

***Mard (Real Man), Pati (Husband) and Pita (Father):***  
**A study of male workers, masculinities and family in an Indian Slum**

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Family and its wellbeing is always an important issue for the social scientists throughout the research history. This fact is easily understood, as family is the most important primary unit of societies. Many schools have opined their views on the welfare process of family and its members. However, the theories inspired by the concept of gender equity advocate for a balanced participation of the household members and gained a larger number of supporters. While analyzing the issues like domestic violence, maternal health care, child wellbeing, a bifocal approach is considered as the panacea to it. It is no doubt giving autonomy and mobility-freedom to women folk is one of the “must to do” agenda. Moreover it is a strong demand of the ethical values. Besides sensitizing male and its gender is also another important challenge which has been widely neglected through research and intervention. In recent years, social scientists have increasingly emphasized the importance of male involvement in the domestic arena. The large number of articles (Aguma, 1996; Cleland, 1993; Davis et al, 1987; Green, 1990; Khan et al., 1997a, 1997b; Ringheim, 1993; Schuler et al. 1995; UNFPA, 1995) and growing number of conferences, research projects and debates on this subject bear testimony to the importance of the issue, both from programmatic point of view and as a process for bringing about gender balance in men’s and women’s reproductive rights and responsibilities (Khan, M.E and Patel, B. 1997). This internalization has boosted up the researches and talk about the male role as a father, husband and overall as a partner in the family building processes. While focusing on the role value of males the underlying issues like masculinity, gender identity invites the attention.

**Development of the concept**

In each culture, there is a socially expected value for each gender. This gender identity oriented behaviours are more rigid than among irrespective of cultures. The reason for that is there are no such movements for men or masculinities at pace as the

feminism activities, which has enabled the change of traditional feminine identity. The masculinity is shaped according to the cultural beliefs, values and norms, evolved from long term behavioural practices, where the males' role was dominant in hunting and war. This traditional masculinity value keeps the expected male role far from the feminine values. The message that men and women must lie in the extremes while talking about social and cultural and to some extent physical roles is well articulated in all most all socialization process. It is a widely found perception that overt affection, emotion and weakness is all feminine characteristics and men are not expected to show these feelings. The expected characteristics like "no sissy stuff," "to be a sturdy oak", "give 'em hell" not only endanger the men's way of life but whole familial environment too. In the whole process of socialisation and re-socialisation the traditional message of masculinity is very much rigid about its core concept. Whether it is the working environment, peer surroundings or family responsibilities the pressure of performing as a man is always there.

### **Domestic involvement, family welfare and gender**

The ICPD programme of action declares that "change in both men's and women's knowledge, attitude and behaviour are necessary conditions for achieving the harmonious partnership of men and women. Men play a key role in bringing about gender equality since; in most societies men exercise preponderant power in nearly every sphere of life..." It is easily understood that greater paternal involvement with children may contribute to the children's overall development(Coltrane, 1996), participation in domestic assignments alleviate the burden of second shift experienced by women( see Hochschild, 1989), and improve a family's over all well-being( Glass,1998).In Indian context too the male participation in maternal welfare is widely realised. Sensitive participation of male in domestic responsibilities is not only contributed towards the maternal wellbeing but it also will be an effective intervening step for addressing the rigidity of patriarchy. Male involvement in domestic and family arena is not only safeguards the gender equity but it is a pivotal promoter of reproductive right of both the sexes. However male involvement in reproductive health and other broader areas is a complex process of social and

behavioural change that is need for men to more responsible roles in reproductive health (Drennan,1998). In patriarchal societies where women lack autonomy in reproductive decision making particular choices men can contribute to the improvement of women's health and consequently overall improvement of women's status( Singh et ak, 1998).It not only tells about acceptance of one particular behavioural pattern but it reflects about the change in men's age old attitude toward women's health , child rearing activities, supportiveness to women and over all the responsive change toward the female gender. the role of men in reproductive health is also considered important in the present day context of high incidence of STDs including HIV/AIDS( Drennan,1998) That is the need for family wellbeing. Gender ideology is an important factor to consider the analysis of determinants of paternal and over all male involvement in family. Gender ideologies represent what individuals view as appropriate roles of men and women, which in turn affects own behaviour (McHale &Huston, 1984). So in this context where there is a wide ranged agreement for the need of male participation, further there is an understanding that the particular aspect of male role is largely guided by the gender attitude, there emerges a need to study depthly the whole process of gender construction and its dynamics in the above discussed concern.

### **Research and methods**

Broadly this paper attempts to peep into the construction of masculinity among male workers and how these male workers are involved in fathering and spousal activities. However specifically the exercise tries to unfold the perception of masculinity from male perspective, to understand the dynamics of male involvement in family and to explore the linkage between masculinity and male involvement in familial activities. The data presented here derived from a primary study on sexual behavior of migrants carried out in a slum in Orissa, which is demographically important state in India. The chosen slum is the largest one in the capital city of Orissa .As the city is expanding; there is a huge demand for migrant workers from different parts of India. The study has been conducted in the year of 2007.

*Choosing the sample:*

Within the administrative jurisdiction of Bhubaneswar , there are eight numbers of big and small slums in current situation. The slum *saliasahee* is one of the big slums in the city. It is locally known for its heterogeneous migrant population. Apart from this; the slum is also situated close to one of the posh areas of the city. The physical setting gives an ample access point to all the urban opportunities. The particular slum was selected for its described characteristics. In the second step out of the twenty two hamlets ( Sahis) two were selected randomly. The total households were listed in both the hamlets. Keeping the sensitivity of the issue before sight, the purposive sample technique found to be the suitable one. The sample size was decided to be hundred and from each *sahee* first fifty married male migrants in the determined age group were selected. Selection of the respondents for the in-depth interviews was also done in the similar fashion.

Entry to the community was obtained through the community gatekeepers, who were found to be the key informants in latter stages. As an introductory part the free listing and pile shorting exercise was done among twenty-five men on the perception about masculinity. It not only gave a detail in-depth knowledge about cultural perception of male gender, but “the card-game” exercise created a conducive atmosphere for discussing the sensitive issue in the community.

#### *Construction of composite variables*

Apart from other several questions the survey has two sections of questions that ask about the notion of the masculinity and the other is about the child care activity. In these paper two composite variables has been constructed for quantifying the issues. First one is the composite variable of masculinity and the composite variable of child intimacy.

From the open ended section that asks about the notion of masculinity and sexual image, a number of responses came out. Fourty-six different types of answers were sought out from the multi number of questions. The different types of responses were broadly divided into four major domains such as “Social”, “familial”, “cultural”, “and sexual”. After testing the reliability of the responses ( alpha value =.7098) fourty two variables were finalized for final calculation. The next exercise was to rank them into three

categories. The rank was high medium and low according to the degree of rigidity\* of masculinity notion. Each rank set was containing fourteen different perception of masculinity. The responses under the high rank was assigned a numeric value of two each, one to lying in the medium rank and zero to the lower ranked responses. As each category contains fourteen responses the range of the composite variable lies between “zero” to “twenty eight”.

In the second phase there was a question that asks about the paternal involvement in child rearing activities which are loaded with socially constructed value. There are seven questions that reveal the participation of fathers in activities like “playing with children”, “telling stories”, “dressing them up”, “accompanying to school”, “taking them with while going for visit”, “bathing the children”, “feeding the children”. The questions reveal whether the respondents were involved in such activities “frequently”, “some times” or “never”. A score of numerical value “three” was given to the responses like frequently, a score of two to responses like “sometimes”, and a score of one to the responses like “never”. The value of “ the composite variable of child intimacy” lies between twenty one and seven. Further the two composite variables were used to show the pathway of different behavioural dimensions.

### **Findings and discussions**

The study population was from a typical low socioeconomic slum dwelling characteristics. There was a poor health care facilities in the slum, as a similar line to other slum areas they don't have a proper sewage and mixed housing patterns. Major chunk of the population are engaged in daily waged construction work. Table 1.a gives the socio demographic profile of the male workers .a majority (fourty five perecent)of the respondents belong to the age group of thirty five and above. Approximately one fourth

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\* *In this study the perceived male characteristics that reflects the traditional Machismo is considered as rigid.. Further, it is assumed in this paper that the higher the risky factor attached to perceived male gender role higher is the masculinity.*

(twenty three percent) of the male workers are illiterate. Only seventeen percent of the workers of *Saliasahee* are completed middle school or higher.

**Table 1.a: profile of respondents**

<b>Background Characteristics</b>	<b>Percentages ( n=100)</b>
<b>Age</b>	
<21	22.0
21-35	33.0
>35	45.0
<b>Education</b>	
Illiterate	23.0
Literate < primary	21.0
Primary < middle	39.0
Middle school comp.	17.0
<b>Age gap between husband and wife</b>	
Less than 5	69.0
Less than 5	31.0
<b>Work type</b>	
Unskilled hired labourers	42.0
Skilled worker	39.0
Others	19.0
<b>Place of origin</b>	
Within the district of Bhubaneswar	1.0
Eastern Odissa	32.0
Southern Odissa	57.0
Out side Odissa	10.0
<b>Familial setup</b>	
Nuclear	63.0
Joint	37.0

A large sect (more than eighty five percent) of the slum dwellers are of Hindu religion. Only fourteen percent are from other religions. Most of the male workers of this slum are engaged in the construction work. Only nineteen percent are engaged in other various types of jobs a mixture of both skilled and unskilled. Nearly about two thirds of the respondents are having a age gap of five years between themselves and their wives. For the rest (one third) of the slum dwellers the husband wife age gap is more than five years. Less than one tenth of the male workers have no living children. Another one tenth of them have only sons. Half of the respondents reported to have both living sons and daughters. The rest ( twenty eight percent) are reported to be the father of only daughter children.

*Unfolding Masculinity:*

On the basis of spontaneous responses four different components of masculinity came out. The domains like “Physical”, “Familial”, “Social” and “Cultural” are visualized as the arena of performing masculinity by the men of the study population. However it is interesting that within each domain two different polar expressions are found. One type of response is giving the message of traditional macho scent where as the other one is inclined towards an ideal and rational attitude. For example while describing the male characteristics two different opposite going responses came out ,like e “a man should sexually satisfy multiple partner” and the responses like “A man should adhere to marriage values.

**Table 1.b categorisation of multiple responses to perception of masculinity**

<b>Masculinity perception</b>	<b>Percentage (multiple response)(n=100)</b>
<b>Physical</b>	
Work perspective	63
In muscle language	67
<b>Familial</b>	
As a member of the institution	53
As the controlling mechanism	71
<b>Cultural</b>	
Humane perspective	43
emotion controlling mechanism	59
<b>Sexual</b>	
Marital value perspective	21
High sex drive	97

About two thirds of them describe the masculinity as muscular appearance, physical resistance power where more than half of responses saw the working skill and ability as an indicator of masculinity.

More than two thirds of the male migrants saw masculinity should enables man to act as a controlling mechanism within family set up. At the same time half of the male argue a masculine man should as a responsible member of the family. When perceiving the cultural image of man a majority response masculinity as a mechanism that controls emotion, and psychological weakness. Less than half of the respondents opine to be morally strong, control all the feelings is the sign of real man. On answering the question “what a man sexually should be?” Almost all the respondents described masculinity as a cause of strong sexual urge where as less than one fourth said a man should respect the marital values. A twenty eight year old , who drives taxi often go for long trips responded “man have to release that it is not important each time your wife should be there. A man is pure always. If you don’t get an opportunity to have sex you cannot concentrate on work. Another twenty two year old construction worker said “ a man should satisfy the women on bed. I have to do sex till she cries out otherwise she will think I am not a man.” A thirty three year old high school passed skilled worker said “it is women who wants sexual satisfaction from omen. When ever one gets invitation from any women for sex he should accept it other wise he will not be



considered as a man”. Categorising the male migrants perception about masculinity. More than one fourth fall in to the high category which reflect the high risk attitude. Another less than half perceive their masculinity in a comparative mediocre way and come under medium category. Rest about one fourth describe masculinity as a healthy life way for example “socially cooperative towards community” “caring towards family members” ‘culturally soft attitude holders” and “guiding sexual behaviour in a controlled way’ . They all come under Low category.

*Male workers and Masculinity: Making of the Man !!!*

Masculinity is largely a social construct. The socio-cultural factors contribute enough for shaping up the gender identity. The most common characteristics among migrants like “slum dwelling” “working in unorganised sectors where risk factor is involved” “unhygienic living condition” “occupational competition” “new comer syndrome”. These factors have a lot of potentiality to masculinize the males in certain direction, often in a rigid way.

**Table 1.c men and masculinity**

Background characteristics	High	Medium	Low
<b>Age</b>			
>21	45.4	27.3	27.3
21-30	36.4	33.3	30.3
30+	27.0	42.3	30.7
<b>Work type</b>			
Unskilled hired labour	40.5	38.1	21.4
Skilled worker	35.9	48.7	15.4
Others	11.1	33.3	55.6
<b>Familial set up</b>			
Nuclear family	39.7	38.1	22.2
Joint family	13.5	35.1	51.4
<b>Education</b>			
Illiterate	30.4	43.5	26.1
Literate < primary	26.8	46.4	26.8
Primary < middle	31.6	36.8	31.0
Middle comp.	17.6	35.3	47.1
<b>Age gap</b>			
Less than five	23.2	30.4	46.4
More than five	35.8	35.3	25.9

The young migrants show to have risky perception about masculinity in comparison to older cohorts. Nearly half of the migrants under twenty one age fall under the high masculinity where as a little higher than one third of migrants in the age group of twenty one to thirty and about one fourth among migrants above thirty perceive their masculinity high. Those migrants staying in a nuclear familial set up, y (about forty percent) reported to have the perception of high masculinity. Where as, among those who stay in a joint family system about one tenth of them show to posses the high masculine attitude the workers who are engaged as the hired unskilled labourer in construction sectors they developed their perception regarding masculinity that falls under high category. Whereas majority of the skilled workers, in construction who do a comparatively less hazards manual labour have developed their masculinity under mediocre category. And other occupants like service and shop owning more than half perceive their masculinity that lies under low category. The occupational factor , age , living set ups do have a good influence in shaping the male gender identity.

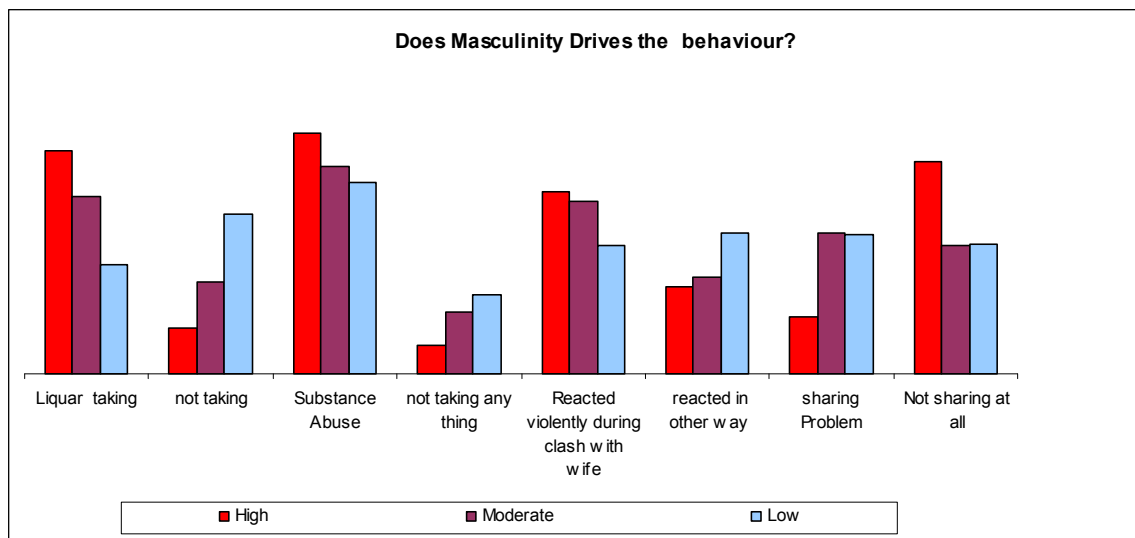
The variation in perceiving masculinity among different background characteristics certainly points the social construction of the male identity. The migrant men are well aware that they have left their native land in search of jobs and it is one of the responsibility due to their gender .The have internalised deeply about the responsibility pressure. While interviewing in-depthly a thirty year old illiterate worker said “he must earn. If a man does not earn and feed his children then he is not a *marda* (man) The exposure to the risky factors at the work place and the coping up strategy to the situations is based on their gender identity. The same respondents continued “for earning and for the sake of his occupation a man should not bother about anything I do my finishing job on eight to ten stored building just standing on a *vada* (bamboo) nothing there to give you support can you do ? but nothing happens to man once you are afraid you are gone’ second twenty nine year unskilled daily wage worker said “*marda* can live at any condition. I worked continuously for four nights in a construction work. A mild headache and fever was there many told me to take rest and go to doctor what will do ?

we are not bamboos (elite) we are the man of earth I took a ginger\* and slept the next day I was alright”.

The adverse social factors faced due to the “new to the place” or “no one known” do build a resistant and killer attitude to exist and sustain. A twenty five year skilled worker said “when I came first time here no one was known to me nobody helped me to get work and to get a place to stay. I took it for challenge now I get more work than others, some are jealous of me but they have no courage to stand before me.”

*Masculinity and the Behavioural pattern:*

In the survey there was a probe for the behavioural pattern of the male workers .It gives a detail picture of their risk taking behaviours like liquor consumption , abusing other substances, how they have reacted with their wives during domestic arguments and whether they have shared their problems and worries with wife or any one else.



findings revealed that there is a negation between high masculinity orientation and unhealthy behavioural pattern. Liquor intake is positively related with the masculinity index value. Similarly those who are reporting their perception of masculinity in a hegemonic way are found to contribute largely to substance abuse. One thirty one year old unskilled worker shares his view, “...what is harm is taking liquor?... we are eating

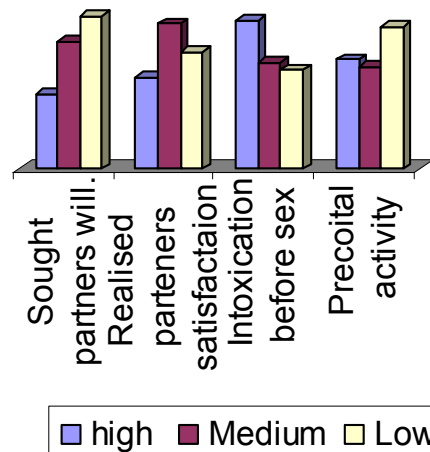
\* Allopathic medicine with alcohol percentage more than 72, locally known as “ginger”, which often found to be abused by the migrant workers .

more hazardous food than this...staying in more risk places... nothing is happening to us!..what liquor can do ?..” . another twenty five year old youth says , “...alcohol is man;s drink..u feel like lion when you take it...”. The response to doemitic interaction is also largely affected by the gender drive. Particularly while interacting with wife the masculinity identity found to be significantly guide the reaction of the men. those who are having a high endorsement to hegemonic masculinity has reacted violently than others during argument with wives in last three months. One twenty nine year old skilled construction workers justifies , “...if husband will not say *right* and *wrong* to is wife then why he is husband?...if you give a little chance to women you cant control them...”. A second thirty nine year old driver says with an experienced tone, “...if you don’t control your family, people wil not think that you area man...”. The masculinity attitude also found to act upon the tension management mechanism. Men with a rigid masculinity attitude are reluctant to share their worries and day to day problems with others particularly to wives.

#### *Men and marital sex:*

Sexual behaviour within marriage is comparatively less talked than the non marital one. The common belief that the non marital sex is more to be blamed for HIV infection is one of the cause for it. But the power negotiation, gender game within the marriage have caused the low profile of women in the marital sex. This is one of the important cause of flowing down the virus to common people. The survey has asked about the sexual behaviour such as seeking permission, pre-coital activity, intoxication before sex, realization of partners sexual satisfaction and dignity. Also the in-depth talks have gathered the detail reasons for the particular behavioral pattern.

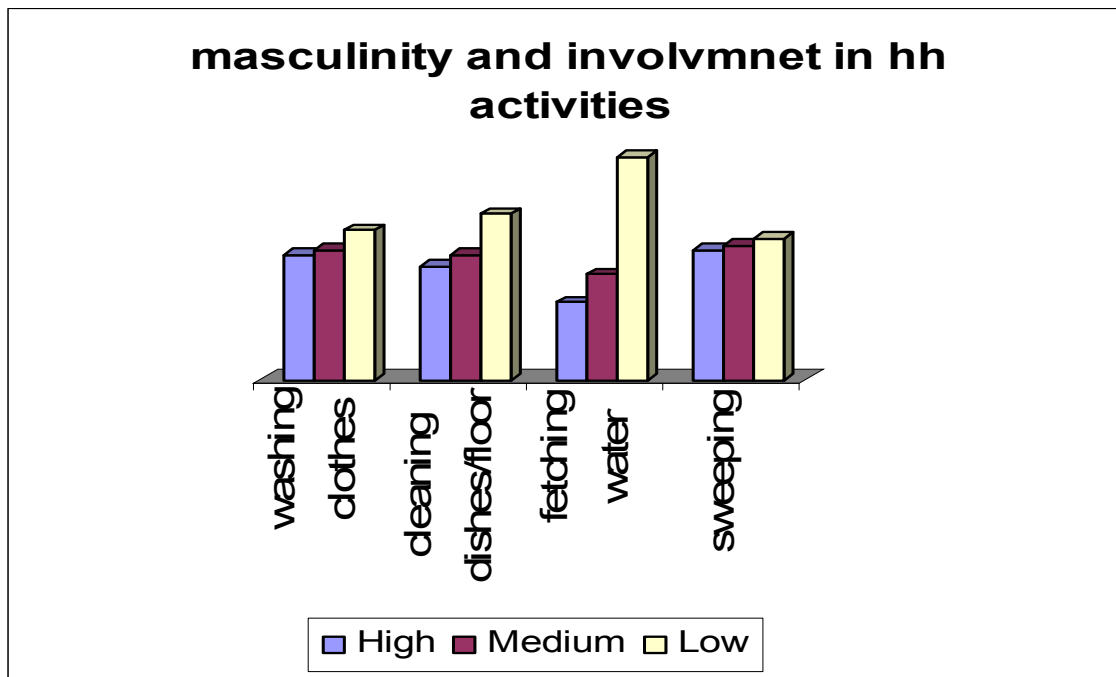
## masculinity and sexual relation with wife



men with a high masculinity attitude never consider that it is important to ask for the will or permission before having sex with their wives. In a similar fashion the hegemonic masculinity attitude never allowed men to think or realize about the satisfaction of the wife during the sexual intercourse. The faulty notion of female sexuality which is obviously one of the major reflecting device for masculinity attitude development among men is responsible for the unhealthy behavior of men in the entire sexual picturesque. The findings further revealed that the relation between intoxication before sex and high masculinity attitude is positive. One twenty seven year old construction worker says, "...I don't believe that...why to ask permission for sex?...that's what women want from men!...a *mard* (man) should be always ready for sex...and can satisfy any number...". Another twenty three year old young father says, "... I always feel like doing sex after taking alcohol...you feel like a man...without any anxiety...I am sure she also gets satisfaction...I do sex until she cries out...". Another forty year old manual labourer opines, "...husband has aright to do sex with wife ...that's why they are married !!!...its wife's duty to satisfy her husband ..."

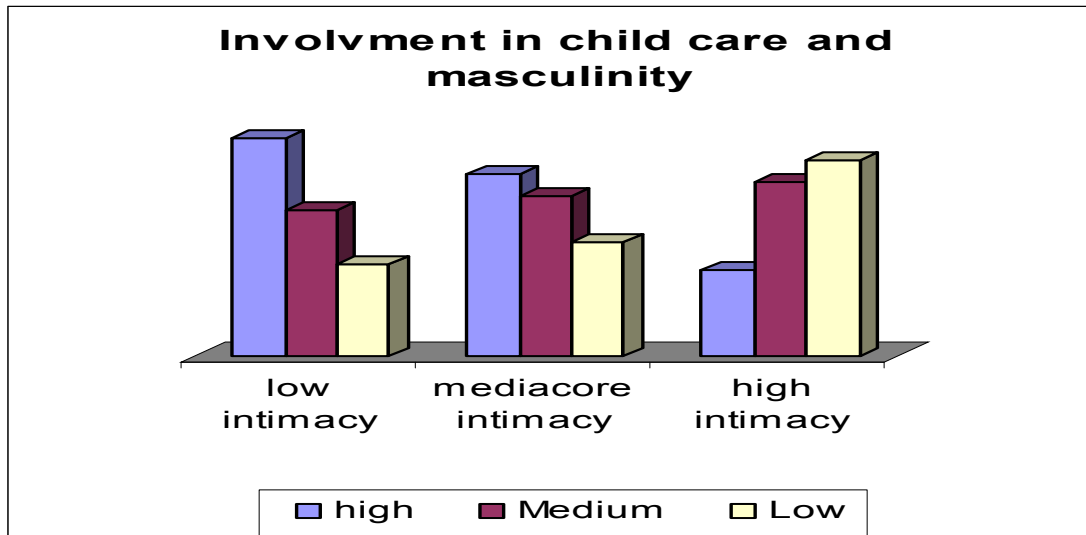
*Men and mothering:*

Like other social subsystems, jobs and works also has been engendered. There are many works within the four walls of home is not socially expected to be done by the men. The survey has tried to quantify the work participation of men in the domestic arena including the child caring activities. Further it has tried to capture conceptually the logic behind the response to a particular type of job. In analysis the masculinity index has been used to see the work participation of men in domestic jobs and further with the child intimacy composite variable ( seven activities used to construct the composite variable has been discussed in earlier section) to see how masculinity drives the men in interacting with the children.



the findings revealed that the men with a hegemonic attitude are less likely to be active in the domestic jobs lie washing clothes occasionally, cleaning the dishes or the floor , fetching water for domestic consumption, and sweeping the home. Interestingly it came out that the there is a variation within. The participation goes significantly down when it comes to the case of fetching water. It may happen that the fear of getting exposed in the community of doing domestic work is a threat to many men. One thirty year old guy says

that, "...what people will think?. I am man with women qualities inside..". another twenty six year old carpenter opines. "...you cant change it God has made the distinction of jobs...if I tried to deviate from it people will laugh...".



Findings again reveals about the men participation in the child care activities. It is found that the high hegemonic masculinity curbs down the paternal involvement significantly. One thirty year old construction worker says, "...how man can take care of a child?...mothers know best...you cant ask a man to breast feed the child( laughs)...". Another twenty eight year old father of two daughters opine with a very confusing tone, "we are toiling all the day no time to look after the children. It is the women duty to look after them." further he says, "...if you don't scold your children they will not obey you...it is not wise to mix up with the children. Then what will be difference father and mother?...affection should there within. its not good show for love, children will be spoiled".

### Conclusion

Male gender identity gets constructed and re constructed through out the socialization process. The immediate environment available for the socialiaization is largely responsible for altering, modifying or strengthening the gender value. Here it is found that the risk strings attached to the migration, working and living conditions contribute largely in shaping the male value. While the gender identity gets reconstructed on the

platform of a traditional value, the myth of masculinity gets deep rooted. As a result the notions like “male sexual image” , “ power execution ability” are perceived as important components of masculinity. Further the performance anxiety makes the situation worse. This hegemonic masculinity notion guides significantly the men’s behaviour while interacting within family and community. The intra spousal relation and communication, whether it is sexual or asexual gets largely affected. the paternal involvement with children gets a negative thrust which is definitely not health for the child development. Further the ideally expected sensitive male role within family gets shattered under the myth of hegemonic masculinity which is not a good sign for tomorrow’s gender structure. However , the fact is noticeable that there are some realization of sensitivity among most of the men which gives a platform for planning the deconstruction of the hegemonic masculinity and reconstruct it in a healthy direction.

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