father's participation in household works reduced the adversity of women's childhood experiences.

When all background characteristics like religion, economic condition of the respondents' natal family, type of natal family, education and occupation of respondents' parents, sibling composition and parental violence were controlled, it was found that Muslim women were nearly 2 times more likely to experience highly biased socialization during childhood (OR=1.53; $p<0.05$) than the Hindu women. Women whose fathers were educated at least up to primary level, were nearly 50% less likely (OR=0.52, $p<0.05$) to have adverse childhood experience than those whose fathers were illiterate. On the other hand, women whose fathers worked as manual labors were nearly 1.8 times more at risk (OR=1.77; $p<0.05$) to experience high gender discrimination and biased socialization during childhood than those whose fathers were agricultural laborers. Women of 2nd/3rd birth orders were less likely to have highly adverse childhood

experiences. Occurrence of parental violence i.e. father beating mothers, increased the chances of gender discrimination and gender bias significantly by around 2.5 times (OR=2.50, p<0.01).

Conclusion: Findings underscored the wide prevalence of gender discrimination and gender biased socialization within the family. A considerably high proportion of women indicated that gender discriminatory practices were common and teachings of sex-specific gender norms and behaviours was also rampant. There was a significant religious disparity wherein Muslim women experienced more adversity may be due to the conservative nature of their community. On the other hand, presence of inter-parental violence is suggestive of prevailing gender inequality and male dominance within the family; in such a setting women were more vulnerable to experience discriminations based on gender and socialization that was gender specific. Parents especially in rural areas must be counselled and given incentives to end discrimination against girl child; proper orientation must be given towards gender equality as they play pivotal role in socialization of young girls. Urgent attention from policy makers and stakeholders is required to provide essential gender education among young boys and girls and enable them to question the gender stereotypes of the society and breakthrough intergenerational transmission of traditional gender norms.

Table 1 Dimensions of adverse childhood experiences: Gender discriminations and gender socialization among young married women.

	Percentage of young women
<u>Respondents (R) faced any discrimination in the following:</u>	
R's education was given less importance than her brothers/other males in family	25.4
R was given less freedom to go out compare to her brothers/other males in family	50.0
R was expected to do more household works compared to her brothers/other males in family	55.4
Discrimination in allocation of food	7.2
Discrimination in allocation of clothes	6.0
Discrimination in access to money	7.4
Discrimination in access to health care at the time of illness	2.0
<u>Respondents were taught the following:</u>	
Girls should always be obedient to the decisions taken by parents and caregivers	84.2
Girls should control their tongues and learn patience - as key to successful marriage in future	73.8
Girls are burdens on parents as they have to be married off	12.0
It is shameful to discuss about womanly issues like menstruation, child birth in public	45.0
Male members should always take food before females	39.6
Sisters/females in family were ill-treated for not having son	11.2
Index of adverse childhood experiences	
Low	29.2
Medium	42.4
High	28.4
Total, N =	500

Table 2. Factors influencing the experience of gender discrimination and gender socialization during childhood by young married women

		Highly adverse experiences (%)	Exp. B (Results from Binary Logistic Analysis)
Religion	Hindu (ref.)	39.6	
	Muslim	63.2	1.531*
Educational level of respondents' mothers	Illiterate/no formal schooling (ref.)	53.7	-
	Primary	43.6	-
	Above primary	46.5	-
Economic Condition of natal family in the village/community	Well off (ref.)	37.7	
	Middle class	35.9	0.848
	Poor	61.6	1.250
Father beat mother (Parental violence)	No (ref.)	42.5	
	Yes	70.3	2.502**

Birth order of respondents	1st order (ref.)	54.3	
	2nd-3rd order	45.4	0.473**
	4+ orders	56.7	0.669
Sibling composition	Only sisters (ref.)	36.8	
	Only brothers	40.2	1.119 ⁺
	Both brothers and sisters	55.6	1.651
Respondents' fathers participated in household chores	No (ref.)	53.1	
	Yes	40.0	0.625
Educational level of respondents' fathers	Illiterate/no formal schooling (ref.)	65.4	
	Primary	46.9	0.521*
	Above primary	37.1	0.654
Occupation of respondents' fathers	Agriculture (ref.)	53.8	
	Manual labour	71.2	1.773*
	Business/service sector	34.1	0.800
Type of natal family	Nuclear (ref.)	55.2	
	Joint	38.8	0.765
Constant			0.912
R square			0.174

Note: 'ref.' - Reference category; (-) – Variable not included in logistic regression; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ⁺ p<0.10

References:

Kenney, M.K. and Singh, G.K. (2016). Adverse Childhood Experiences among American Indian/Alaska Native Children: The 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health. *Scientifica*, 2016, 1-14.

Verma, R.K. and Mahendra, V.S. (2004). Construction of masculinity in India: A gender and sexual health perspective. *Journal of Family Welfare*, 40 (Special Issue), 71-78.