

# The Effects of Patriarchal Beliefs and Internalised Misogyny on Women's Self-Esteem: A Correlational Study

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## Abstract:

This research explores the relationship between patriarchal beliefs, internalised misogyny, and self-esteem levels among women, with special focus on the sociocultural context in which such patriarchal thinking is shaped. Patriarchal thinking and attitudes have been embedded in the social fabric and our daily practices, and women tend to internalise such thinking in the form of misogynistic beliefs about themselves and others. A correlational research design was used to examine these relationships. A sample of 114 women between the ages of 18 and 50 years was used. Psychological instruments such as the Patriarchal Beliefs Scale (PBS), Internalised Misogyny Scale (IMS), and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) were used to collect data. Descriptive and Pearson's correlation tests were conducted to examine the relationship between variables. The study found that both patriarchal beliefs and internalised misogyny were found to have a negative correlation with a woman's self-esteem level. This implied that the higher a woman's level of patriarchal beliefs and internalised misogynistic attitudes was, the lower her self-esteem was expected to be. Moreover, a strong positive correlation existed between patriarchal beliefs and internalised misogyny. This showed that the more a woman believed in patriarchal attitudes, the higher her level of internalised misogynistic beliefs was expected to be. Thus, the study indicated the significant role played by social and cultural belief systems in shaping the self-concepts of women as a whole.

**Keywords:** Patriarchal beliefs, Internalised misogyny, Women's self-esteem, Gender socialisation, Sociocultural influence, Mental health

## 1. Introduction:

Patriarchy is a dominant feature in many societies, influencing gender role issues, power, and expectations (Walby, 1990). It is a social institution that pervades all walks of life, influencing both institutional and mundane belief systems, attitudes, and practices that lead to male dominance and female subordination. In a predominantly patriarchal society, women are likely to encounter social communications that diminish their capacity, free will, and impression, which could have profound effects on their psychological well-being. Such belief systems are likely to be internalised over time, influencing how women view themselves in comparison to others (Fredrickson Roberts, 1997). An important psychological outcome of patriarchal socialisation in terms of gender roles is internalised misogyny. Internalised misogyny is a state of internalised sexist beliefs by women (Bearman et al., 2009). Unlike the exposure to patriarchal

socialisation, which is essentially perceived as an external influence, internalised misogyny entails the internalisation of patriarchal attitudes. This means that patriarchal socialisation can be internalised and can affect women's self-concepts. Internalised misogyny can be expressed in several ways, including self-derogation and the derogation of other women, internalised sexist beliefs and gender stereotyping, and the overall acceptance of gender inequality (Szymanski et al., 2009).

Self-esteem is defined as the general evaluation that a person has for his or her own worth as a human being. It is one of the fundamental steps to understanding the psychological well-being and mental health of an individual (Rosenberg, 1965). Several studies have proved the role played by societal feedback, culture, and belief systems in relation to an individual's self-esteem. In a patriarchal society dominated by the idea of patriarchy, the self-esteem of women is more prone to impairment due to the emphasis placed on gender roles. According to Szymanski et al. (2009), patriarchy and internalised misogyny may work collectively to cause a decrease in a woman's self-esteem. While there has been considerable research on the effects of patriarchy, genderism, and their impact on the mental well-being of females, the majority of the research that currently exists is based on the structural effects that these systems take on the human behavioural process. Moreover, not enough empirical research currently exists that examines the direct effects of patriarchal ideals, internalised misogyny, and self-esteem, especially outside of Western culture. In India, the manner in which traditional gender ideals mix with social change. The present study is intended to fill that gap by exploring the relationships between patriarchal beliefs and practices, internalised misogyny, and self-esteem in women

## **2. Review of Literature**

### **2.1. Patriarchal Beliefs**

Patriarchy, as a system of male domination, has been studied extensively in sociology, gender studies, and psychology. Walby (1990) has defined patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women." These presumptions reinforce gender inequality and perpetuate the assumption that men are superior, rational, and worthy of authority over women. They are expressed in cultural norms, domestic arrangements, and institutional practice, often shaping women's options within education, employment, and civil society. Psychological studies have found that patriarchal mindsets affect not only external social arrangements but also internal worlds of women. For example, studies have shown that women brought up in very patriarchal households have problems with autonomy, assertiveness, and self-confidence (Kandiyoti, 1988). Patriarchal expectations can force women to adopt stereotypical roles of mother, wife, and caretaker, restricting their personal and professional aspirations. These expectations are then further reinforced in collectivist societies like India by cultural practices such as dowry, son preference for daughters, and arranged marriages (Chopra, 2004). Research in the Indian context has identified the persistence of patriarchal tendencies even in the context of modernisation and urbanisation. Gupta (2012) explained that patriarchal mindsets continue to inform women's career decisions, choice of marriage partners, and social independence even in educated populations. Similarly, Nanda and Warriar (2011) stated that patriarchal mindsets influence health outcomes and that women prioritise their families' needs over their own needs. This reflects how entrenched such attitudes are and how they continue to influence women's identity and self-perceptions.

### **2.2. Internalised Misogyny**

Internalised misogyny is the process by which women internalise patriarchal values and use them against themselves and other women. Bearman, Korobov, and Thorne (2009) have characterised it as the process

of "self-subjugation," whereby women evaluate their own worth in terms of male-defined measures. It can be exhibited in many ways, including competition with other women, woman-policing, and the acceptance of sexist stereotypes as "natural." Research has shown that internalised misogyny has severe psychological consequences. Szymanski, Gupta, Carr, and Stewart (2009) argued that internalised misogyny correlated with body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and depression. Internalised sexist beliefs may cause women to perceive themselves as inferior and compare themselves to ideal feminine ideals, which are unattainable. This behaviour enhances self-criticism and reduces self-acceptance. Different research shows that internalised misogyny also disrupts women's relationships. For instance, Enns (1993) found that highly internally misogynistic women are likely to judge other women, hence causing fragmentation rather than unity. This reduces the possibility of collective resistance against patriarchal oppression. In the Indian context, internalised misogyny is sustained through cultural discourses that reinforce female sacrifice, obedience, and chastity. Dutt (2018) indicated, in a study, how women themselves propagate patriarchal practices by endorsing son preference, rebuking independent women, or stigmatising those who go beyond traditional roles. The above illustrates how, once internalised, misogynistic thought starts to get transmitted through generations, keeping systemic inequality alive.

### **2.3. Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is a significant psychological concept that, in the words of Rosenberg (1965), is the global opinion of self-worth that a person holds. High self-esteem is linked with positive outcomes like resilience, confidence, and psychological health (Orth & Robins, 2014). Conversely, low self-esteem has consistently been associated with depression, anxiety, school underachievement, and the inability to make interpersonal relationships (Baumeister et al., 2003). Differences in self-esteem between genders have been a central area of study. From research, women are found to report lower self-esteem compared to men, particularly during adolescence and young adulthood (Kling et al., 1999). The disparity is often attributed to societal pressures, gender stereotypes, and cultural expectations that place women in subordinate positions. For example, women who undergo discrimination or objectification are likely to feel doubtful about themselves and inadequate (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Gender socialisation in the context of India is a significant influencer of self-esteem. Ram, Usha (2014) have studied and discovered that young women brought up in highly patriarchal settings had lower self-esteem compared to their counterparts brought up in more equalitarian contexts. Cultural factors such as son preference, limitations on the mobility of women, and pressure for early marriage traditionally establish that women are subordinate to men in value. This not only impacts their self-esteem but also their mental health and life outcomes.

### **2.4. The Inter-relations Between Patriarchal Beliefs, Internalised Misogyny, and Self-Esteem**

The intersection of patriarchal attitudes, internalised misogyny, and self-esteem has been an increasingly popular field of study over the last few years. Research indicates that patriarchal attitudes can undermine women's self-confidence by devaluing their effort and limiting their opportunities (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Women endorsing such attitudes are likely to internalise restrictive roles, and thus lower self-aspirations and lower self-worth. Internalised misogyny has also been strongly connected with self-esteem. Szymanski et al. (2009) noted that women who were more internalised in their misogyny were more likely to have lower self-esteem and greater psychological distress. This association has been explained in terms of the process of self-objectification, whereby women view themselves from a male point of view. Also, studies show that internalised misogyny and patriarchal views are related. Bearman et al. (2009) found that women who held patriarchal views were more likely to internalise misogynistic values. This suggests a dynamic where structural inequality is then reinforced by internalised assumptions and results in lower

psychological well-being. Although more research has been conducted with the increased focus, much of this has occurred in Western countries. Little research on these relationships has been conducted in India, where patriarchy within family systems, education, and society is strongly entrenched. This makes the present study highly relevant since the study seeks to examine how patriarchal beliefs and internalised misogyny affect women's self-esteem in an Indian sample.

### **2.5. Research Gap**

While increasing literature has explored the psychological consequences of patriarchal norms and internalised misogyny on women, some gaps persist. A great deal of the research has been performed in Western settings, which have dissimilar cultural, social, and family structures compared to India. Research by Szymanski et al. (2009), Glick and Fiske (1996), and Wilson (2019) identifies the harmful impact of internalised sexism on mental health and self-esteem, but these results are not necessarily directly generalizable to Indian women, who navigate a distinct intersection of caste, tradition, and modernity. Additionally, prior research has largely addressed either patriarchal ideology or internalised misogyny alone, with fewer studies exploring how the two concepts work together in a single model to affect self-esteem. Although some recent articles (e.g., Evteeva, 2024; Weygold, 2024) address media or socialisation elements, little empirical research exists linking these attitudes to psychological outcomes within a South Asian framework. The current research fills these gaps by applying standardised measures of patriarchal beliefs, internalised misogyny, and self-esteem to a representative sample of Indian women aged 18 and older. Through examining the interrelationships among the variables, the current research sheds new light on how internalised patriarchal beliefs influence women's self-worth in an ever-changing cultural context.

### **2.6. Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The rationale of this research stems from understanding the subtle psychological effects of patriarchal social orders. While numerous studies highlight outward phenomena of patriarchy like discrimination, pay disparities, or constricted movement, fewer delve into how women struggle when they internalise these ideas. This study is significant since self-esteem is a cornerstone of psychological health, and its effect on women's confidence, decisions, and ability to succeed in life is one-to-one. Knowing how patriarchal culture conditions women to view themselves can contribute to uncovering the unconscious psychological price of gender inequality. The research is also of social importance. By pointing out domains wherein internalised patriarchal values continue to influence women even within contemporary or "enlightened" settings, it underscores the necessity for psychological and cultural intervention, rather than policy change. Results of this research can shape educational, counselling, and advocacy efforts aimed at empowering women through confronting damaging norms and facilitating healthier self-concepts.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Structure**

For this research paper, a linear correlational design was employed to study the relationship between the concerned variables. The data was collected through non-probability snowball sampling using online Google forms containing questions about demographic details, the Patriarchal Belief Scale, Internalised Misogyny Scale, and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale. The homogeneity of this sample is ensured through age and demographic details. The sample strictly consisted of Indian adult women aged 18 to 50. Language proficiency was also ensured so that the participants could read and understand English and, therefore, could efficiently answer the questions asked. The software JASP (Jeffreys's Amazing Statistics Program) was used for data analysis.

### 3.2.Hypothesis

1. There will be a negative correlation between patriarchal beliefs and self-esteem.
2. There will be a negative correlation between internalised misogyny and self-esteem.

### 3.3.Tools used

- 3.3.1. Patriarchal Beliefs Scale (PBS)** - The Patriarchal Beliefs Scale (PBS) is a psychometric tool developed and validated by Yoon et al. (2015) to measure patriarchal beliefs in adults. It assesses beliefs across three main dimensions: the institutional power of men, the inherent inferiority of women, and gendered domestic roles. The 35-item scale uses a 7-point Likert Scale to gauge agreement with statements, with higher scores indicating a greater endorsement of patriarchal ideas.
- 3.3.2. Internalised Misogyny Scale (IMS)** - The most prominent and widely cited assessment tool is the Internalised Misogyny Scale (IMS), developed by M. Piggott in 2004. The IMS is a 17-item questionnaire that measures a woman's internalised cultural devaluation of women. Since its development, the Internalised Misogyny Scale has been validated and translated for use in various cultures. Studies have found that higher IMS scores are significantly correlated with negative mental health outcomes.
- 3.3.3. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)** -The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a 10-item questionnaire used to measure an individual's overall sense of self-worth and self-acceptance. Developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1965, it is one of the most widely used self-esteem measures in social science research. All three instruments are commonly employed and validated in psychological studies, providing reliability and validity for the data collected.

## 4. Results and Discussions

### 4.1.Results

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

#### Descriptive Statistics ▼

<i>Descriptive Statistics</i> ▼			
	Score(PBS)	Score(IMS)	Score(RSES)
Valid	114	114	114
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	100.2	41.81	13.48
Std. Deviation	46.05	20.34	3.925
Skewness	0.867	0.929	-1.125
Std. Error of Skewness	0.226	0.226	0.226
Minimum	0.000	0.000	0.000
Maximum	232.0	103.0	21.00

Descriptive statistics were calculated for patriarchal beliefs (PBS), internalised misogyny (IMS), and self-esteem (RSES). There were no missing data points from the sample of 114. All data were complete. The mean score for patriarchal beliefs was  $M = 100.20$  ( $SD = 46.05$ ). This revealed a high degree of variation in the expression of patriarchal beliefs and attitudes. Regarding internalised misogyny, the mean was  $M =$

41.81 (SD = 20.34). There was significant variation in this case as well. The mean for self-esteem was found to be  $M = 13.48$  (SD = 3.92). Regarding the Skewness values, it is clear that the data showed moderate positive points for PBS, with a Skewness of 0.867, while IMS had a slightly higher value of 0.929. This suggests that several respondents scored higher on these scales. Similarly, self-esteem displayed moderate negative points, averaging -1.125. All data points fell within the appropriate range for analysis.

**Table 2: Pearson’s Correlation Analysis**

**Correlation**

*Pearson’s Correlations*

		n	Pearson’s r	p	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	Covariance	
Score(PBS)	-	Score(IMS)	114	0.965***	< .001	0.950	0.976	904.19
Score(PBS)	-	Score(RSES)	114	-0.234*	.012	-0.400	-0.052	-42.24
Score(IMS)	-	Score(RSES)	114	-0.299**	.001	-0.458	-0.122	-23.90

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

To determine the relationships between patriarchal beliefs, internalised misogyny, and self-esteem, Pearson's correlation coefficients were used. There was a very strong positive correlation found with patriarchal beliefs and internalised misogyny,  $r(112) = 0.965$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%. The results of the correlational analysis showed that the more patriarchal beliefs were supported, the more internalised misogyny was exhibited. There was a significant negative correlation noted for patriarchal beliefs and self-esteem,  $r(112) = -0.234$ ,  $p = .012$ , 95%. This indicates a relationship between higher patriarchal beliefs and lower levels of self-esteem. Also, internalised misogyny negatively correlated with self-esteem;  $r(112) = -0.299$ ,  $p = .001$ , 95% CI [-0.458, -0.122]; however, higher levels of internalised misogyny were associated with lower levels of self-esteem. Overall, the results support that there are significant relationships between the three variables in the hypothesised order.

**4.2. Discussion**

The present research aimed to investigate the relationship between patriarchal beliefs, internalised misogyny, and self-esteem among women. The results indicated strong correlations between all three constructs, with all relationships occurring in the predicted directions. There was a strong positive correlation between patriarchal beliefs and internalised misogyny, which was in turn negatively correlated with self-esteem.

This high positive correlation between patriarchal belief and internalised misogyny indicates that gender-based belief systems may also be related to internalised misogyny, as indicated in the study. When there is a belief in patriarchal attitudes, there may also be an internalisation of misogyny as an intragender evaluative attitude. This finding may also be in line with prior theoretical standpoints on the belief systems of society on how they affect cognition and perception as a whole (Szymanski et al., 2009). The negative relationship found between patriarchal beliefs and self-esteem suggests a potential link between positive hierarchical ordering of gender roles and a negative self-worth concept. The negative relationship found between internalised misogyny beliefs and self-esteem suggests a potential link between the internalisation of negative beliefs centred on gender roles and a negative concept of self-worth. This is consistent with other research documenting the psychological effects of internalised suppression and gender-based socialisation (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Szymanski et al., 2009). Overall, it can be stated that the results indicate sociocultural gender ideologies may have psychological implications. For example,

internalised unequal gender norms may affect how capable and worthy women perceive themselves. Furthermore, they may influence self-esteem, especially when traditional gender roles are still followed.

### **4.3. Implications**

There are several theoretical, practical, and social implications of the results of this study. Because of the strong association between patriarchal beliefs and internalised misogyny, what the findings suggest is that gender-based ideologies function at an internal psychological level, apart from the structural level. This, in turn, reinforces the critical theoretical understandings of the internalisation of sociocultural norms as one pathway through which systemic inequalities impact individual well-being. From a psychological perspective, the key takeaway of the negative association between internalised misogyny and self-esteem is that interventions on internalised gender attitudes cannot be de-emphasised. This underlines the potential benefits for psychoeducational components, critically targeting patriarchal norms and self-directed gender biases, in programs to enhance women's self-esteem. This can prove to be more effective than only practising individual confidence-building strategies. Within an educational and community context, it would seem that gender-sensitisation activities, which foster an awareness of internalised stereotypes, could play an important role. This may be done by conducting workshops, organising activities on university campuses, and community-based activities, which could positively impact self-view and psychological behaviours among women.

Additionally, the study also points to the significance of sociocultural change. This comes in the form of the fact that patriarchal beliefs are seen to be related to misogyny, particularly in an internal sense. This means that efforts targeted at only changing the individual may not be effective. Lastly, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge, particularly within environments where cultures other than Western cultures prevail, emphasising the significance of exploring the effects of internalised gender ideologies within environments where traditional values have considerable influence on socialisation patterns.

### **4.4. Limitations**

There are certain limitations of the current study. Firstly, the current research used a snowball sampling method, and it is quite possible that the sampling used was somewhat homogeneous. This is because, through the snowball method, a certain category of people gets interconnected. They may belong to a similar sociocultural background, education, and/or ideology, and thus a more robust association may exist. The associations in the current study may not thus be a reflection of the entire sampling population. Secondly, the study was conducted using a correlational design approach. Although a significant link was established between patriarchal ideologies, internalised misogyny, and self-esteem, it is impossible to determine the direction of the relationship. That is, it is unclear whether patriarchal ideology precedes lower self-esteem and internalised misogyny or if the reverse is true. Third, the very high association between patriarchal beliefs and internalised misogyny provokes concern about the possibility of overlap between the two constructs. Although in theory they are well differentiated, there is a possibility that both may assess conceptually close aspects of gender belief. It may be worthwhile to explore discriminant validity even more systematically and use different instruments to separate the two constructs. Furthermore, the study relied only on self-report measures that might be susceptible to social desirability effects or response sets. These participants might have underestimated or overestimated their beliefs based on certain factors. Lastly, demographic factors like level of education, socioeconomic status, and regional diversity were found not to be examined as moderators. These factors would be significant if integrated in

future studies, as they can provide more insights regarding societal influences on self-esteem, as well as gender beliefs.

#### 4.5. Future Recommendations

The longitudinal design would possibly be used in future studies and could help to identify the directionality of the relationships formed among patriarchal ideology, internalised misogyny, and self-esteem. More diverse and representative samples of populations would increase the level of generalizability within a variety of sociocultural settings. Furthermore, future studies may wish to examine additional variables, such as potential mediating and moderating factors, including feminist identity, education level, and social support. Further studies designed to tease out the important distinction between patriarchal ideology and internalised misogyny would help to refine the understanding within the field.

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