



# Understanding Masculinities:

A Formative Research  
on Masculinities and Gender  
based violence in Pakistan





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## Foreword

The research on which this study is based was undertaken in a small relatively homogenous lower middle class community in the Punjab. Six 'blocks' in Union Council Rehmatabad, Rawalpindi city, were selected for research purposes and research findings were based on interviews and focus group discussions with young men and women from the 15-25 age group. At first glance, and when taken in conjunction with the overall aim of the study viz to 'develop a deeper contextualised understanding of perceptions of men and women around masculinities', and to 'explore links between notions of masculinity and behaviour, especially gender based violence' in the Pakistan context, the research has obvious limitations. As pointed out in the study, it is non-representational character. Limited to one relatively homogenous class group, it misses out on the cross class dimension; based only on the views and opinions of a lower middle class community in urban Punjab, it also fails to take into account both rural/urban and ethno-cultural variables. Paradoxically, these limitations including the possibility of an inherent 'sample selection bias', constitute its strength. Deprived of the multiplicity of points of view stemming from differences of class, caste, rural, ethnic contexts and related factors, its relevance lies that it highlights and brings into sharp focus the critical role of stereotypes in the constitution of male identity. In the process it also provides useful insights into masculinity as a socio-psychological construct and the ways in which gender-based stereotypes naturalise, justify and perpetuate violence against women.

Interviews and focus group discussions reveal perceived links between potency, notions of masculinity and male identity. Recurrent references to male ability to perform sexually with wives and including other women, the ability to produce offspring, and sexual performance as a means of dominating/controlling women and ensuring fidelity, point to the impossible demands of masculinist fantasies and the precarious uncertainties of male identity that inform all areas of life such as the male role as breadwinner, 'good' son and husband, including boy's 'games' and as topic of conversation. For instance, the ability to have an 'erection' was seen as the sign of a 'real man' and includes challenges among unmarried young men to demonstrate this ability openly; further, a man unable to perform sexually or to prove it publicly through domination of his wife, number of offspring, sex with sex workers ran the risk of being labelled as a 'non-man' through the pejorative label of 'khassi' or castrato. That this dominant and assertive masculinity is underpinned by fear is evident in the concerns expressed by men and reinforced by women who, at least as far as these research findings so, accept this perception of a dominant and assertive masculinity at its own valuation.

It is a phallogocentric worldview, and the stereotypes that it has given rise to reflect and reinforce the central concerns of this world. By definition stereotypes reduce individuals to a few simple characteristics that are perceived or represented as being fixed by Nature and are therefore unchanging and unchangeable. There is no room for difference, diversity or nuance in the stereotype. In this sense, stereotypes set up a socio-symbolic border 'Us' and 'Them'; between the 'normal' and what then falls within the purview of the 'abnormal'. At one level therefore, the stereotype grants certainty to the world that is lived and experienced. At another, however,



precisely because it is so narrowly constituted, immutable and unchallengeable, it creates a potentially violent space where all that which it denies and excludes is relegated to the margins and aligned with the illicit, thereby placing the stereotype constantly under threat.

In so far as definitions of what constitutes the male and female, stereotypes facilitate the division men and women into simple binaries that are stripped of all nuance and diversity. Thus if a 'real' man is visibly aggressive and virile, then the one who fails to meet the requirements imposed by the stereotype, is not a man. This very real and debilitating fear is borne out by this study in which anxiety about sexual performance because of previous sexual experience was mentioned 22 times. By this logic, if the man is a breadwinner, then the working woman is a transgressive entity who violates the straitjacket of the stereotype falls within the purview of excess of laying claim to illicit agency that threatens the masculinity or manhood of the male; if the visible sign of manhood is control and domination of the woman, then not only does she pose a threat to it, she justifies violence that is meted out to her.

The internal logic of the manhood/dominance dyad presupposes hierarchies of power where the latter is directed against and the subordinate or excluded group viz women, and those men who are in a weaker position either socially or because they have failed to meet the standards of accepted manhood. There is no question of peaceful coexistence here, but of a violent hierarchy where men have the upper hand.

Seen from this perspective 'Understanding Masculinities: A Formative Research on Masculinities and Gender-based Violence in Pakistan' by Rozan is a welcome contribution to the work being done on issues of violence against women. Its value lies in fact that while much work has been done on the feminine as a social construct as well as women's status and role in society in order to understand and the phenomenon of gender-based violence, in Pakistan at least, little work has been done to understand the link between perceptions of masculinity and violence. By highlighting the role of gender stereotyping it brings the focus to bear on the insecurities that underpin male identity and concomitant notions of masculinity. In the process it marks out areas for further exploration and also of the work that needs to be done in this regard. In order to address the issue of gender based violence, not only do men need to be taken on board, spaces also need to be created where both men and women are enabled to question their fantasies alongside the ideas and norms that shape their thoughts and experiences and subject their needs and desires to the rigid and often impossible demands of stereotypes that limit their right to agency and self-realisation.

*Neelam Hussain*

## Executive Summary

This research report attempts to provide some insight into young boys and men's lives and their experiences of masculinities and gender norms within the context of Pakistan. It is Rozan's belief that initiatives aimed at gender transformation must address and understand how these roles and norms are experienced by men and how they impact their lives and relationships. A particular concern explored is how these manifestations are experienced, perpetuated and challenged by women. A qualitative piece based on a small homogenous lower middle class community in a city of Punjab, it is an attempt by Rozan to deepen its understanding of male attitudes and perceptions on gender based violence and their link to masculine identity. This it feels is vital if we are to 'talk' to men and involve them as partners in the work on gender based violence. The research also aims at developing and testing the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale, initially developed and tested in Brazil and later India, to the Pakistani context for use as an evaluation tool.

Conducted in Union Council, Rehmatabad, Rawalpindi city, in the province of Punjab, the research interviews 39 respondents through 11 in-depth interviews and 5 focus group discussions. Four major themes were discussed namely masculinity, violence, sexuality and relations. Respondents were young men and women between the ages of 15-25.

Primarily the analysis is qualitative, however, an attempt has been made to record the frequency of recurring themes. It is also pertinent to note that distinct grouping on basis of marriage was also done as it was considered an important determinant of changing social positions and hence roles of men and women.

### Findings

#### Men's perceptions

##### **A real man should ensure that he remains sexually potent**

- Sexuality was a theme that appeared consistently in interviews and dominated discussions with sexual potency and performance seen by most as an important way to maintain control and domination over the wife. Maintaining potency and virility, special diet, exercise, sports and body building, protecting oneself from too much indulgence in masturbation and sex were areas which were emphasized.
- Most men shared personal sexual experiences with other boys as they were growing up and almost all made some reference to a homosexual experience. Sex with younger boys was often coercive/abusive.
- Boys often expressed sexual helplessness when confronted with girls and women on the street. Some believed rape cannot happen without the consent of the woman.

##### **A man provides for the family, earns himself and does not depend upon women's income**

- Ability to earn and provide was closely linked to respect as many believed that only men who

could earn and provide for their family deserved respect. Running parallel to the theme of being a 'provider' were negative or disapproving attitudes towards women's earning.

### **A man needs to control his wife, look after the needs of parents more than the wife, and take major decisions within family**

- All espoused a clearly well defined role between husband and wife when it came to domestic chores and upbringing of children. Man's role in the house was seen as that of the head who must command respect and be able to balance between the demands of the parents and the wife.
- Most felt that men should look after the needs of the wife, if this conflicted with parental rights, parents should be prioritized.
- There was a need to establish clear dominance and control in relationships with the opposite sex within and outside marriage.
- Most men mentioned controlling women's sexual activity and a deep distrust of women. Keeping an eye on the sister's and wife's movement was considered important. Sharing sexual problems or concerns with the wife was considered to be ill advised as women were seen as untrustworthy.

### **Violent behaviour and harassment of powerless groups as part of being a real man**

- Most men mentioned violent fights between rival youth groups in the community. Many had been part of such groups, and some reported detailed incidents in which their lives were endangered. Use of weapons such as pistols and knives seemed common.
- Sexual violence against younger boys, was not viewed as violence and it seemed that the line between sexual experimentation among friends and manipulation of young boys by older boys was blurred.
- There was less recognition of sexual harassment as violence though they accepted that women were harassed on the road and in public.
- Domestic violence was seen as an act which was sometimes necessary when 'a limit' was reached to show the woman 'her place' especially when she answered back. The onus of preventing violence and conflict in the home was clearly on the woman.

### **Men cleanse society and uphold traditions**

- Men saw themselves as a group that needs to protect and uphold society's traditions and morality. This role extended to beyond the family where some boys/men reported that they insulted and teased boys whose sisters worked.
- There was also a reference to the need to 'clean up' society from groups like homosexuals, men who 'kept' younger boys, youth who teased girls and boys and girls who were 'dating'.

### **Real men do not look like women**

- Descriptions of what men wore and how they walked would be invariably be expressed as being different from women; negation of feminine traits seemed important to their identity as men.



## **Women's perceptions**

### **Men earn, make decisions, are trustworthy and have a need to control the wife**

- Men's ability to earn was an important pre requisite for respect, although some women felt that this burden was heavy and many men suffered as a result. While some echoed men's sentiments that living off a woman's earnings is wrong, others felt that women can and should support men.
- These women experienced men as the ones who decide, give orders, dominate and get angry when they do not get respect.
- Women echoed what men said about women being untrustworthy and felt that men were better at keeping secrets.
- Women's relationships with each other within the home were characterized by conflict and competition over resources such as use of money, food items, decision making within the home.
- Women felt that they were blamed for not having children or for producing a female child and felt that a woman's standing was only secure once she had a male child.

### **Men resort to violence in intimate relationships**

- Women repeatedly shared personal or observed stories of domestic violence. Nearly all married women had experienced physical violence at the hands of their husbands and some by mothers and fathers-in-law.
- There was an acceptance of domestic violence as justifiable under certain conditions. Many felt that the wife should only be beaten when she has done something 'bad' outside or disobeyed her husband. Most believed that the responsibility of avoiding violence lay with the women. Beating was also acceptable if it was done in privacy and at night, and if the man apologized later.

### **Men blame women for infertility and do not want to be questioned about their potency**

- Women never mentioned a man's sexual potency as a key criterion for what defined a real man. They shared that men tended to blame women for childlessness or infertility and did not tolerate questioning about their own potency.
- Women saw men's sexual needs as something that men could not control and agreed that a man's sexual desire must be met immediately.

## **Application**

Using these findings, the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale was adapted in the Pakistani context, where initially 39 GEM Scale items including 3 India specific items were tested for consistency with 106 young boys and men. After factor analysis, 13 items were finalized that include 4 Pakistan specific items extracted from the research.

The findings from this study highlight how perceptions and practices of masculinity influence and inter-connect with issues such as relationships, sexuality and, most importantly violence.



Traditional notions of masculinity put men in positions of dominance where relationships are often characterized by unequal power relations and violence is seen as a tool for maintaining control. This control as is at best fragile, in the face of rigid expectations from men regarding sexual virility and dominance as well as their role as primary providers for the family. These expectations are particularly unstable in the context of rapidly changing demographics with shifting gender dynamics, reduced livelihood opportunities, and an increased need for women to work and supplement family incomes.

Understanding and acknowledging these tension points, contradictions and anxieties in men's lives in programming with men can be strategic entry points of discussion and engagement with them on issues of gender based violence and may serve to increase the stakes for men for a more gender-just world.

## Introduction

### Gender and Violence in Pakistan

Numerous studies have confirmed that in Pakistan's patriarchal society, women and girls are considered less competent and less worthy than boys and men. A strong patriarchal culture has resulted in structural and socio-cultural inequity, which often manifests in violence and harmful traditional and cultural practices. According to UNDP's Human Development Report 2006, the literacy rate amongst Pakistani women is just 36% as compared to 63% for men. Pakistan's maternal mortality ratio, estimated to be 500 deaths per 100,000 births, is estimated to be one of the highest in South Asia<sup>1</sup>. A common perception within communities is that women are themselves responsible for inciting violence and that such violence is a private, personal issue and outside intervention is unacceptable. Illustrative statistics given below provide testimony to the widespread practice of violence against women;

- 2913 cases of honor killings<sup>2</sup> were reported to the Police departments in 2003
- According to reported cases, in 1997 at least eight women, more than half of them under the age of 18, were raped every twenty-four hours nationwide<sup>3</sup>
- According to a sample survey in Punjab<sup>4</sup>, 82% of women in rural Punjab reported violence, with 52% women in urban Punjab reporting violence within the home

<sup>1</sup> UNFPA: <http://www.unfpa.org/profile/pakistan.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> National Commission on the Status of Women report on 'The Concept of Justice in Islam' 2007.

<sup>3</sup> The Gender Question, Human Development Centre, 2000

<sup>4</sup> State of Human Rights Report 1998

Both the feminist and the human rights movement have focused largely on either women or civil or state responsibility towards women. With either focus women are the ultimate beneficiary. Efforts attempt to enable women to empower themselves, to provide them with better quality services and to cope with the effects of violence in their lives. The other part of the equation, namely men, is often forgotten. Initiatives to engage men involve sensitization to 'women's issues' or appeal to them to play a part to reduce injustice against women. Valuable as both approaches are, they often view men as 'ungendered', their behavior with women as disembodied aspects of their life and often inadequate attention is paid to gender norms specifically how notions of hegemonic masculinity play a critical role in shaping men's identity and their behavior towards other men.

It is important to recognize how inequitable gender norms are inherently part of the socialization process for both males and females. These norms lead to inflexible gender stereotyping which impact women in obvious ways e.g. restricted mobility, withdrawal from school, control over interactions with males (Greene 1997) and heightened threat and presence of violence (Verma et al 2005). However, it is also important to recognize that they also affect men and boys, where privileges such as autonomy, mobility, opportunity and power create a specific set of vulnerabilities and pressures for men (Greene 1997; Barker 2000b). These could be distinctive vulnerability to child sexual abuse (Aangan, Rozan 2007) risky behavior such as unprotected sex, not seeking support for sexual problems and concerns (Barker 2000) and increased exposure and engagement with violence on the streets. Public spaces are gendered spaces where boys and men often prove their masculinity through street fights and harassment of women,

children and/or men who do not conform to dominant forms of masculinity. Boys and men can be subjected to and victimized by performances of masculinity by other men; in other words acts of violence instigated by other men. Homosexual men or those perceived as feminine may be attacked by other men who prove their masculinity and heterosexuality through this violence (Flood 2005). For some young men, violent behaviour is perceived as inevitable and compulsory, an appropriately masculine and heterosexual response to conflict with substantial rewards (Reilly et al. 2004).

How men respond to victimization is also gendered. Responding aggressively and unflinchingly to other men's physical aggression or sexual aggression can be a sign of manhood. Men who show pain or weakness risk being seen as feminine (Flood, 2005).

Boys are often misinformed about sexuality and sex and rarely have adequate or reliable sources of information. Myths such as masturbation leading to impotence, physical illness, and weakness are common. In addition many report guilt and strong anxiety about sexual performance in marital life (Qidwai, Waris 1996). Rozan sees these trends through its work with young men and in particular through its counseling service, the youth help line (YHL, Rozan 2003) where many young men talk about the 'pressures' of keeping a certain image, engaging in violence and risky sexual experimentation.

### **Rozan and Men**

Based in Islamabad, Pakistan, Rozan is an NGO that works on gender, violence against women and children and sexual and reproductive health since 1998. Its oldest programme, Aangan has a special focus on child sexual abuse. In addition to working with communities and schools, it functions as a

resource center. Capacity building and training is a core strategy employed by the organization. Recently, the organization rolled out a project on gender sensitization of the media. Currently, Rozan has contractual partnerships with the government to improve service delivery to survivors of violence through support for its women centers (Ministry of Women Development) and to institutionalize training on gender and violence in police training (National Police Academy). Besides capacity building, Rozan also offers in- person, telephone, e-mail counseling services to survivors of violence.

Men and boys have been an essential feature of all Rozan activities since its inception. The target population varies from policemen to young male volunteers involved with the white ribbon campaign. Other activities have addressed men's vulnerabilities such as working with male survivors of child sexual abuse and the male youth that calls the youth help line.

Rozan's work with police men over the last ten years, with self awareness as its central component, has been based on the premise that unless you reach people where they are and listen actively and with empathy to the road that they have traveled on, there can be no real work with them. A large section of the module developed for the police addresses the police men's own issues, pain, powerlessness and stress. In our gender workshops, Rozan addresses how socialization hurts both men and women. Men women dialogues, have also been conducted in an effort to promote an understanding of how each one's perspectives and needs are different because of their socialization.

In 2008, Rozan consolidated these initiatives as a separate unit called the Humqadam programme. Humqadam is an Urdu word for a

companion who walks alongside. The research and the work being done now reflects a deepening of our experience and learnings over the years and a closer focus on it. Currently, the programme is involved in formative research on masculinities and has started a community project with young men. It aims to create spaces for men to engage on gender issues with a special emphasis on involving men and boys in stopping violence against women.

### **Research Justification**

The power of these social norms governing men's behavior together with uncompromising standards of masculinity are a formidable challenge to reducing the incidence of gender based violence. Recognition of these socialization messages, their impact on men, and the pressures men face in meeting standards of masculinity is vital if we are to 'talk' to men. Herein lies great potential for a shift in ownership of the issue of gender-based violence.

Though there has been some promising work on gender-based violence and its link to masculinities in the regional and global context, more work is required specifically in the context of Pakistan. Initiatives that explore alternative and acceptable ways of being a 'man' without resorting to domination and violence are rare. Despite the growing informal acknowledgement of the need for these initiatives, within Pakistan there is limited evidence-based work showing this as an effective and necessary strategy to address gender based violence.

Rozan developed this qualitative investigation in order to deepen its understanding of male attitudes and perceptions on gender based violence and their link to masculine identity within the Pakistani context.

### **Study Objectives**

Rozan believes that a holistic understanding of masculinities with its various forms of expressions and manifestations is essential for designing effective preventive programs on violence against women. Of particular significance is how these manifestations are experienced, perpetuated and challenged by women. More specifically the study aims to:

- Develop a deeper contextualized understanding of perceptions of men and women around masculinities
- Explore links between notions of masculinity and behaviour, especially gender-based violence
- Develop content and interventions for programming with young boys and men on gender-based violence
- Develop and test the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale, initially developed and tested in Brazil and later India, to the Pakistani context for use as an evaluation tool



## Study Location and Methodology

### Study Location

The research was conducted in Union Council Rehmatabad, Rawalpindi city, a large city in the province of Punjab, adjacent to Islamabad. There are 20 sub locations comprising 14 colonies and 6 blocks in UC Rehmatabad. These 6 blocks were selected for the study. The 6 blocks represent the original settlement of the area, known as 'Gharibabad'. The population of selected area (6 sub locations) is approximately 10, 200 people and can be categorized as a low-income group. Prominent castes and ethnic groups in the area are Shiekh, Abbasi, Kashmiri, Rajput, Khawja and Pathan and the population is predominantly Muslim. The area is reasonably developed with paved streets, water supply and electricity system, good sewage and sanitation system. One government Basic Health Unit and three government schools are present in the locality.

### Mapping and Sampling

Since 2003, Rozan's 'Aangan' programme has worked with women and children of

Rehmatabad on child sexual abuse and child rights. Under this program, Child Protection Committees (CPCs) have been established which serve as a platform for community members to raise awareness and provide support services for survivors of child sexual abuse. The research team involved members of CPCs as "key informants". With the help of key informants, the team gained knowledge about the history and socio-economic scenario of the area and also identified another set of key informants (both men and women). The following characteristics were sought for members of this group:

- Age group 15-25
- Residing in Rehmatabad
- Well informed about the youth and youth activities in the community
- Willing to talk about the community and youth issues
- Socially active

A mapping exercise to define sampling frame and to characterize youth in the communities was conducted with the help of young men and women. Places were identified where youth usually gather and spend time. These included movies shops, video games shops, snooker clubs, Internet clubs, playgrounds etc. Furthermore, two of the research team members were residents of the target area and acted as a bridge between the team and the local people. Small groups of young men were first approached and given an orientation about the purpose and objectives of the research. They were motivated to spread the details among their peers and encourage them to respond to the research team. Once this was underway, the snowball technique was used to help identify people for the focus group discussions, which in turn helped identify respondents for in depth interviews.



For women, owing to the fact that they are often not accessible in public spaces, a different strategy was used. To identify women respondents door-to-door visits were conducted. After identification, one to one meetings and orientations (both individual and group) were carried out to seek their consent to participate in the formative study.

A PRA tool Daily Routine Chart was also used with both young men and women. The community members, both male and female, were asked to develop their daily routine charts. There were three purposes of doing this activity: first to get an idea about the life style of community members and to have knowledge about how and where they spend most of their time, second to identify potential respondents i.e. who are willing to participate and were expressive; and third, to assess an ideal time to approach them for research activities and possibly for the intervention at a later stage.

Criteria for being a respondent in the study included the following:

- Age 15-25
- Residing in the selected 6 blocks of Rehmatabad
- Expressive - willing to talk about themselves, their personal experiences

Consent was taken again, once final participants were identified.

### Development of Guidelines

In-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussion (FGDs) were planned with the identified respondents. For this purpose guidelines were developed for both IDIs and FGDs. In this process International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)'s Asia Regional office, and a local researcher, Mr. Ayaz Qureshi

supported the team. Rozan's Youth Help Line and the Aangan program teams were also consulted.

The guidelines were developed around the four thematic areas: Masculinity, Violence, Sexuality and Relationships.

### Data Collection

In the process of data collection, eleven IDIs and five FGDs were conducted with the identified respondents. All respondents were between the ages of 15-25 years and included both married and unmarried men and women. There were a total of 20 men and 19 women, making 39 respondents in all.

Tools	Married		Unmarried	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
In depth Interviews (11)	2	1	6	2
Focus Group Discussions (5)	1 (5)*	1 (9)	2 (5,6)	1 (7)

\*No. of participants

The data was recorded through tape recorders, with short notes taken in the field to back up the recorded data in the event of mechanical failure of the recorder, and later it was



transcribed in Urdu. It was then translated into English taking into account that the translation be done literally without changing the sense of the respondent's views.

## **Analysis**

Two data sets (1 FGD, 1 IDI) were reviewed in detail. On the basis of the review, the research team divided the data into four main domains namely, Masculinity, Violence, Sexuality and Relations. Two domains i.e., Masculinity and Violence were further subdivided as:

**Masculinity:** Traits, Attributes and Influencers (source of message)

**Violence:** Type of violence (Physical, Non-physical or sexual), list of perpetrators and context /situations.

Primarily the analysis was qualitative, however, an attempt was made to record the frequency of recurring themes. The analysis also attempted to look at similarities and

differences between:

- Men and women
- Married and unmarried persons
- Group and individual discussion

A select research team from Rozan conducted the analysis with support from ICRW Asia Regional Office. MS Excel spreadsheets were used to code and analyze the descriptive data.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The sample was small and therefore, not representative.

In order to participate in the study, respondents had to be expressive and open to discussing topics that could be considered socially taboo. Therefore, the findings may reflect sample selection bias.

Moreover, the homogeneity of the sample does not take into account class, rural/urban, and ethnic and cultural variables and as such has obvious limitations in terms of representation.

## Understanding Masculinity: Findings from the Qualitative Research

Themes that appeared recurrently when we spoke to men about perceptions of an ideal man revolved around pressures to prove oneself as a man. For many, this was about sexual potency and concerns around that, and about being a protector and provider, essentially a money earner.

### i) What men said

Some key themes that appeared in men's interviews and focus groups discussion were as follows and have been ordered according to the frequency with which they appeared in discussions.

#### **A real man should ensure that he remains sexually potent**

Sexuality was a theme that appeared consistently in interviews and dominated discussions. This focus was more marked among unmarried men than married men.

Sexual potency and performance defined by some as the ability to engage in sex for long duration ('sexual stamina'), were seen by most as an important way to maintain control and domination over the wife. Mentioned over 11 times in data pieces were references to men's ability to perform sexually with their wives and produce offspring. Some shared that men who were not able to sexually satisfy their wives ran the risk of being dominated and 'ordered' around by their wives and even infidelity on the part of the wife. The need to prove oneself sexually, was not limited to the wife alone. Two unmarried boys mentioned how the ability to have an 'erection' was a sign of a real man and how boys can challenge each other openly to

## *"zina fana hai - sex destroys you"*

'prove' this ability. A man unable to perform sexually or to prove it publicly, either through domination of his wife, number of children, or sex with sex workers was labelled 'na marrd' (not a man) or 'khussi' (less than a man) This label was also given to men who are not able to have children.

There was much discussion on how to maintain potency and virility. While there was lot of emphasis on special diet, exercise, sports and body building, there was also a strong belief that too much indulgence in sex with women and in masturbation would weaken the body and that this damage was irreversible ( zina fana hai - sex destroys you). Many spoke about physical exercise for strengthening the body for sex but also felt that it was a good way to release energy and helped to protect from sexual indulgence as well.

Anxiety about sexual performance because of previous sexual experiences was mentioned





## Some experiences while collecting data

- There were some initial hesitations and skepticism expressed about NGO's, especially women's NGO's, and a belief that their agendas were pro-women and unsympathetic towards men. This was more apparent at the early stage of identification of sample, however, as the research team visited the area more frequently this decreased.
- The dynamics of masculinity, especially around male honor were apparent in the heated discussions that took place when young unmarried men talked about whether sisters should be 'allowed' to work and the view that those who lived off sisters earning should not be called 'men'. There was citing of Quranic verses and hadith<sup>5</sup> to support both sides of the argument, and there came a point when the researcher feared that physical violence might erupt as some boys started to attack and question each other directly. Discussion and mention of sisters and insinuations about their sexual conduct were matters of clear tension and conflict between these boys. The ease with which the discussion could have escalated into physical violence is indicative of how difficult it is to have an open dialogue and communication on these issues.
- Interviews and FGDs with women went on longer than expected, as women were eager to talk and on the whole were more expressive. The married women's focus group discussion was a heavy session. Personal experiences of violence dominated the session. Many women shared personal stories and many cried, with some asking for support and referral services. These women were then linked to Rozan's counseling and referral services for women.

over 22 times. There seemed to be a hierarchy of activities that were sexually weakening. Masturbation was at the top of this hierarchy, 'If you do it with hand, it takes twice as much from a man than doing it with a woman', followed by sex with women and then sex with other boys.

There was also guilt expressed about masturbation with reference to religion. One person shared that his inability to 'control' his sexual needs and his involvement in a religious madrassah caused a great deal of anxiety as he felt he was being a hypocrite. 'At that time,

we considered ourselves sinners, because we were doing wrong (masturbation). Our (religious) taining was underway and we used to go for learning sipara (Holy Quran recitation) as well as preaching. We were also learning about what is wrong and what is right. So in this respect we used to think that what we have just done (masturbate) is wrong and what we are doing here (reciting Holy Quran) is also wrong. We used to feel shame but they say sexual pleasure is such that you require more and more of it.

Many men reported that they did not wish to discuss these anxieties with their peers, however, some mentioned going to 'hakeems'

<sup>5</sup> Sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)



*"If you do it with hand, it takes twice as much from a man than doing it with a woman"*

and local sex clinics in the area that promised sexual strength. There was also a reference to special tablets that made one sexually virile. Most men shared personal sexual experiences with other boys as they were growing up and almost all made some reference to a homosexual experience. It was interesting that the respondents did not see sex with men and boys as being as sexually or physically harmful as sex with women. In most cases, where men shared experiences of having sex with men, they talked about being the penetrator as opposed to being penetrated. This may be because the latter is associated with being 'feminized'.

Sex with younger boys seemed to be somewhat coercive/abusive. At times, participants referred to the practice of finding and trapping younger and 'beautiful' boys referred to as keeping a 'suchi'. Keeping a 'suchi' was associated with pride and was a sign of a virile and powerful male. Other examples of coercion were less direct. Participants spoke about sexual experimentation with other boys wherein one or two older boys who were more knowledgeable initiated the experience. In one instance a young man spoke about an experience where a group of older friends had sexually abused him when he was in Grade 2 (approx. 8 years old). He shared that this experience had profound negative impact on him and his schooling suffered. Though he referred to this act as a 'zyadati' (unfair/wrong act), he tried to absolve his friends by saying

that they had started doing this because maybe they too had been sexually abused by someone. Another young man shared a detailed account of an experience in which he and a group of 12 boys had taken a young boy up a deserted hill and raped him. He shared that they had threatened him with an axe if he tried to resist. Clearly here the element of abuse, use of power, and the need to be penetrator is evident, as it seems these boys chose to rape this boy as opposed to having sex with each other. What is also clear is that the abuser or as in these two cases, the abusers are often 'friends'.

Boys often expressed sexual helplessness (bequabu) when confronted with girls and women on the street in 'tight clothes and short sleeves' and justified 'teasing' of women as something stimulated by women themselves through their 'eye contact' and 'ways of walking' and other behaviors. Their (girls') dresses are such that even boys who are noble are compelled to say something (taunt, use abusive language).

Some believed rape cannot happen without the consent of the woman. 'Even if a prostitute is caught red handed and she is not willing (to have sex with you), you can't harm her, if she is sitting right in front of you and she is not willing, you can't even touch her. When she is willing (to have sex), she can do it even beneath seven covers. It doesn't happen without the will of a woman, it is never forceful', implying therefore that rape is impossible and women lie about being raped.

**A man provides for the family, earns himself and does not depend upon women's income**

Preoccupation with their ability to earn and provide for the family was second only to their concerns around sexual virility. Mentioned

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*"Even if a prostitute is caught red handed and she is not willing (to have sex with you), you can't harm her, if she is sitting right in front of you and she is not willing, you can't even touch her. When she is willing (to have sex), she can do it even beneath seven covers. It doesn't happen without the will of a woman, it is never forceful"*

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over 22 times in the data pieces, this attribute was critical. Again and again men would talk about this being a primary function of men 'men are born to earn'...'without money/ salary a man is nothing'...'earning of a man is his



potency' ... 'men who cannot are eunuchs'.

Ability to earn and provide was closely linked to respect as many believed that only men who could earn and provide for their family deserved respect.

Running parallel to the theme of being a 'provider' were negative or disapproving attitudes towards women's earning which came up 14 times. Using money earned by women members of the house was seen as honourless. 'One who lives on (eats) his wife's earning is not a man'. There was also anxiety and tacit disapproval regarding the increasing trend of working women's independent mobility and their exposure to harassment and other men. Women working outside or going about doing their work alone were considered extremely deplorable. These women were often equated with sex-workers, and their family members, specifically men were seen as pimps for allowing them this freedom.

Married men differed from unmarried men on this topic though. This may be because married men acknowledge the need for women to work and supplement a family's income because of practical realities. Similarly there was less emphasis on this trait in individual sessions, and some shared that, although not desirable, it may be necessary. Many of these men rejected female employment as honourless in the group setting even though individually they admitted 'allowing' it. This discrepancy may have been caused by a social pressure to convey certain traditional messages in a group setting, with

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*"One who lives on (eats) his wife's earning is not a man"*

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more freedom for honesty in private interviews.

**A man needs to control his wife, look after the needs of parents more than the wife, and take major decisions within family.**

All espoused a clearly well defined role between husband and wife when it came to domestic chores and upbringing of children. With men being seen as responsible for earning and fulfilling a family's needs financially, it was women's responsibility to fulfill household responsibilities. Some went on to say that working within the home was shameful for men as real men did not do work meant for women.

Man's role in the house was seen as that of the head, pillar, decision maker who must command respect and be able to balance between the demands of the parents and the wife. Some cited religion as reinforcing the role of the man as the one who fulfilled expectations of people especially parents and this was considered an important way to please God. If we have no knowledge of our "deen" (faith), then we are not of any value, faith should come first and then worldly needs... if you impart faith's education to your children, they will not be spoiled, your daughters will not be spoiled.

Although most felt that men should look after the needs of the wife, if this conflicted with parental rights, parents should be prioritized. The husband's role was to make the wife 'understand' this priority. 'By the grace of God I always do what my parent tells me, irrespective of whether I will gain or lose by that act'. In case of conflict between parents and wife, many men said that their typical behaviour was to withdraw, leaving the two conflicting parties (often the wife and the mother in law) to fight it out and resolve it between themselves. Relationships with parents seemed to be

characterized by a sense of duty and respect especially after marriage. The dynamics between husband and wife were quite different. As one said 'treat your wife with kindness but do not end up being subordinate to her'. Another defined the kind of relationship between husband and wife as 'if a woman really cares for her husband and if one day her husband asks her to die, it is not for the woman to ask why, if she is an obedient wife she should die as it pleases her husband and she must always respect him' Sometimes words used for the wife seemed derogatory and reduced her status to an object or possession e.g. 'cheez'. Controlling the wife seemed to be an important attribute of masculinity where men were conflicted about maintaining a balance between being polite and not being 'extra polite'. This extended to the sexual arena as well and the pains young men take to show that they are sexually virile but at the same time not 'controlled' by their women. One man recounted the tale of a friend who upon getting married was teased by friends: if he went home too early, he cared about his wife, but if he went home late, he was afraid of sexual activity.

This need to establish clear dominance and control in relationships was not limited to





marriage but also extended to other opposite sex relationships and it was highlighted that a boy must not be dominated by his girl friend. Losing control was defined as spending 'too' much time with her and giving her attention. This could lead to teasing and being ostracized from boys' groups.

Religion was often cited by young men, especially in group discussions to support their argument about restricting women's mobility, dress code, earning. However, interestingly there were a few dissenting voices that felt religion was being misinterpreted and that Islam allowed women more freedom.

Most men mentioned controlling women's sexual activity and a deep distrust of women. Keeping an eye on the sister's and wife's movement was considered important. Sexual activity before marriage for women was not acceptable, and it was important that women be virgins before marriage. Once a woman had engaged in sexual activity, she was not to be trusted; 'whether you steal once or you steal a thousand times it is the same, whether you steal one rupee or one lakh rupee it is the same thing'. This criterion was rigid and applied even if the sexual activity had been with the

husband before marriage. This strict moral code seemed to have no connection to their own sexual practices before marriage, be it sexual experimentation with friends, sex workers, or younger boys.

Sharing sexual problems or concerns with the wife was considered to be ill advised as women were seen as untrustworthy, and there was concern about losing control through admission of weakness and her then looking elsewhere for sexual satisfaction. There seemed to be some evidence of this extending to matters beyond sexual concerns as well, but that was not adequately probed. Male friends on the other hand were considered more trustworthy and reliable. They could be looked upon to help and also keep secrets.

### **Violent behaviour and harassment of powerless groups as part of being a real man.**

Most men mentioned violent fights between rival youth groups in the community. Many had been part of such groups, and some reported detailed incidents in which their lives were endangered. Use of weapons such as pistols and knives seemed common. Issues over which they fought ranged from revenge for perceived insult, being paid to inflict harm on another person, possession of younger boys for sexual purposes, engaging in fights to 'cleanse' society, and rivalry between different castes. There was a belief that a real man always responded to a threat, did not forgive or forget, and did not shy away from conflict even if it meant endangering his life. There was a sense of bravado and not being afraid of death if you were a real man. 'We have to die one day, whether we die at the hand of a human being or because a dog bites us, or the angel of death comes to take our spirit, when our death is ordained it will happen'



Sexual violence against younger boys, was not viewed as violence and it seemed that the line between sexual experimentation among friends and manipulation of young boys by older boys was blurred. There was little expressed empathy for the victim. Even when respondents described their own experiences with victimization, there was little suggestion of feeling angry or resentful. In one case, where the young man had been part of a gang rape of a younger boy, there was a lot of guilt expressed later, about the sinful nature of the act, but no empathy for the victim.

There was less recognition of sexual harassment as violence though they accepted that women were harassed on the road and in public. Where some criticized the practice as wrong, many felt that men were 'compelled' to engage in it and that women invited it. Some felt that women who were harassed were sex workers and that even if they did not respond to verbal harassment, men would continue to harass them.

In sharp contrast to the women's groups, where domestic violence and abuse was a recurrent theme, men did not discuss it. This denial was especially marked in the group discussion. In the individual sessions there was some mention of it, and, though many felt that it was not

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*"We have to die one day, whether we die at the hand of a human being or because a dog bites us, or the angel of death comes to take our spirit, when our death is ordained it will happen"*

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desirable, at times they felt it was necessary. Some felt that it had to be done when 'a limit' was reached to show the woman 'her place' especially when she answered back. Domestic violence was discussed as an important tool to ensure domination and respect. One man shared that sometimes men also beat their wives when they wanted to hide certain things (hinting at sexual infidelity) and women insisted on questioning them about it. Many felt that the threat of violence or show of temper ought to be enough to keep her under her husband's control.

The onus of preventing violence and conflict in the home was clearly on the woman. As one put it 'when she sees I am angry she herself gives in. I can get out of control in anger... to keep her respect she backs off...everyone likes to maintain their respect'. Another man puts it as 'avoiding violence is a woman's responsibility, if she is intelligent, she should pick up her husband's mood'.

A man shared that the man who beats his wife is 'namard' (not a man) but in the same sentence went on to say that although you should not beat women, a woman of a 'good family' was able to tolerate violence. 'She is like a wall, no matter how much you beat her she takes it'.

### **Men cleanse society and uphold traditions**

Men saw themselves as a group that needs to protect and uphold society's traditions and morality. Most expressed this foremost and primarily in terms of the women in their family especially the wife and sister, often referred to as 'cheez' or possessions. This was linked to controlling her mobility and dress. Failure to meet this criteria made a man honourless, and, as one man put it, 'in our area we live for our honor only, and we die for it as well'. Sitting with your sister at a bus stand where she can be

*"When she sees I am angry she herself gives in. I can get out of control in anger... to keep her respect she backs off.....everyone likes to maintain their respect"*

seen by other boys was seen as dishonourable, as was allowing her to talk to boys or go out without purdah/veil.

This role extended to beyond the family where some boys/men reported that they insulted and teased boys whose sisters worked. There was also a reference to the need to 'clean up' society from groups like homosexuals, men who 'kept' younger boys, youth who teased girls and boys and girls who were 'dating'. 'Nowadays if some boy passes through our streets (area) and he is after a girl or if he has come for a date, he can never deceive us. We make him understand once, but the second time we don't just talk to him (implying that they use violence). People in the neighbourhood also support us in this saying that the boy has done wrong as he came to tease girls (so he deserves it)'. In individual sessions there was more focus on controlling female members of their household rather than society but as a group there was more collective censure of activities outside the home.

*"She (good woman) is like a wall, no matter how much you beat her she takes it"*

### **Real men do not look like women**

Although being muscular and physically strong was mentioned by many as an important trait of masculinity, this was almost always mentioned in the context of sexual virility/potency except twice where it was mentioned in the context of using it to show strength and dominance over other boys. Special diets and regular exercise and sports were considered important not only as they visibly made the body stronger, but also as a protection/distracted from excessive indulgence in sex.

Participants made it clear that real men do not look like women. When asked to provide descriptions of what men wore and how they

*"In our area we live for our honor only, and we die for it as well"*

walked, they would invariably frame it as being different from women, almost as if the definition of being male meant not being female; negation of feminine traits seemed important to their identity as a man. 'Men must be different from women, through clothes, colors etc'. Another man, describing what he called a feminine man in the area said ' they have a female nature...there have 50%-75% woman's qualities in them, I mean their style of speaking, if they go somewhere they will think about their appearance and this will resemble that of women i.e. doing facials, putting lenses, and make up. They want to be like a girl'.

### **ii) What women said**

Key themes that appeared in women's discussion were:

**Men earn, make decisions, are trustworthy and have a need to control the wife. Men should balance parents' and wife's expectations and most of all 'give peace' to the wife**

Men's ability to earn was an important pre requisite for respect, although some women felt that this burden was heavy and many men suffered as a result. They talked about how men sometimes smoked, used drugs and became violent to release tensions. They shared that men feel inferior and low about themselves if they could not meet their family's needs. This impact on men's health and behaviour came up only once in the data collected with men.

While some echoed men's sentiments that living off a woman's earnings is wrong, others felt that women can and should support men. Some also indicated that it was considered good if the girl was educated and could bring in money. This made her an asset. This is in contrast to what most unmarried men said who labelled letting their wives and sisters work as 'honourless'.

Women also saw men's work as outside the home and women's as that of looking after the family and children. Some felt that women who work should get more support from men in household chores. However, there was some skepticism about their (men's) ability to do so. As one woman put it 'wo kaam kam karte hain aur khap zyada daltein hain' (when doing domestic chores they create more fuss and work less). Another woman felt that it was a sign of shame if the man of the house had to work within the house.

'Raub' or control over the wife was considered an essential attribute of masculinity where one said 'men want that other people should

say...look, how much control he has ... the sound of his voice makes his wife run. The wife wants that before he should lift his hand (hit her ) she should fulfil his needs'. Another woman shared that 'if a woman has been given freedom by her husband she should be faithful to him, if she has freedom she should not abuse it unduly and stay within limits'. Some women felt that men were skeptical or suspicious of women and that dress, appearance (e.g cutting hair) and mobility were often areas where 'permission' was needed. Many shared that a man required that a woman seek permission before visiting her natal home.

These women experienced men as the ones who decide, give orders, dominate and get angry when they do not get respect. Decision-making was seen as men's domain and women shared how they were discouraged from participation in decision- making by being told that they did not know enough.

Women echoed what men said about women being untrustworthy and felt that men were better at keeping secrets.

Sometimes, women mentioned traditional gendered practices that men did not perceive at





all. For example, women mentioned setting aside better food for the man of the house in acknowledgment of his status as breadwinner and primary earner. It is notable that this preferential treatment in diet had no relationship to sexually potency, which is the only time men spoke about the importance of special diet.

Women's relationships with each other within the home were characterized by conflict and competition over resources such as use of money, food items, decision making within the home. While some experienced actual physical abuse at the hands of the mother in law, others talked about how they felt less important and how often husbands would side with the mother in law and his sisters and leave them to fend for themselves. However, women felt that a good man should be able to balance fairly between the needs of his wife and his parents. They also felt that a good man should speak politely and calmly with his family and try not to resort to violence. As one put it, 'it is all right if he cannot give money he should at least give us peace of mind'.

Women felt that they were blamed for not having children or for producing a female child and felt that a woman's standing was only secure once she had a male child. 'Since I gave birth people have stopped criticizing me'

### **Men resort to violence in intimate relationships**

In sharp contrast to the married men's focus group discussion where domestic violence was denied and ignored, the topic dominated women's discussion. Women repeatedly shared personal or observed stories of domestic violence. Mentioned over 46 times in the discussions, the types of violence shared included sexual abuse of children, sexual harassment in public spaces, acid throwing, and physical

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*"It is all right if he cannot give money he should at least give us peace of mind"*

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violence against wives, ranging from slapping, hitting, kicking, marital rape and excessive beating leading to abortion. Nearly all married women had experienced physical violence at the hands of their husbands and some by mothers and fathers-in-law.

There was a chilling acceptance of domestic violence as justifiable under certain conditions. Many felt that the wife should only be beaten when she has done something bad outside or disobeyed her husband and 'that if he beats her for a reason it is acceptable'. However, when they spoke about incidents of violence they had experienced themselves, they nearly always spoke of it in terms of being excessive and unfair. 'When I was pregnant, my husband used to kick me with his legs excessively, and then I lost the child. When we went to the doctor, he said there was no pregnancy and then he and his mother started to say that I had aborted my child myself'. Another woman stated 'The main reason why a man beats a woman is that he can't be violent with anyone else, so in this case he is violent with his wife; if he is angry with his father... or with someone else...so he will vent it in the home especially on his wife. The wife will say to him, " why do you take out your anger with someone else on me..."

Like the men, most believed that the responsibility of avoiding violence lay with the women. 'When a man is asking for something, it is better to agree with him instead of him becoming violent' This was not so much in

terms of doing something specific or avoiding something specific but more in terms of understanding husbands' mood, keeping out of the way, arranging everything according to their liking. There were some dissenting voices; however, all agreed that there were certain conditions where beating was justified. One of these conditions was sexual infidelity. Beating was also acceptable if it was done in privacy and at night, and if the man apologized later. 'He beats me at night, so I say to myself, it is OK. But he has started to beat me in front of everyone, and there are signs on my body'.

Two women shared that they did not feel they could ever refuse their husband sexually. As one simply put it, there was no point 'even if a wife is not willing, he will do it by force'. There was a strong religious justification given for this, and many felt that it was a sin to say no to the husband.

*"When a man is asking for something, it is better to agree with him instead of him becoming violent"*

*"He beats me at night, so I say to myself, it is OK. But he has started to beat me in front of everyone, and there are signs on my body"*

**Men blame women for infertility and do not want to be questioned about their potency.**

Women never mentioned a man's sexual potency as a key criterion for what defined a real man. In two of the five data pieces with women, there was a reference to the ability of men to produce children. They shared that men tended to blame women for childlessness or infertility and did not tolerate questioning about their own potency. This was, however, more in the context of the ability to produce offspring than sexuality per se. This echoes what men had said earlier about their discomfort or wanting to hide sexual weakness from their wives.

Women saw men's sexual needs as something that men could not control and agreed that a man's sexual desire must be met immediately.

## Pakistani Adaptation of Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale

The GEM Scale was originally developed by the Horizon Program and Instituto Promundo with young men aged 15 to 25 years. The original scale includes 24 attitudinal statements about gender roles in the area of domestic work and childcare, sexuality and sexual relationships, reproductive health and disease prevention, partner violence, and attitudes towards homosexuality and close relationships with other men. Based on the analysis of data collected by Rozan for the original testing, 22 statements were taken from the original GEM Scale, 3 from the Indian adaptation, and an additional 14 statements were developed for Pakistan.

### Fourteen items developed by the research team included in the first round of testing

#### Masculinity

1. It is a man's responsibility to fulfill every domestic need.

2. There is no difference between men and women dietary needs.
3. An honorable man does not live on woman's earnings.
4. Men get out of control due to women's dressing and gait.
5. A man is born to earn.
6. A woman is responsible for not having children.
7. A man has to prove his manliness.

#### Sexuality

8. A woman cannot refuse her husband for sex.
9. Men should hide their sexual disease from women.
10. A man should be sexually powerful to keep his wife in control.

#### Relationship

11. Parents are more important than wife.
12. Women of the house should be in men's control.
13. A woman is responsible for domestic violence; sensible woman never let the violence happen.
14. Women should not go out for work.

### Twenty two items selected from the original GEM Scale team included in the first round of testing

1. It is the man who decides what type of sex to have.
2. A Woman's most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family.
3. Men need sex more than women do.
4. You don't talk about sex, you just do it.
5. Women who carry condoms on them are "easy".
6. Changing diapers, giving the kids a bath, and feeding the kids are the mother's responsibility.
7. It is a woman's responsibility to avoid



- getting pregnant.
8. A man should have the final word about decisions in his home.
  9. Men are always ready to have sex.
  10. There are times when a woman deserves to be a beaten.
  11. A man needs other women, even if things with his wife are fine.
  12. If someone insults me, I will defend my reputation, with force if I have to.
  13. A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.
  14. I would be outraged if my wife asked me to use a condom.
  15. It is okay for a man to hit his wife if she won't have sex with him.
  16. I would never have a gay friend.
  17. It disgusts me when I see a man acting like a woman.
  18. If a woman cheats on a man, it is okay for him to hit her.
  19. Men can take care of children just as well as women can.
  20. Real men only have sex with women.

21. Above all, a man needs respect.
22. Women should be virgins until they get married.

### Three items selected from the Indian GEM Scale

1. A real man produces a male child.
2. A real man is one who can have sex with a woman for long time.
3. A married woman should not need to ask her husband for permission to visit her parents/family.

For the Pakistani adaptation these 39 items were first tested for language with a group of 8 young boys in Urdu. After this these 39 items were given to 106 young men. The responses from 106 respondents were analyzed using principle component analysis to select items that had high internal correlation. With about five iterations, 13 items that clung together with Alpha value of 0.71 were identified.

### Items selected for Pakistan version of GEM Scale

#### Sex and Sexuality

Men need sex more than women do.  
 Men are always ready to have sex.  
 I would be outraged if my wife asked me to use a condom.  
 Only a real man can produce a male child.  
 A man should be sexually powerful to keep his wife in control. @

#### Gender Norms

Changing diapers, giving the kids a bath, and feeding the kids are the mothers' responsibility.  
 It is a woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant.  
 A man should have the final word about decisions in his home.  
 Above all, a man needs respect.  
 Women should also go out for work. @  
 An honorable man does not live on woman's earnings. @

#### Violence

A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.  
 Women of the house should be in men's control. @

Note: Items with symbol @ are Pakistan specific.



## Conclusions and Implications for Programming

Drawing upon the findings, this section presents conclusions about the attributes or perspectives that define masculinity. It also attempts to understand how these attributes interact with each other and impact the lives of young men and young women.

Each of the areas identified below highlight tension points that can be explored and discussed in group education sessions and campaigns in an attempt to support young men in:

- Reflecting upon and understanding where these expectations come from, how they influence their behaviour and also how it then impacts people and relationships around them
- Gaining knowledge and information on sexuality (e.g myths around sexuality)
- Learning skills (e.g. conflict resolution and anger management)
- Coping with aspects of their lives that need support especially in cases where their first experience with sexuality has been abusive

Sexual potency and the ability to 'prove' ones masculinity through sexually virility were important for these young men. Activities that were believed to lead to increased sexual performance were highly desirable such as special diet, engagement in sports, physical exercise and bodybuilding. There seemed to be an interesting contradiction /fascination with sexual stamina (and a need to develop it through physical exercise) in order to fulfill sexual demands and be a man but at the same time, a fear that sex will weaken the body and

must be avoided. They seemed to be struggling constantly with what they felt were 'uncontrollable urges' and fearing their detrimental consequences.

Men's **anxiety around sexual virility and its association with the ability to produce offspring**, especially a male child, was obvious in discussions. Any admission of sexual weakness or anxiety about sexual performance seemed contrary to the notion of being a man and as such there was discomfort with sharing this with women and to some extent with other men. Men did not wish to discuss this with their wives or seek possible treatment for it. This discomfort sprang from a perceived fear of sexual infidelity on part of the wife, once she discovered that the man had a real or imagined sexual deficiency. A practical implication articulated by women of this fear experienced by men, was that men would not accept blame for the couple's inability to conceive and often would blame the wife for her inability to produce children. Interesting to note here is that men's defensive behaviour in a bid to 'protect' their manhood leaves women vulnerable to the blame for being barren/childless. This is often cited as a major justification for second marriage for men.

For most men early sexual experimentation involves other men, even though this behaviour is not acceptable in a traditionally conservative society like Pakistan. Moreover, with a **blurred line between experimentation and abuse** by older 'friends', sex and sexuality become enmeshed with guilt, fear of physical consequences, and a strong anxiety around sexual performance in married life. As a result these young men, despite the very real anxiety they experience, have few avenues of support, reassurance or provision of factual information to clarify myths around sexuality or even information about sexual health. Also we know that men traditionally block themselves from

## Comparing perceptions of men and women

Much of the discussion with men revealed male expectations to prove masculinity. Being a man was not an entitlement by birth, but had to be proved repeatedly through the fulfilment of sexual, familial, and financial roles. There was relatively little emphasis on physical attributes, and men seemed to be driven more by the need to prove their sexual potency and ability to provide and earn for their family. Other proofs of masculinity were domination and control over wife, not being feminine, responding without fear to threats and insults, and taking revenge. Women's discussion revealed daily experiences with the man/men in their lives; their messages were a contrast to the men, who spoke about the 'ideal man'.

There was also similarity between men's and women's views about socialization messages around gender norms. The views complement each other, but it was interesting that women's prioritization of what makes a 'real' man was different from men's. They seemed to place peace of mind (treating women with respect and not resorting to violence or threats) higher than his ability to earn and provide for his wife or his sexual virility, both of which are placed by men as critical for gaining respect within the family and society.

Women also showed more insight than men and more flexibility when it came to changing or challenging gender norms, as they are clearly at the receiving end of this discrimination in more obvious and extreme ways. Men seemed to function from a position of privilege and power (entitlement), but there was clear anxiety and tension around the need to prove and maintain this position of power and fear of admission of weakness.

emotional expression, and as such may find it hard to deal with trauma like sexual abuse as children and may also subsequently find it harder to empathize with powerless groups as to do so may invoke memories of unresolved trauma in their lives.

The data clearly reveals the belief that **men were helpless in the face of sexual needs** and that it is women's dress and behaviour which 'compels' them to be attracted to them. Linked with this was the belief that women could not be forced to have sex and that 'good' women were never harassed. An implication of this belief would be that that women who claimed they had been sexually abused were lying and are to blame for sexual assault in the first place. Correspondingly men have no agency or ability to control themselves sexually and hence are not to be blamed. To some extent young

women also echoed this and felt that women's dress may lead men to sexually assault them. However, they did not share the opinion that women could not be raped without consent.

**Ability to earn and provide** for the family was closely linked to respect, as many believed that only men who could earn and provide for their family were deserving of respect or were honourable. Although this was reiterated by women, they prioritized it less. Women shared that what they sought most from their husbands was care, importance, and peace of mind, even if they could not provide financially. Running parallel to the theme of being a 'provider' were attitudes towards living off of **women's earning**, which was regarded by men as honourless. This was less intensely expressed by married men and in individual interviews. The reality is that many women in

this community work as domestic help in homes, in schools, in offices, or in NGO's. It seemed that men have 'allowed' women to work despite their discomfort due to economic reasons. It was a standard that men wanted to espouse to but had to compromise in their lives. This seemed to create a great deal of tension in them, hence the vehemence with which it was reviled e.g. equating women's work outside the home to sex work.

**Controlling and guarding the women of the house** was considered an essential attribute of a real man and as such men prescribed acceptable dress code and activities outside the home. This was seconded by women who shared that husbands and brothers were often skeptical and suspicious about them especially if they went out of the home. Women also felt that women should stay within limits and not abuse freedom if allowed to work outside. This included being conservative in dress and demeanour and not appearing overly 'bold' or socially adept.

Men experience themselves as men only if these traits and attributes differentiated them from women. There was a strong fear of appearing feminine and pressure to prove that in **your trait, mannerism and dress you were a 'real' man**. If you did not meet these standards, you could be teased and ridiculed. There was mention of drugs and steroids used by young men to build the body.

Overwhelmingly, both men and women shared the belief that the **responsibility of avoiding violence within the home was the woman's**. Although justification was given by both, the women expressed more clearly that it was often unfair and excessive. Women and men both felt that a woman could avoid violence if she was able to manage her husband's mood; but often conditions to avoid violence were arbitrary and essentially meant backing off from one's

position and being subservient to the man's demands. Even in this case, some women felt that violence could not be avoided when the man had to vent his anger about something else and the woman was a safe outlet. Men lacked this insight when they talked about violence. Some men did censure violence also but said so on grounds of how men should be kinder to women and keep a balance between being polite and overly subordinate. Recognition of sexual harassment as a form of violence against women was low.

'Real' men were not afraid of **engaging in violent and risky behaviour** even if it endangered their lives. Many had been part of street gangs and groups and although there were dissenting voices which spoke about resolving conflict through dialogue, the majority felt that show of strength was needed to establish dominance. This did not have to be physical strength alone but could also be connections with powerful and influential groups.

There was clear **demarcation of responsibilities within the home**, both for men and women, more so in the case of men. Both expressed that it was shameful for men to work around the house, especially in terms of serving himself etc. Some women seemed more open to changing this norm, saying that women who worked needed more support within the home and women could supplement family income.

The need to establish **clear dominance and control** (sexual and otherwise) in relationships with wives/ girl friends was expressed as an essential attribute of a man. Image was important in this case and could translate into pressure on men to show that they did not 'care' so much for their wives and girl friends. It seems that men hide their sexual anxieties from their wives and can resort to violence if necessary to demonstrate this control.

As most families within Pakistan live in a joint family system, an issue that seemed to come up again and again was **balancing between the needs of the parents and the wife**. These needs were often perceived as competing. Men's reactions to this conflict were to side with parents and also to avoid responsibility for resolving the conflict, withdrawing physically from the situation. This was echoed by the women when they shared experiences of negotiating disagreements with their in-laws.

Some men saw themselves as **gatekeepers of traditions and society's morality**. This role seemed limited to others' sexual activities outside the domain of marriage, with a special focus on groups like homosexuals, men who 'kept' younger boys, youth who teased girls and boys, and girls who were 'dating'. Here, the criterion for being attacked was sexual activity outside the contract of marriage. No distinction was made on the basis of whether the behaviour was engaged in willingly or was forced (as in the case of eve teasing and child sexual abuse). Both the victim and perpetrator were implicated as culpable. An interesting observation was the fact that although in the group discussions there was much censure of these activities, many in interviews shared personal experiences where they had engaged in such behaviours, highlighting another area of

tension where men espoused to a standard that they were personally unable to meet themselves.

The findings from this study highlight how perceptions and practices of masculinity influence and inter-connect with issues such as relationships, sexuality and, most important violence. Traditional notions of masculinity put men in a position of dominance where relationships are often characterized by unequal power relations. Violence is seen as a tool for maintaining control. This control is at best fragile, in the face of rigid expectations from men regarding sexual virility and dominance as well as their role as primary providers for the family. These expectations are particularly unstable in the context of rapidly changing demographics with shifting gender dynamics, reduced livelihood opportunities, and an increased need for women to work and supplement family incomes.

Understanding and acknowledging these tension points, contradictions and anxieties in men's lives can be strategic entry points of discussion and engagement with men on issues of gender based violence and may serve to increase the stakes for men for a more gender just world.



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**Rozan** is an Islamabad based NGO working on issues related to emotional health, gender, violence against women, children, and the reproductive health of adolescents. In addition to awareness raising and psychological support services, Rozan also offers training and capacity building services to governmental and NGO/CBO partners.



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