

Investigating Sexism Faced by Young Adult Women in Indian Families and its Negotiating Outlets

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Abstract

India is a deep-rooted patriarch, where Gender bias is an inherent characteristic of a patriarchal society. Parents play a significant role in their children's formation of gender-role attitudes and stereotypes from childhood through young adulthood. In general, parents' expectations that their children behave according to gender stereotypes are stronger the more sexism they exhibit. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the presence of sexism in the homes of young adult women of Assam and to explore the variables of sexism faced by young adult women in their families. The study was carried out using a descriptive study design with a qualitative approach where a non-probability sample design was selected with a convenience sample technique used for providing a questionnaire to 40 participants who are young adult women from the age group 22-30 across Assam. The present study also used a semi-structured questionnaire. In this study, it was seen that the majority of the participants encountered sexism in their family. Out of all the participants, the majority of them also believe the prevalence of traditional gender roles in their family. It was identified that the majority of the respondents believe the negotiating outlets to sexism is an open conversation on gender equality and sexism in the family, balancing the decision-making power in the family, through awareness and sensitization and breaking intergenerational stereotypical norms and behaviors attached to a particular gender. Women are subjected to severe misogynistic crimes to subtle sexist comments, but they cannot escape from it. Family plays a vital role in the upbringing of a child. Sexism in the family often comes in the form of action and language.

Keywords: Sexism, Indian, Families, Adult, Young, Women

Introduction

For ages, the society of India has cultivated its people's mindset according to one's gender through its norms and belief system. This implantation gives rise to the issue of gender inequality and discrimination. India is a deep-rooted patriarch, where Gender bias is an inherent characteristic of a patriarchal society. It is a form that disparages women in a number of different ways (Kohli, 2017). About a quarter of Indians (23%) say there is "a lot of discrimination" against women in their country. And 16% of Indian women reported that they personally had faced discrimination because of their gender in the 12 months before the 2019-2020 survey (Jonathan Evans, 2022). Gender-based violence and misogyny are frequently viewed as manifestations of "culture" and "tradition" in India and the West. This is an inaccurate and distorting lens through which to look at gender violence and misogyny (Krishnan, 2015). The family as a fundamental social group has continually been regarded as a middle component for the improvement of

the person in addition to society and mankind. In Indian families, gender roles are well differentiated and have an impact on the socialization method from birth onwards (A, 2021). Parents play a significant role in their children's formation of gender-role attitudes and stereotypes from childhood through young adulthood (Halpern H. P., 2016). Casual sexism and discrimination in families are the result of the stereotypical upbringing of the children by the parents. The behavior implantation according to gender is one of the embedded characteristics of sexism in the family. Sexism is a form of prejudice or discriminatory treatment based on a person's sex (Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2015). Sexism is an invisible but influential hand that is framing our day-today language or jargon (Kahn).

Sexism has been categorized into various types including hostile, benevolent, and ambivalent. Sexism can differ from harmful violence to a subtle comment that strengthens stereotypes (Medical News Today, 2023). Only a small number of empirical research, however, addresses both hostile and benevolent sexism inside the family. In general, parents' expectations that their children behave according to gender stereotypes are stronger the more sexism they exhibit (Daniela Barni, 2022). The sex of the kid has no bearing on the overall levels of parental sexism, as hostile sexism is more prevalent in fathers than in mothers (Małgorzata Lipowski, 2016). The most prevalent type of sexism, in which women are objectified or humiliated, is hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism is a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that is subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy-seeking (e.g., self-disclosure) (Suparna Jain, 2020). An analysis of different stereotyped behaviors and comments has been put forward as part of sexism in families which includes, family members making assumptions about dividing household work based on gender, manipulating and controlling women's behavior by telling women to sit like a lady, when family members determine "appropriate talk" based on the genders of people in the room, family members displaying gender overprotectiveness, etc (Mercado, 2017).

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the presence of sexism in the homes of young adult women of Assam and to explore different variables of sexism faced by young adult women in their families. This study also identifies the negotiating outlets of sexism by young adult women of Assam.

Objective

- To investigate the presence of sexism in the house of young adult women of Assam.
- To explore different variables of sexism faced by young adult women.
- To identify the negotiating or preventive outlets of sexism by young adult women.

Methods

The study was carried out using a descriptive study design with a qualitative approach. Young adult women of Assam, with the age group 22-30 years were considered for this study.

The non-probability sample design was selected for the current study. The convenience sample technique was used for providing a questionnaire to 40 participants across Assam. Before providing the questionnaire, telephonic informed consent was given by the participants.

The inclusion criteria include young adult women from Assam. The age group of the respondents is from 22-30 years. The study excluded the respondents who are male. It also excluded women who don't fall in the age group 22-30 years.

Tools of Data Collection: The present study used a semi-structured questionnaire to investigate sexism faced by young adult women in Indian families and identify the negotiating or preventing outlets for sexism by young adult women.

Result

In Table 1, it was seen that majority of the participants encountered sexism in their family. Out of all the participants, majority of them also believes the prevalence of traditional gender roles in their family. Participants who faced sexism in their family (i.e. 36), out of them majority has responded that unequal distribution of household chores is one of the major sexist behavior in the family, along with control over personal choices, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and forcing marriage. The majority of the respondents (i.e. 36) also stated that sexist comments like attaching household chores to a particular gender, normalizing women being subjected to objectification, and commenting on their right to dream and have aspirations for their future are prevalent in the family.

Table 1: Determining the prevalence of sexism in the family according to the participants along with its variables

Prevalence of sexism		Frequency(n=40)	Percentage (%)
Encountering Sexism	Yes	36	90.0
	No	04	10.0
Prevalence of traditional gender roles in the family	Yes	36	90.0
	No	04	10.0
Sexist Behavior variables		Frequency (n=36)	Percentage (%)
Unequal distribution of household chores		10	27.7
limited educational opportunities		03	8.3
Forcing marriage		06	16.6
Control Over Personal Choices		08	22.2
limiting financial independence		01	2.7
reinforcing harmful stereotypes		07	19.4
denied inheritance rights		01	2.7
Sexist Comments variables		Frequency (n=36)	Percentage (%)
normalizing women being subjected to objectification		09	25.0
Attaching household chores to a particular gender		15	41.6
need to limit to a 'safe' job		03	8.3
right to chase dreams and have aspirations		06	16.6
Stereotyping gender dress code		03	8.3

In Table 2, it was identified that the majority of the respondents believe the negotiating outlets to sexism is an open conversation on gender equality and sexism in the family, balancing the decision-making power in the family, through awareness and sensitization and breaking intergenerational stereotypical norms and behaviors attached to particular gender

Table 2: Identifying the negotiating outlets of sexism according to the participants

Negotiating variables	Frequency (n=40)	Percentage (%)
Balance in decision-making power	09	22.5
Open conversation on gender equality and sexism in the family	10	25.0
Through awareness and sensitization	08	20.0
Breaking intergenerational stereotypical norms and behaviors attached to gender	07	17.5
Combatting gender discrimination	06	15.0

Discussion

The study shows that the majority of the participants have encountered sexism in their family which also influences the prevalence of traditional roles attached to a particular gender. These findings are similar to that of Sudha Shashwati and colleagues' study where it was revealed that in a patriarchal country like India, women encounter sexism more commonly in their household, where it is normalized throughout generations and takes an imprint in everyone's life to adapt the same intergenerational tradition of sexism either knowingly or unknowingly (Sudha Shashwati, 2023).

The findings of this study on sexist behavior variables among the participants who have encountered sexism in the family are similar to the article by Jonathan Evans and colleagues which states that nine in ten Indians agree with the statement that women must obey their husbands, including nearly two-thirds who completely agree with this sentiment and household chores should be completely done by women in the household (Jonathan Evans, 2022). Controlling the personal choices of women by the authoritative figure of the house, which is patriarchal in nature by the male members irrespective of age, is one of the major sexist behaviors that has been faced by women in their households (Verma, 2022).

In another study by Robbyn T. Scribner and colleagues, the findings showed similarity to this study, which stated that the majority of women came across sexist comments regarding women being subjected to objectification. Scribner also categorized their study on sexist comments into 4 themes. The four themes of sexist comments into which all categories were placed are as follows: (1) Inequity and Bias, (2) Objectification, (3) Stereotypes, and (4) Undervaluing Women (Robbyn T Scribner, 2021).

In another study by Bahira Trask, the findings provided similar findings to this study, which states that family plays a significant role in gender equality and negotiating sexism in the household by implementing open conversation on gender equality and sexism in the family (Trask, n.d.). The changes in the family's social relationship are essential as they help break the generational stereotypical norm and behavior attached to significant gender. Socio-economic changes in society have induced certain changes in family experiences that some as antecedents to various behavioral and psychological consequences in the individual (Aparijita Chowdhury, 2013).

Limitations

- The lack of significant literature and data on young adult women encountering sexism in families across Assam.
- The use of descriptive analysis limited the findings of the study.

Implications

- The findings of the study can be used by Women and Child Welfare organizations to understand the casual sexism faced by women in the household by their families.
- The findings of this study can also be added to the existing literature in this area of study.
- The findings of the study will help in the overall awareness of sexism and sexist attitudes towards women in the family.

Conclusion

Gender discrimination is one of the most traditionally embedded issues in Indian society. Women are subjected to severe misogynistic crimes to subtle sexist comments, but they cannot escape from it. Family plays a vital role in the upbringing of a child. The stereotypical values and belief systems of Indian families divide the upbringing of a girl child and a boy child. The judgments on the belief system in an Indian family can impact its values in the next generation of the family. These sexist behaviors and languages are normalized in the family. Women mostly find it difficult to understand the dynamics of sexism in the family. Sexism in the family often comes in the form of action and language. These pattern of actions are sexist behaviors that are often seen as normal demeanor by the members of the family as it is induced throughout their life by their family or society, in general. The sexist comments or language that is used by the family towards its members irrespective of their gender, which directly or indirectly discriminates a person on the basis of their gender, are prevalent and normalized in Indian households. Socio-economic changes as well as open conversation within the family members are one of the major negotiating and preventive outlets for sexism. Sexism within the family can also be reduced by balancing power dynamics in the family as India being a patriarchal nation, holds its root in male members being the authoritative figure of the family.

Ethical Considerations

The participants have given informed consent for participating in the study.

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