Married Men’s Views on Gender Rights and Sexuality in a Northwest Bangladesh Village

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Nr 1/2012
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Acknowledgement

I am heartily and sincerely grateful to my Supervisors Dr. Ann Öhman and Maria Wiklund for their constructive guidance and continuous encouragement in this study from beginning to end in the completion of this thesis. I am especially thankful for Ann Öhman’s depth of knowledge regarding specific aspects that have put me on the right track, for giving me new knowledge to guide my footsteps like a newborn child. Her cooperation, valuable time and suggestions have made it possible for me to complete my study. Without her enthusiasm and careful labor, it would not have been possible to submit this thesis on time.

It gives me great pleasure to express my thanks and love to my friend Rabiul Karim, Associate Professor, Department of social work, University of Rajshahi. He was my first inspiration towards furthering my education, and has given me all kinds of support in this study.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to my all teachers. They have made me capable, and given me strength as a new researcher. I also want to give my grateful thanks to thesis stipend selection committee and examination committee as well as the Swedish Centre Party, Umeå and Umeå International School of Public Health who were involved in selecting me for award. This stipend has opened a way to collect data from the field directly and to write my Master Degree thesis from my own country. During my study period, many contributors played momentous roles in bringing my study up at this stage. I am indebted to the office of the Bureau of Statistics, Local Government Engineering Department and to the villagers who have given valuable information, as well as their valuable time and cordial support during my fieldwork in the rural village. My heartfelt thanks especially goes to all the study respondents for their invaluable time, information and co-operation as well. I will ever remember their cordial hospitality.

I also want to give thanks to all my friends in the MPH course who shared their valuable experiences and practical knowledge to enrich and make my study more constructive. Especially some of my friends from my country, like Zia, Masud and Munsur, have given valuable information, as well as mental and practical support from time to time, and encouragement to go forward.

Lastly and finally, I am obliged to admit my gratefulness and repentant heart to my wife, child, parents and others family members who are dependent on me in any way. I am very much liable to them and grateful for their giving of their valuable time and sharing family responsibilities. Really I have no words to express my feelings for their patience in being separated so long from me.
Abstract

Sex may not always be a matter of pleasure, but can instead be a way of humiliation and pain. In fact, the violation of gender and sexual rights is a crucial public health problem in many developing countries. But this may be closely associated with gender norms and the positions of women and men in a particular society. Therefore the study of gendered sexual issues as a public health problem should be perceived within each particular context. This study describes and explores how married men think and perceive family power relations, sexuality and men’s and women’s rights in their daily family life in rural Bangladesh. The general objective of this study is to explore married men’s views and attitudes about family life, power relations and sexuality in rural Bangladesh.

This research follows a qualitative methodological approach. A social constructionist and gender theoretical perspective was adopted. Fieldwork was conducted in a village, located in the northwest part of Bangladesh. Ten married men between 20 and 45 years old were selected purposively for in-depth interviews. They were interviewed individually. Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Qualitative content analysis was adopted to understand the phenomenon in context.

The study revealed that married men’s views and attitudes toward women’s rights and sexuality are heavily influenced by patriarchal perspective. Men think that a wife is the property of her husband and that the wife should obey her husband by performing household duties on time, by serving husbands in doing whatever her husband wants, and by giving sex to her husband whenever he wants. Men also think that a woman should always follow her husband and that women should never argue with their husbands. If women fail to obey their husbands or please them sexually, men are allowed to beat their wives. Men’s extra marital affairs or their visiting sex workers are somehow perceived as socially accepted. However, women’s sexual pleasure, denial of sex offers from their husbands, seeking sex, and extra marital affairs are completely forbidden and treated as bad conduct in women. These are in turn considered sufficient cause for a husband to punish his wife. Men said that a girl should be socialized properly so that she can learn how to obey her husband and please him. According to them, men should also be the guardian of his wife and an ideal man is one who is able to dominate his wife through performing his economic and family provider roles properly, with rigorous physical strength. Information showed that the violation of women’s family and sexual rights might be closely correlated with men’s gendered attitudes and perceptions about women’s and men’s rights in rural Bangladesh. Data also indicated that men’s gender attitudes toward women’s gender rights and sexuality are broadly constructed and shaped in the
context of patriarchal social and religious norms in Bangladeshi society. Thus men’s
gendered views and attitudes are the means by which men’s patriarchal family authority
is justified, where married men receive unpaid family and sexual services from women.
Thus the men’s practice of exercising family power and authority over their wives,
exploiting their labor, body and sexuality are socially normalized in the context of men
and women’s gendered views and attitudes, and are influenced by patriarchal and
religious norms and customs in rural Bangladesh.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1. Background
Reproductive and sexual health is an important public health issue. And gender is a significant determinant of reproductive and sexual health in many societies. Gender inequality is widespread in Bangladeshi [1, 2]. However, gender inequality is socially normalized based on some gendered norms that lead to people’s attitudes and views. By taking into account the traditional gender socio-cultural context, this study explores married men’s perceptions and views related to gender rights and sexuality in rural Bangladesh.

Bangladesh maintains a very low health profile. The maternal mortality rate is estimated to be high, at 3.2 to 4 per 1000 live births. 80% of maternal deaths happen at home. Almost 90% of deliveries take place at home, attended by traditional birth [3-5]. However, Bangladesh has incorporated sexual and reproductive health issues into its health policy. The government has focused its provision of services and information and education programs toward changing people’s behaviors. Many projects have been implemented in schools and communities, in partnership with NGOs, donor agencies, and civil organizations [6-11]. However, most of the projects focus on women’s reproductive health, rarely incorporating men. But men also play important roles in reproductive and sexual health matters. Recently the ministry of Health and Family Welfare has developed a strategy to integrate the general population to improve reproductive and sexual health services and campaigns. However, without having proper knowledge about men’s views and attitudes toward reproductive and sexual health, this initiative may not bring good results [12-14].

Introduction
Sex is not always a matter of pleasure. Many times sex is a way of humiliation and pain [15]. In fact, the violation of sexual rights is a crucial public health problem in patriarchal social structures. However the problem is closely related to the gender norms, perceptions, attitudes, and positions of women and men within a particular society [15]. Therefore the study of sexual rights as a public health problem should be perceived within each given context, taking into account the gender norms associated with the positions of women and men in a society.
Though patriarchy has been a dominant feature in the world, many high-income countries have eventually been transformed into fairly gender equal societies. However there is still a classical form of patriarchy in many low-income countries where women’s life, sex, reproduction, income, education, etc. are strictly controlled by men, especially by husbands [1]. Bangladesh is a good example of a patriarchy. Patriarchal traditions leading to gender inequality is an acute social and public health problem in rural Bangladesh [1, 13, 15].

However, both femininity and masculinity are constructed from cultural and subjective meanings that constantly shift and vary [16, 17]. Gender is basically produced through the socialization process and most of the studies related to gender and sexuality have focused on sex roles based on women’s experiences in western contexts [18-27]. Generally there is a lack of sexuality studies from the man's perspective, and also in the context of low-income patriarchal societies. I believe, though, that men’s understanding about sexuality is very important because men are the main agents in the acts that lead to the violation of sexual rights [28-34]. Therefore we need to know more about men’s attitudes and views on gender and sexuality if we want to make a change towards a less patriarchal society. This study is aimed toward understanding married men’s views and attitudes toward sexuality in relation to the complexity of the social culture in rural Bangladesh.

1.3 Research Problem in Context

Men are the prime actors in both the private and public spheres of rural Bangladesh. Married women hardly have any rights to do anything, or to propose to do anything without the prior consent of the husband or household head. Women are not well prepared to deal with men before their marriage. This is because traditional religious norms strictly discourage social interaction between men and women before marriage. Sex is supposed to enter into their life by marriage. The first sexual encounter is also commonly dependent on the husband. Women’s sexual rights are also primarily violated by men’s improper behaviors. But it is not clear how men’s attitudes and thinking about sexual issues are influential on gender and sexual health status in Bangladesh. Therefore, it is important to scrutinize married men’s attitudes and views on gendered reproductive and sexual health and rights.

1.4. Aim of the Study

To explore married men’s views and attitudes about family life, power relations and sexuality in rural Bangladesh.
1.5. Research Question
What are the perceptions and attitudes of Bangladeshi rural married men towards family life, power relations and sexuality?

1.6. Implications of the study
Even though men are traditionally the main role players in reproductive and sexual health, we hardly know about their views on these issues. A few studies have been conducted focusing on women in relation to gender norms but no studies have been conducted on married men’s views on gender rights and sexuality in rural Bangladesh [15, 31, 35, 36]. Especially, religious beliefs and social norms influence men’s views have rarely been taken into account in previous studies. Therefore the findings of this study may contribute to the knowledge and consciousness among various concerned groups of people and different government and non-government agencies that are interested in gender and sexual issues.
2.1 Introduction
This chapter introduces the basic concepts used in this study as follows:

2.2 Gender
Gender refers to the cultural and social aspects of femininity or masculinity. According to Öhman, gender denotes the socially and culturally constructed conditions and processes for women and men, and girls and boys [37]. She also stresses that gender deals with people’s life experiences at the micro level and with structural and political conditions at the macro level [37]. Therefore we can say gender is a social idea of grouping people based on sex related to cultural and social phenomenon. Gender makes differences between men and women based on the social and cultural norms in a society. Social structure defines the norms that are the most appropriate for men and women. Gender is also regarded as a very systematic and socially constructed code of life ethics [38-40]. Therefore, in this study gender is defined as socially constructed roles, rights, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society specifically considers appropriate for men and women [37-40].

2.3 Gender and Sexual Rights

Gender rights
Rights reflect an equal and a fair treatment in terms of familial, social and political involvements. Rights often refers to freedom and in this study gender rights refer to equal entitlement to the enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other fields [14, 40, 41].

Sexual rights
Sexual rights often include the right of all persons, to be free from sexual coercion, discrimination and violence [41]. In this study sexual rights are defined as follows:

- the highest attainable standard of health in relation to sexuality, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services;
- to be able to seek, receive and impart information in relation to sexuality;
• sexuality education;
• respect for bodily integrity;
• choice of partner;
• the freedom to decide to be sexually active or not;
• consensual sexual relations;
• consensual marriage;
• to decide whether or not, and when to have children; and
• to pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

2.4 Violence and Violation of Sexual Rights
Violence is the use of any kind of force, maltreatment, discrimination or deviance, or denial of anyone’s personal rights or the denial of protection from any of these things. Violence can be also verbal, physical or sexual force against anyone. In this study violation of sexual rights is defined as a form of violence, which is any incident of threatening behavior, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual) between adults who are in a marital relationship [41].

2.5 Patriarchy
Patriarchy can be defined as the rule of men [29, 42, 43]. Men are treated as household heads, as they are supposed to be the main household providers. Men are also assumed to manage all important family affairs and rule over other members, e.g. women and children. In a patriarchal system women and children must follow the male head of the family and are usually controlled by him [42, 44, 45]. Patriarchy can be seen as the force that maintains sexism as a set of social relations between men and women, and which has material and normative aspects [42, 44, 45]

2.6 Men’s Views on Sexuality
Attitudes are defined as one’s positive or negative state regarding any social issues [23, 43, 46]. In this research men’s attitude and perceptions about sexual rights are considered to be men’s beliefs about sex, men’s opinions about marriage, partner selection, sex time and frequency, sex position and women’s expressions of sexual desire. Use of contraceptives within sexual relation and extra marital and premarital affairs are also considered.
2.7 Theoretical Perspective: Theories of Gender

A conceptual framework will be developed from a social constructionist and gender perspective about married men’s views and attitudes related to people’s gendered positions and rights, family relation, marital power, and sexuality in rural Bangladesh [47-52]. Theories related to gender and masculinity will also be used in relation to the aim of my study [38, 39].

A Social Constructivist and Gender Perspective

Gender is the issue of culture and it is socially constructed [39]. From the viewpoint of social constructionist theory, gender is viewed in the way women and men think and act [47]. This is not because of their physical traits but because of their understandings about femininity and masculinity that they adopt. From this perspective, gender does not reside in the person; rather, it resides in social transactions defined as gendered. Furthermore, gender does not represent two rigid or static categories (e.g., man or woman) but, rather, a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people's actions [47, 48].

According to constructionist theorists, people are not simply "conditioned" by their culture. Men and women are active agents in constructing and reconstructing norms related to femininity and masculinity. This concept is central to constructionism. From a social constructionist perspective, girls and boys are not simply blank slates that are written on; rather, they are active participants along with the world around them in the construction and reconstruction of gender [47, 48]. Thus gender is something that people construct and reconstruct. This dynamic process occurs in ongoing interaction with social and institutional structures. Institutional structures provide both limits and opportunities to learn and display gender and can either foster or undermine people’s attempts to adopt healthy habits [47, 48]. Thus men enacts gender as socially prescribed construct and create a variety of masculinities such as ethnic, gay, professional, and rural masculinities [47, 48].

Theory of Masculinity

Masculinity is defined as activities, attitudes and behaviors of men. This is a psychosocial identity of male sex. Masculinity is one of the gender constructs where men socially belong [38, 53, 54]. Connell emphasizes the way of treating gender as a system of symbolic relationships, not a fixed fact about a person; where she mentions masculinity is
the centre of the idea related to male position [38, 53, 54]. She introduced a concept ‘hegemonic masculinity’ – which is culturally linked to both authority and rationality – the key themes in the legitimization of the patriarchal social order [54].

The idea that masculinity, the internalized gender positions of men, may also allow for social change. This is because that the gender norms are social facts, and they can also be changed by social process [38, 48]. Connell (pp. 73-75) presents masculinities in relation to gender relations of a society and shows a model of dimensions or structure of gender relation as Power, Division of labour, and Cathexis [38]. Her model is based on western cultures; but I believe it can also be used in my study, as a provisional model as follows:

(a) **Power**: the main axis of power in the gender order is the overall subordination of women and dominance of men – the structure of women’s subordination – is called ‘patriarchy’. This is why, men exercise authority; there is also a male-monopoly of top social positions, and men also control public relations. In other words, men control all social institutions to be men. However, Connell also mentions that there are many reversal practices against the general patriarchal structure e.g., women-headed households and female teachers with male students [38].

(b) **Production Relation or Gender Division of Labour**: According to Connell, capitalist economy is working through gender division of labour leading to a general pattern of gender unequal accumulation of recourses; and therefore ‘masculinity’ is a social construction that men control the corporates and have the great private fortunes [38]. Gender is familiar/visible in the form of the allocation of tasks. This leads to the gender unequal shares in the social positions and division of labor. This also leads to unequal wage rates. In many societies, men earn double than women. Modern technologies are also mostly handled or control by men. Men are also benefited as husband from their wife’s unpaid labor or domestic work.

(c) **Cathexis**: It is sexual desire and emotion. Connell explains cathexis as “sexual desire”, which is so often seen as natural, though its gendered character is clear. This is true both for heterosexual and homosexual desire. The love-relation that shapes people’s sexual desires is thus another aspect of gendered social order [38, 39]. The consequence of cathexis is that only men take benefits, as dominant gender. Connell explains that men receive much emotional support from women without social obligations to reciprocate. Heterosexuality is organized to prioritize men’s pleasure in personal
relationship as well as in mass media. According to Connell, this double standard might indeed legitimate men’s sexual freedom and commercial sex industry services [38].

2.8 Conceptual Framework

By taking into account a social constructivist perspective, this research conceptualizes that married men’s views and attitudes towards family life, power relations, sexuality and rights may be constituted on an axis of the gendered norm system in rural Bangladesh. A social constructionist perspective related to gender and masculinity was adopted because it links the ideas of masculinity and femininity as to the research questions of my study – to explore married men’s views and attitudes about family life, power relations and sexuality in rural Bangladesh. A social constructionist perspective was also suitable because married men’s specific masculine identities such as their gendered positions within the family (family provider status), access to education, income and occupational status as well as their wife’s socioeconomic status may also re-shape (reconstruct) their gendered views and attitudes toward family, power and sexuality in rural Bangladesh.

![Conceptual Framework Diagram](image-url)

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework for the study
Chapter 3
Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction
By taking into account a social constructivist perspective, this research has followed a qualitative approach as it explores people’s attitudes, perceptions, and behavior in context (in the context of rural Bangladesh society) [50, 51]. A qualitative approach was also considered appropriate since there is hardly any study on men’s views and attitudes toward gender and sexuality in rural Bangladesh. This study adopted an ethnographic methodological approach as it explores married men’s subjective views and attitudes on gendered familial roles and sexual rights in a specific social context. Ethnographical approaches are often used to explore people’s norms and practices in specific social contexts [50-52]. Since a description of the specific patriarchal social context in rural Bangladesh is an important part of this study, I followed ethnographic qualitative and social constructivist approaches to contextualize the findings. This is because ethnographers view questions/answers as integrated elements in human thinking [50-52].

3.2 Study Location
Fieldwork was conducted in a village in northwest Bangladesh. The village was about 40 km from Naogaon district headquarters and 59 km away from Rajshahi divisional headquarters. The communication between the city center and the village was weak, as there was no black paved road, but only muddy country roads that cross through rivers and water basins. The reason behind the selection of the village was that I had easy access to the place, and the place was quite familiar to me. Since this research included sensitive issues, I preferred to find an appropriate village where the study environment would be safe for me as well as easy to build up rapport with the participants.

3.3 Features of the Study Village
I selected the particular village because it was a typical backward remote village in northwest Bangladesh. The village had no educational institution. Most of the people were very poor. They lacked current information on national and international affairs. By occupation they were mostly farmers, while others were agricultural day laborers. All were Muslims. They believe in and follow Islamic religious norms strictly. A few organizations (GOs and NGOs), such as the Family Planning Association in Bangladesh (FPAB) and the Bangladesh Rural Advance Committee (BRAC) were working there and
incorporating women into income-generating projects, while Islamic norms do not support women to be household providers. A few organizations (GOs and NGOs) were also promoting family planning, community health education, and awareness building on reproductive health issues among women. Therefore I believed that the study village would be appropriate for my study on men’s views on gender and sexuality. I also believed that the village is a typical ‘remote village’ in the northwest part of Bangladesh.

3.4 Respondents
Ten married men aged between 20 and 45 years were interviewed. They were selected purposively. Purposive sampling was followed because it allowed the researcher to identify appropriate respondents who could also give information and an explanation of their attitudes from the view point of Islamic doctrine [50, 51, 55]. I approached twelve married men but two of them declined to be interviewed. One man declined because he was afraid of the content of the interviews and another man was not able to find a suitable time for him to be interviewed. However all interviewed men were approached by introducing the research issues in an informal manner as well as by building up initial rapport. After describing the purpose of the interviews I sought oral informed consent from them. Only one inclusion criteria was taken into account; i.e. that all respondents had to be married in order to serve the purpose of my study [51]. After interviewing 10 respondents, I judged that the views and attitudes related to married men’s views and attitudes had been captured.

3.5 Data Collection
The interviews were based on a pre-designed interview guide; however, relevant questions outside of the interview guide were also asked. The interview included 25 open-ended questions that focus on men’s attitudes, preconceptions and behaviors on gender roles, rights and sexual behaviors such as sexual affairs in marriage, their perceptions about foreplay and sexual pleasure, premarital sex, extra marital sex, individual sexual rights, and marital rape (see Annex-1). Individually, face-to-face interviews were conducted [51]. All interviews were taped recorded and took place in a friendly environment. Respondents never treated me as an outsider. They trusted me as their friend. Respondents chose the time and place to be interviewed [51]. Most of the respondents were relaxed and easy to talk to. They were also free to ask questions to the researcher.
3.6 Data Analysis

At the first, all the audio taped interviews were transcribed into Bengali text and then translated into English. Qualitative content analysis technique was used to analyze the data as a description of the context [56]. Codes, categories and condensed meaning units were identified from out of the interview text. I did not use any special computerized software or program to analyze the data. I created simple tables to sort and separate codes, categories and meaning units. At first meaning units were identified and separated from the text of the interviews. Then their codes and meaning words were identified. Condensed meaning words were identified from the meaning units then meaning words were separated under subcategories. Appropriate meaning words were separated under appropriate subcategories for analysis and discussion [56]. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis and theme generation procedures, all meaning units, and codes leading to categories generated from the interviews were discussed with other colleagues in Bangladesh [56].

3.7 Ethical Issues

Ethical permission to conduct the fieldwork was granted from the Bangladesh Medical Research Council (BMRC), Dhaka, on August 01, 2008. Ref No: BMRC/ERC/2007-2010/874; Date: 01.09.2008 (see annex-2). I myself conducted most of the interviews. However a male colleague of mine from the Public Health Discipline in the Karolinska Institute also helped me interview two married men in the village. This also allowed the researcher to triangulate the data collection procedures ethically. Moreover both my colleague and I were married so it was quite easy for us to establish rapport with the married male respondents. Since the research interviews contained sensitive issues I clearly described everything about my study and study procedures to the participants and received their informed consent. I also told them that the interviews could be terminated at any time they chose, or if they felt uncomfortable. Confidentiality of the data and the anonymity of the respondents were ensured. Their identities were not disclosed in the report [20].

3.8 Locating my own stand in Ethics

As an interviewer I have considered and emphasized the respondent’s convenience as to time and place for taking their interviews, so that study participants felt safe and secure in discussing very sensitive issues. I built good and easy relations with them so that they did
not hesitate to answer the sensitive sexual issues in their rural perspective. Sometimes I felt a dilemma about how to pose these sexually sensitive questions to the old and senior men, due to the fact that Bangladeshi rural norms normally do not allow for asking about sexually sensitive matters. But my rapport buildup and relationships strongly helped me acquire real and true information. They have trusted me to never disclose individual information that they have given. After finishing, all respondents were paid a small amount of money, as per local labor market price, for using their time. As a researcher I have tried to stay neutral in order to gather information and analyze data on the sensitive sexual issues in the rural Bangladeshi perspective, even though I was born and brought up within the very same patriarchal social norms. Otherwise there could have arisen some difficulties in getting information on married men’s views and attitudes about family life, power relations and sexuality issues that could create a gap in the analysis data, and this could have an influence on the result.
Chapter 4
Study Findings

4.1 Introduction
This chapter presents the main findings on married men’s views and attitudes towards family life, power relations, sexuality and rights. The content analysis produced six themes. They are described as six sub-sections as follows: (1) cultural norms or social customs of women’s subordination; (2) gendered expectations from family institutions; (3) gendered religious beliefs and practices; (4) gendered family power and normative male violence; (5) sex: men for pleasure, women for giving birth; and (6) challenges of masculinity: emotion, shame and stigma. The themes and categories are described in detail as follows.

4.2.1 Cultural Norms or Social Customs of Women’s Subordination
“The cultural norms or social customs of women’s subordination” was reflected in the following two categories, which were revealed from the interviews with married men, and are listed below:

4.2.1.1. Women should be under the control of men
From the interviews with married men, it was revealed that rural Bangladeshis like to see their woman under the control of their husbands. Traditional gender norms suggest men should dominate women. They think women should not go out from their home. If women are going outside the home for any reason, they should be then restricted and controlled by their husbands. One respondent (Interview-1; 26 years old) said:

“My wife is not allowed to go outside because it is not fair that she will meet other men and talk outside. She may become wicked if I indulge her too much. If she goes out frequently then people will criticize me and she will lose her character.”

The respondents emphasized that all responsibilities of the family should be borne by men as the household head. All family members should depend on the household male head. The man is obliged to and liable for hard work because men are strong. People think that a man must be strong. He must have the ability to earn an income; and the male head must control the household, and then the family will be ensured of culturally
ascribed reputation or prestige. The male household head should make the decisions in every aspect of the family.

Another respondent (Interview-2; 45 years old) argued as follows:

“I don’t allow her to go do outside work: it’s forbidden for women. A wife is the kind of thing or good that should be kept behind a curtain at home or inside the home. By the grace of the Almighty it is my responsibility to keep her secure and I also try to do that. . It is ‘haram’ (forbidden by Muslim religious law) for her to go outside and meet or talk with another male.”

All these interviews indicated the cultural aspects of men’s domination over women. Rural Bangladesh still believes that women should be under the control of their husbands.

4.2.1.2 Ideal husband and ideal housewife

Rural Bangladeshi culture also prescribes the ideal characteristics of husband and wife, which revealed themselves from the interviews with my respondents. The notion of an ideal husband and an ideal wife also suggests that women be subordinated by men within family affairs. An ideal husband should have all the ability to manage everything. An ideal husband can never be a bad one. He loves his wife and family. He helps his wife in intra household work and child care. He has money, a good house and good control over their work. He is never idle and careless. An ideal husband is one who is also able to rule well over all family members. An ideal husband is one who can easily ensure that his wife will follow his orders and be obedient to him.

On the other hand, an ideal woman is one who always obeys, honors, and nurses well her husband. Society likes to see the women’s main responsibility being to please their husbands through sex and reproduction. According to social expectations, a wife should be very ideal, must be a virgin, pure, polite, decent, honest, and well behaved. A wife should not argue with her husband and/or elderly people. The wife’s arguing is seen as a bad behavioral attitude for women. Moreover, an ideal woman has to learn about family management. She should always be careful about family activities like cooking or preparing and serving food and drinking water, making the beds, take caring of children, their husbands and other family members, and taking caring of cattle and poultry. The informants thought that a wife should not neglect or disobey her husband. Women are bound to fulfill their husband’s desire whenever he wants. An ideal wife must also keep
silent. Their voices should be very low, they should never speak up and they should never be heard outside the house. The wife should not have any vanity and they should be shy. One respondent (Interview-5; 36 years old) said:

“The shyness of a woman is her ornament. Women must have shyness and politeness.”

4.2.2 Gendered Expectations from Family Institutions

The following categories contributed to developing the theme as described below:

4.2.2.1 Male headship-supporting family

Even though a joint family system has a long tradition in rural Bangladesh, nowadays most of them have been transformed into nuclear families. However, married men in the study area expressed their views that a joint family system is the perfect one to keep a family running well. They said that the family is a place of peace and happiness. So every family member should be together. A 42-year-old respondent (Interview-7; 42 years old) said:

“My elder son used to help me before. Now he does not because he is separated from me after his marriage. My younger son doesn’t do any work. He only eats. If we were all together then it would be good. All fathers want to live together but the children don’t.”

So, another aspect of the joint family is that other family members respect their patriarchal family head. Younger members and women are not allowed to argue with parents or household heads. The household head regulates the family. The interviews indicated that older married men are worried about the emergence of the nuclear family and the loosening of their family authority and benefits. Therefore from the viewpoint of married men, a joint family system is the ideal form of family, where men have both power and economic benefits.

4.2.2.2 Family formation and marriage

The interviewed men believed that the family should be formed by arranged marriage and that the guardians – male heads – should decide everything, from spouse selection to dowry receiving. Also, the household head should arrange the marriages of their dependent unmarried adult members. The adult members of the family should not have
any right to choose their life partner. One married man (Interview-8; 38 years old) told how he loved a neighbor’s daughter but he was not able to marry her due to his father and grandfather, as they did not like the girl. However, later on he was obliged to marry another girl as per his father’s choice. He said:

“I wanted to marry her but my father did not allow it.... They asked me to marry another girl. I asked my mother, but she failed to convince my dad. At last I gave up and gave my consent to marry the girl they had selected for me, and they received the dowry.”

4.2.2.3 Expected sons, neglected daughters
A son is considered very important to the family. Parents of daughters keep trying until they get a son. Having a son is also related to marriage and dowry. Everybody expects to have a son because they can receive a dowry accompanying their marriage, with properties such as cash money, bikes, furniture, land, and good food. Moreover men think that a son is the light, the property, of the family as they remain at home after marriage. On the other hand, they think of daughters as ‘parasites’, as they will move out to others' homes. That’s why they think sons are so important, not only for keeping the family sign (that is, tradition, and the family name) and for earning, but also for securing his parents in their old age. A 32-year old respondent described: “if there is no son who will take care of me when I am very old”?

4.2.2.4 Family functioning - gendered work
The men’s interviews revealed that gender based work in rural Bangladesh is divided into two broad categories: housework and paid labor (often outside of the home). Men feel that men should work outside the home and go for heavy and strong work. They think women have no ability to participate in agricultural work in the field or outside of the home, but they think wives are good for nursing and caring, preparing and serving food, making beds, taking care of children and cattle or poultry, and homestead agricultural work that requires less energy. They believed housework is an obligatory work for wives or women. Wives must be independent in a family managerial job. A 38-year old respondent (Interview-8; 38 years) replied to a question on domestic work as follows:

“It is a rule that women should do all the housework. They need to maintain their family well. A wife should cook, look after domestic animals and serve her husband by
staying at home. She shouldn’t go outside of the home and in front of other men apart from her husband.”

Another 42-year old man said:

“Cooking is a woman’s duty. A man should never cook when his wife is at home. A man works in the field and earns money for the family – so the wife should cook for him.”

The men also said that women’s housework is very light work “they work easily at home and so it is unpaid” (Interview-8; 38 years old). They also believed that women are a part of the family where they should belong so they cannot refuse to do housework, as a housewife.

4.2.3 Gendered Religious Beliefs and Practices
The following categories contributed to the development of this theme as described below:

4.2.3.1 Men allowed, women restricted
The interviews revealed Muslim people’s thinking and perceptions about religious beliefs and practices. They expressed differences between men and women. They said that men must go to the mosque and pray, while women are restricted from going to the Mosque. A woman can never be an Imam (priest). According to Islamic rules, women cannot be the household head and/or community leaders. They said these are Islamic rules and they also expressed fear of divine punishment, if they fail to follow these Islamic rules. They think that women should pray for their husbands, but should pray silently and at home. A middle-aged man (Interview-3; 39 years old) replied concerning his understandings about religiosity:

“I am very happy with everything; Allah has done well for me. I have got many good things in my life. I am happy with my family as I follow Allah’s rules and control my wife.”
4.2.3.2 Religiosity and controlling one's wife

Men believed that it is their religious obligation to control their wife: “*Allah said man must have control over his wife and children*” (Interview-7; 42 years old). Men even believed that they could beat and force their wife to keep them on a religious track. They even understand that for a wife to discuss sex is a sin. They believe that honesty is all about who is following Allah or not, and they said that an honest man is always happy. Men think that a wife should be religious and must follow religious rules and regulations. A good wife always obeys her husband. A 37-year old married man (Interview-4) said:

“A wife or woman should be religious, polite and decent. She must follow religious activities and follow her husband. A wife is very good if she obeys and honors her husband.”

Another man (Interview-3; 39 years old) made a complete statement:

“*Women should not go outside. Talking, meeting with, or intimacy with an outside male person is illegal and un-Islamic. These are illegal for women religiously. Women would not be free, and they should not have any autonomy or power, in order to keep them pure – women must be a virgin and pure until marriage. Any kind of sexual relation in women is sin and ‘Haram’ (forbidden activities by religious law), except with her husband. Women must be shy and follow their ‘Purdha’. Women must care about religious traditions and culture and therefore they should satisfy their husbands by obeying them.*”

4.2.4 Gendered Family Power and Normative Male Violence

These categories contributed to the development of this theme as described below:

4.2.4.1 Authority and breadwinner position

My respondents said that men should have the family power because they are household providers. Men said that they should be the household heads. Rural men also think that as an income earner they should make the decisions. So according to them, a husband should be ‘all in all’ as well as the main decision maker in the family. Men also think that women should not give advice to their husbands. They said men should not take any advice from the wife because it may cause danger. They also think that women cannot possess more knowledge than that of men. So they therefore justified, in that men should
make the decisions and that women should follow their husbands. Most of the men also practiced this. A respondent (Interview-7; 42 years old) said:

“Everything goes according to my wishes. She doesn’t have any say. I do everything according to my wish. Why should she give me advice... she has no right to give any advice.”

4.2.4.2 Real man: strength, property and power
The men believed that a wealthy man is a real man. Men must have energy and strength and money or wealth or property to be a man. A respondent (Interview-6; 22 years old) said:

“A good husband, as a man, has to work properly; must have wealth, a good house, household furniture; and have financial solvency. But we have none of these things.”

They see wealth and money a man's power. Another respondent (Interview-5; 36 years old) owned land and he felt powerful in himself:

“Land and money, I’ve got all by the grace of the Almighty. Land property and money, but I occasionally have to buy rice. This is my power. If I have no money I have no power. Money makes a man powerful. Land and money are a man's needs.”

Another man mentioned physical strength: “if a man is not physically strong, he is not a man” (Interview-7; 42 years old). One can therefore conclude that money, power and physical strength can be seen as symbols of masculinity in rural Bangladesh.

4.2.4.3 The Male's normative right to beat his wife
Interviews also revealed that married men in rural Bangladesh believe that, as household providers, they can dominate and rule over other family members – and if other family members do not follow his command, a man should use some level of force to control them. They also thought that wife beating is a normal behavior and something that is important for the family’s wellbeing. They argued, if men do not rule and do not beat their wife, women might find a chance to disobey their husband. The interviews also revealed that men show their power by beating and dominating the wife and children: to
beat his wife is the right of a married man. A 22-year-old man (Interview-3) had this to say about wife beating:

“Who will tell me 'no'? I am all in all, she is my wife I can beat her anytime for her neglect of housework or when she disobeys me. I can rule, dominate and teach her by beating. It is my right, and I have to keep her tighter. My wife cannot complain anywhere to anybody because nobody bears her food and clothes. My wife is mine, I can do anything, and nobody can say anything against me; ... and this is my personal matter.”

Many men mentioned that women should not have any freedom to move freely or to work outside of the home. They think that they should keep control of the wife so that women have no chance to disobey their husbands. They also said a good housewife never argues with her husband even if he is drunk, goes to other women or participates in gambling. If the wife tries to argue with her husband, a husband can beat his wife. One man said (Interview-1; 26 years old):

“Why does she argue with me? If she disobeys me then I beat her. Those wives are bad who argue and debate with their husbands. It creates quarreling... so beat her.”

4.2.5 Sex: Men for Pleasure, Women for Giving Birth

The following categories contributed to the development of this theme as described below:

4.2.5.1 Men active, women passive

The men saw sexual intercourse as very important and fascinating. Sexual intercourse is as pleasurable or enjoyable, and more valuable than any visible wealth for human conjugal life. They see sexual intercourse not as a visible thing, but as a matter of feelings. Some of them believe that sexual intercourse must be done in religious ways because it is a wish of Allah, and a “faroj kaj” (obligatory act). Men think that men should take an active role, and that the women’s responsibility is to follow their husbands. Furthermore, they claimed that men do not need any consent from the wife for sexual intercourse and that they can force the wife to fulfill their sexual desire. They believe women should participate in sex in whatever way the husband wants. They think men
have every right to achieve sexual enjoyment from their wife. One man (Interview-9; 32 years old) said:

“She is my wife, not another woman. I can want her any time, whenever and however I like to have sex; and she should agree, such as lying down, sitting, or standing. She should have no say regarding sex. She admits it also, never refuses; she cannot refuse me because she knows she has a fear that I may go to another girl for sex, or even marry again.”

A husband feels dishonored as a man if his wife disagrees or refuses to have sex with him in the ways he prefers.

4.2.5.2 Premarital and extra marital sex

The interviewed men disclosed that most of them had had premarital heterosexual experiences. They think that premarital sex is very fascinating, pleasurable and memorable. However, when remembering this, at their present old age they all felt bad and realized that they did wrong, as premarital sex is religiously forbidden. However even though to a certain extent premarital sex is accepted, they never accept extra-marital sex. They think extra marital sex is very wicked and crude. However, even if premarital sex is somehow allowed, men said that women must remain virgins until marriage. In addition, they believe that women should not watch erotic movies. Men address women’s pre-marital sex as being similar to prostitution and that it should be regarded as a sin. If the wife has had premarital sex, that is unforgivable. Men also said that women who have had pre-marital sex should not marry; and that even if the fact is disclosed after her marriage, the man can divorce her immediately.

On the other hand, no man was willing to hear of his wife’s extramarital sex, even though they recognized that some married men in the village visit sex workers. They treated the wife’s extramarital affair as Jena (a forbidden act). They also argued that a wife should be killed by stoning if she had extramarital sex. They saw cheating on one’s husband as unjust, as the husband’s position to his wife is next to God's. A 40-year old man (Interview-10) said:

“No, it is never possible in my presence that my wife will have sex with another man; I won’t allow it as a husband. A man shows manliness through anger. I’m physically
fit and I bear her all expenses. It is impossible that my wife will have sex with other men. It is forbidden in Islam... I must beat and divorce her; I may even kill...”

4.2.5.3 Sexual pleasure and satisfaction
The informants never saw the woman's sexual pleasure and satisfaction as being important at all. They think that if a man has failed to satisfy his wife, the wife should be patient and wait for a better mood from her husband. In fact the wife’s sexual satisfaction or dissatisfaction was very unclear to them. It seems that they hardly care about this. They just think that sex is a pleasure for men while being a duty for women – to please the husband and produce children. Men felt that the wife should be silent during sexual intercourse and that women should act like a silent toy. A 45-year-old married man (Interview-2) said the following about his wife’s sexual pleasure:

“She has to agree always, but does not make it vocal. If I want sex, she should keep silent and I should do what I want. I like it because a wife must keep silent when her husband has sex with her.”

4.2.6 Challenge of Masculinity: Emotion, Shame and Stigma
The following categories contributed to the development of this theme as described below:

4.2.6.1 Love: to be honored, to be masculine
Respondents said that married men should show some love, sympathy, and affection to their parents, wife, children and other dependent family members. On the other hand, they thought that if women loved their husbands, they could never disobey them. Men sometimes feel bad after they have beaten their wife. A respondent (Interview-2) said as follows:

“It gives me a bad feeling when I need to beat my wife. After that I often realize that I made a mistake. So I try to tell her I’m sorry in many different ways.”

However, men expect love from their wife as a way to be honored and to demonstrate his capability of being a man – his ability to be masculine. Another man, a 36-year-old man (Interview-5) mentioned:
“I must say to all women... obey your husband, love him and serve the family properly... my wife must love me as her husband and I have a right to expect it from my wife. She should laugh if I laugh and she should get upset and cry if I am in pain.”

4.2.6.2 Men’s Shame: A Dominating Wife
These married men who were interviewed in rural Bangladesh believe that women should not rule over men. They think the man is not a man if his wife dominates him. They also believe that it is a shame for a man if he follows his wife’s suggestion. An earlier mentioned respondent (Interview-2) said:

“No, it is never possible.... it is sin and not a very prestigious matter for a husband. The wife cannot dominate or beat her husband... the husband is senior to and older than his wife.”

4.2.6.2 Men’s Stigma: A Cheating Wife
Men believe that it is a big stigma for a man if his wife falls in love with another man; and society will see the man as being incapable if his wife is looking for another man. Any relationship on the part of wives outside of marriage is considered very shameful for the husband. They also think that ‘bad character’ is a stigma for women. Nobody wants to marry a woman of bad repute. This is a big stigma for their family, too. One 36-year-old man (Interview-5) said:

“My wife has never disheartened me. But if a wife is cheating on her husband, the man should either commit suicide or kill his wife.... He is not a man if he fails to keep his wife”
5.1 Discussion

The study reveals that married men in rural Bangladesh perceive gender rights and sexuality in a typical way. Most of the married men were very rigid and conformed to the patriarchal social and religious norms in rural Bangladesh [1, 2, 15]. The findings clearly show that social patriarchal and religious norms influence men’s attitudes and behaviors. This is because they cannot simply neglect and deny the typical patriarchal norms, due to the fear they have of social and religious norms. The six themes revealed in this study clearly demonstrate married men’s views and attitudes towards family life, power relations, gender and sexuality in rural Bangladesh. Married men want to be guardians over their wives (cultural norms or social customs of wife subordination). Their understanding of family institutions is also supported by a patriarchal view (gendered expectations from family institutions). The way they perceived religiosity is also patriarchal (gendered religious beliefs and practices) and they support male headship and men’s normative right to abuse their wife (gendered family power and normative male violence). They think their wives’ only sexual task is to please their husbands (sex: men for pleasure, women for giving birth); and they think that men should be ashamed if he lacks sufficient masculine power to control his wife (challenge of masculinity: emotion, shame and stigma).

The themes and categories reflected in the interviews clearly show that men’s gendered attitudes and perceptions are basically constructed through social processes [47]. Muslim religious norms are very influential on Bangladeshi married men’s attitudes and thinking about women’s gender rights and sexuality. All of the men said that husbands should dominate their wives, since men are thought to be superior to women. The interviews clearly indicate that this is the men’s gendered thinking, which is itself constructed through a socialization process where fathers have showed their sons how to act (as a male and a father), and mothers have taught their daughters how to act (as a woman and a mother) [38, 39, 47].

The patriarchal socialization process is the basis of such men’s attitudes and perceptions [47], where men perceive that the main destiny of a woman is to get a husband. This is connected to the idea that the position of husband to wife should be next to that of God himself. Men think that women must be dominated by men, and therefore that women should obey their husbands. Arguing with one's husband is considered a
serious offence. Schuler, et al, also demonstrated the same gendered reality, and how that cultural ideology restricts women from arguing with their husbands even in an abusive relationship, because they rarely have access to economic and social resources and have virtually no valuable life options outside of marriage [14].

As to traditional gender norms in rural Bangladesh, gender division of labor is reflected in men and women’s work, as women do all the unpaid household work while men do the paid work outside the home. This leads to a social justification of men’s control over women. This finding supports the concept of patriarchy that has been elaborated by other scholars such as Kabeer [57], Kramarae [42], and Yllo [58]. Women’s bodies are considered soft and weak; therefore men think that women are born only for nursing and serving men. On the other hand, men are considered to be outdoormen, free-movers, energetic, strong, and secured. Therefore men are supposed to be responsible for their family's wellbeing and maintenance. Therefore the men’s control over women and children is socially justified by the virtue of their role as family provider. Patriarchal norms give authority to men and therefore husbands are expected to receive free and unpaid services from their wives [2, 59].

A crucial violation of sexual rights such as domestic violence and intimate partner violence is also related to family gendered power relations, and is influenced by men’s gendered attitudes [15, 60]. The men feel that if women violet traditional gender norms, if they fail to fulfill their gendered household duties, or fail to obey their husbands, they should be punished. They also think that men have the right to beat their wife. But women’s aggressive behavior is considered a sin. Thus women’s rights are violated and neglected by men’s masculine and patriarchal attitudes and perceptions toward women’s rights and sexuality. The men consider sex to be pleasurable but they hardly care about women’s sexuality. These findings also conform to the findings of Karim in the context of Bangladesh [15, 61]. However, the present study has clearly established that men’s gendered thinking and perceptions are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural structural mechanism of their society.

The study reveals that in rural Bangladesh the endorsement of aggressive male behavior is also closely related to traditional gender norms and to men’s shame and stigma related to their manliness (masculine identity) [47, 48]. Men think that wife beating is a normal behavior. There is also a belief that a good woman’s husband never engages in extra marital affairs. Therefore it is the women’s responsibility to please their husbands. If a man seeks extra marital affairs, society thinks that his wife has not been able to satisfy her husband’s demand. So, finally, it is the wife who is blamed if a man
engages in extra-marital affairs. These findings confirm the notion of masculinity that states that social norms support men’s activities as normal where men are always out-goers or free-movers [47]. Men may have bad habits, bad tempers, and masculine attitudes but their wives’ must not follow such bad habits or impoliteness. Women are not supposed to have any say when it comes to sexual desires. Married men think that a woman's task is to serve her husband when he needs sex. If women denies her husband sex, it is considered bad conduct. Islamic religious norms also suggest that a wife’s main responsibility is to please her husband sexually, whenever he wants. According to the men interviewed, an ideal woman obeys her husband, tries to understand his demands, and has sex with her husband whenever he wants. Men also believe that if a man feels a strong desire for sex, he can force his wife to comply. Thus men’s gendered attitudes and perceptions are related to the violation of women’s sexual rights [48]. When a wife is not following her husband or when a wife is maintaining an extra-marital relationship, these kinds of acts are considered real challenges to the man's masculinity. Men are supposed to be ashamed when a wife dominates her husband. Men are assumed to be stigmatized when the wife looks for an extramarital affair. These findings also indicate that men’s emotions, shame and stigma are constructed in the context of social and cultural mechanisms [47]. Therefore masculinity is part of the cultural construction of gender. Here, men perceive and feel that they have ownership over women. Masculinity includes gendered ideologies, attitudes, attributes, norms, values and behaviors related to men [38, 39, 54].

5.2 Conclusion
From the findings of the study it appears that rural Bangladeshi married men’s views and attitudes toward women’s gender rights and sexuality are indeed patriarchal. Men think that a wife is the property of her husband and that a wife should obey her husband through performing gendered household duties on time, serving her husband by doing whatever he asks, and giving him sex whenever he wants. Men also think that a woman should always follow her husband and should never argue with her husband. If women fail to obey their husbands or please them sexually, men are allowed to beat their wives. It is somehow viewed as socially acceptable for men to have an extramarital affair or to visit sex workers; but women’s sexual pleasure, denial of sex-offers from their husbands, and seeking sex or extra marital affairs are seen as unforgivable conduct, and punishable by their husbands. Men say that a girl should be socialized properly so that she can learn how to obey her husband and please him. According to them, a man should also be the
guardian of his wife and an ideal man is one who is able to dominate his wife through performing his economic and family provider roles properly with rigorous physical strength. Data shows that the violation of women’s general rights and sexual rights might be closely correlated with men’s gendered attitudes and perceptions about women’s and men’s gender rights in rural Bangladesh. Data has also indicated that men’s gendered attitudes towards women’s rights and sexuality are broadly constructed and shaped in the context of patriarchal social and religious norms in rural Bangladeshi society. Thus men’s gendered views and attitudes are ways of justifying men’s patriarchal family authority, where married men are accustomed to receiving unpaid family and sexual services from women. Thus the men’s practice of exercising family power and authority over their wives, exploiting their labor, body and sexuality are socially normalized in the context of men and women’s gendered views and attitudes, and are influenced by patriarchal, religious norms and customs, in rural Bangladesh.

5.3 Recommendations

Men’s gendered attitudes and perceptions, which are greatly influenced by traditional gendered norms, are found to be a big obstacle to achieving women’s general as well as sexual and reproductive rights in rural Bangladesh. Thus men’s gender attitudes must be addressed by public health interventions. Further studies can also be conducted to understand how men perceive women’s economic involvement and changes in the roles of women in family and society. Although gender social and religious norms are discussed, the root of such men’s gendered ideology is hardly covered in this study, therefore further studies should be conducted to understand the specific cultural roots of men’s gendered attitudes. The study was conducted in a remote rural village in rural Bangladesh where farming is the main occupation for men. How occupational changes and education can influence men’s gendered attitudes could also be matter of further studies. Studies can also be conducted to identify mass educational components that can effectively change men’s gendered thinking.
Annex – 1: Interview Guide

Interview Checklist

Respondents: Married Men aged 20-45

1) Please tell me some thing about your primary and secondary livelihoods in the last five years.

2) How do you perceive the economic conditions of your family?

3) How do you and your other family members contribute financially to your family?

4) When did you get married and how was your marriage arranged?

5) Are you happy with your family life? Why, or Why not?

6) What do you think about the roles you need to play for your family?

7) What do you think about the roles that your wife needs to play for your family?

8) Can you tell me what things are important in order for family life to be happy?

9) What do you think about the importance of sex within marriage?

10) What do you think about a man who has had sex with his lover(s) (finance) before marriage?

11) What do you think about a woman who has had sex with her lover(s) (finance) before marriage?

12) What do you think about a man who has had sex with anyone else (besides his lover) before marriage?
13) What do you think about a woman or girl who has had sex with anyone else (besides her lover) before marriage?

14) What do you think about a married man who has sex with anyone besides his wife?

15) What do you think about a married woman who has sex with anyone besides her husband?

16) What are your ideas about an ideal sexual relationship between men and women in marriage?
   - when and how
   - who should do what
   - satisfaction of both woman and man
   - multiple sex partners
   - oral sex and anal sex

17) Tell me your opinion about a woman who may ask her husband to have sex.

18) Tell me your opinion about a woman who may express to her husband that she is not satisfied.

19) Tell me your opinion about a woman who may tell her husband that she does not want to have sex now.

20) Tell me your opinion about a man who may have sex but his wife may not want to at that time.

21) Tell me who is the most active and passive in sexual intercourse.

22) Please tell me about any contradiction you have with your wife regarding sexual intercourse.
Annex- 2: Ethical Approval

Ethical Review Committee

Md. Muradul Islam
(Bazler Rahman Road
Ranasingar, Rangpur)
MPhil Student of
Umeå International School
of Public Health
Umeå University, Sweden.

Subject: Ethical Clearance

With reference to your application on the above subject, this is to inform you that your Research Proposal entitled “Married Men’s Views on Gender Rights and Sexuality in a village of North-west Bangladesh” has been reviewed and approved by the Ethical Review Committee of Bangladesh Medical Research Council (BMRC).

You are requested to please note the following ethical guidelines as mentioned at page 2 (overleaf) of this memo.

(Signed)

(Prof. M. Anwarul Haque)
MD, MSc, MPhil, PhD, FRCP Edin
Director

Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh, Phone: 8891396, 8923996, Fax: 880-2-4829820
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II
THE ETHICAL GUIDELINES TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE PRINCIPAL/CO-INVESTIGATORS

- The rights and welfare of individual volunteers are adequately protected.
- The methods to secure informed consent are fully appropriate and adequately safeguard the rights of the subjects (in the case of minors, consent is obtained from parents or guardians).
- The Investigator(s) assume the responsibility of notifying the Ethical Review Committee if there is any change in the methodology of the protocol involving a risk to the individual volunteers.
- To immediately report to the Ethical Review Committee if any evidence of unexpected or adverse reaction is noted in the subjects under study.
- This approval is subject to P.I.'s reading and accepting the BMRC ethical principles and guidelines currently in operation.
Reference


45. Kidwai, R., *Domestic violence in Pakistan: The role of patriarchy, gender roles, the culture of honor and objectification/commodification of women*, 2001, Alliant International University: Los Angeles, CA.


