Understanding masculinities, gender norms and intimate partner violence in men’s intimate relationships with female sex workers of Northern Karnataka

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**Background**

- Discourses on men and HIV prevention in India focused on changing knowledge, attitudes and risk behaviour
- Structural drivers of HIV has been increasingly recognised. One such: Effect of masculinities and gender norms on intimate partner violence (IPV) within sex work

**Objectives**

Explore relationship between IPV and ideas of masculinity among the intimate partners (IPs) of female sex workers (FSWs) specially focusing on norms.

**Methods**

- 2 FGDs with FSWs (N=17 women)
- 4 FGD (N=34 men) IP
- 10 IDI (N=30) with IPs

**Findings**

- **Difficulty work situations and gender relations**
  - Hard work makes a man, a man
  - Women's work is less valued
  - Financial and emotional burden of caring for lover and wife at work causes stress
  - Violence is seen as a way to reassert control in the private domain

- **Body image**
  - Bulging, bronzed muscles seen as ideal masculine physique
  - Non-moustachioed, soft-spoken and shy men are considered as “chakka” or effeminate
  - Cultural shifts in masculinity with increased preference for fair skin, modern commodities

- **Relationship dynamics and money**
  - Women considered subservient because of their economic dependence “She came to my house as my wife, and then she has to manage the family well, right? I will take care of her if she treats me with a good attitude”
  - A man who takes money from wife is seen as a lesser man “A chakka takes money from wife!”
  - Violence by men is justified except if the man is a “chakka”
  - Financial support to lovers justifies violence against her “I have the right to hit her and even kill her. Why else would I bear the expense and look after her?”

- **Media, nationalism and masculinity**
  - Nationalism rooted in working-class male culture “The strength of Indian man came from drinking local beers, eating roti and working hard on the land”
  - Disdain for effeminate movie heroes and celebration of heroes in violent combat

- **Perceptions of sex workers**
  - Sex workers were characterized as “sexually voracious women” and that leads to their sexual exploitation and abuse
  - Relationships with SW are born out of sexual needs
  - SWs thought to only need money and hence less obligations

- **Conclusion**
  - Partner violence is a norm in the study community as men believe that they are expected to use violence and they will lose their status and position if they do not
  - Relationships with sex workers are guided by men’s ideas of masculinity and general low value of women
  - Interventions with sex workers and their intimate partners would need to address their perceptions and norms

Photos: K V Balusubrahmanya, KHPT; Sapna G Nair, KHPT.