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Intervening in masculinity: work, relationships and violence among the intimate partners of female sex workers in South India

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ABSTRACT

Although health researchers have begun to examine the forms of violence and power dynamics that play out in the intimate relationships of female sex workers (FSWs) in India, this knowledge has tended to focus on the perspectives of women, leaving men's motivations and attitudes relatively unexamined. This paper examines the contours of masculinity and gender norms from the perspective of the intimate partners of FSWs. Based on six months of ethnographic research in Northern Karnataka, the study employed two focus group discussions (FGDs) with Devadasi FSWs ($N = 17$), as well as four FGDs ($N = 34$) and 30 in-depth interviews with their intimate partners. Given the precarious labour conditions in this region, tensions developed in the participants' relationships with FSWs, as these men were unable to meet local ideals of manhood. Violence became a way that men attempted to re-secure a sense of control in their relationships with women, and to fulfil fantasies of male power. We recommend that programs engaging men not only address intimate partner violence but also attend to the social and structural realities surrounding these men's daily lived experiences.

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Introduction

Although researchers have begun to examine the forms of violence and power dynamics that play out in the intimate relationships of female sex workers (FSWs) in India (Blanchard et al., 2013, 2016; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005; Panchanadeswaran et al., 2010; Ramanaiik et al., 2014), this knowledge has tended to focus on the perspectives of women, leaving men's motivations and attitudes relatively unexamined. Based on six months of ethnographic research in Northern Karnataka, South India, our study explored how manhood is conceived and enacted in the everyday lives of the intimate partners of FSWs. We analyse the perceptions and practices of these men to shed light on the common occurrences of intimate partner violence (IPV) and how local ideologies of manhood – and the social and structural conditions that shape these ideologies – perpetuate IPV within the sex trade.

To understand the complex ways masculinity is enacted, Carrigan and colleagues (1985) contend that it is analytically important to identify the ideologies that enable some men to secure and maintain their privileged positions over other men and women. Hegemonic masculinity serves as an analytical tool to explain the legitimisation of masculinities through social institutions and social groups (Jewkes et al., 2015). As theorized by Connell (1995), 'hegemonic masculinity' refers to certain commonly idealized

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ways of 'being a man' in particular places and at specific time. In the process, other masculine ways of being are rendered inadequate and inferior, what Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) term 'subordinate variants'.

However, problems with 'hegemonic masculinity' become apparent when ethnographic accounts of the seemingly contradictory behaviours of men in a society move us beyond binary notions of 'dominant' vs. 'subordinate' masculinities. Attending to the complexities and contradictions within the social construction of masculinity, scholars have noted the fraught relationships between male dominance as a form of ideology (providing political legitimation) and the actual practices of dominance enacted by men (Elias & Beasley, 2009; Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Whitehead, 1998).

As a set of patterned and collective social practices, IPV emerges out of specific social interactions and power relations that make up particular masculine subject positions (Chopra, Osella, & Osella, 2004; Jackson, 1999). In India, scholars have noted the effects of the shifting market economy on local enactments of masculinity and the implications this can have for gender relations (Abraham, 2004; Chopra et al., 2004; Jackson, 1999). For instance, impoverished Indian men of lower castes have a highly complex and contradictory relation with dominant ideals of manhood given that their material conditions in the market economy rarely allow them to live up to common expectations (Jackson, 1999). Under conditions in which men are denied full access to typical male privileges and status, they may be subject to a 'crisis' in masculinity (Chant, 2000; Cornwall, 2000). Scholars have noted that violence against women is a means of resolving this crisis because it allows an expression of power that is otherwise denied either socially or economically (Hunter, 2010; Jewkes, 2002; Martin, Tsui, Maitra, & Marinshaw, 1999; Weitzman, 2014).

Although such theorizations of masculinity have provided a useful lens to understand violence, much of the literature has neglected the subjective experiences of men in dealing with the prescriptions of hegemony (Seidler, 2006; Stern, Clarfelt, & Buikema, 2015). Drawing on our fieldwork with the intimate partners of FSWs, we explored how IPV derived from men's fantasies of male power. This is in line with other scholarships that describe men's use of violence as a process in which they construct themselves as subjects in relation to various culturally available representations of masculinity (Busby, 1999; Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell, & Dunkle, 2010; Moore, 1994; Wood, Lambert, & Jewkes, 2008).

Understanding violence, then, in terms of larger strategies and projects of masculinities, the study explored the following questions: How do ideals of masculinity influence men's understandings of gender relations? Given the precarious labour market in the study region, how do intimate partners negotiate the shifting demands of work and their sexual relationships with sex workers? What happens when sex workers fail to conform to men's idealized notions of femininity? Understanding masculinity in this way – as contingent, fragile, tenuous and relational – gestures towards the wider social and structural context in which these men live out their lives (including their sexual relationships), and thus avoids rather essentialist caricatures of south Asian men as inherently sexist or violent.

Political economic context

Given the decline in agricultural employment, Karnataka has experienced an economic structural adjustment as labour shifts to the secondary and tertiary sectors (Karnataka. Planning, Programme Monitoring & Statistics Department, 2013). The share of services in total employment has risen from 22.1% (between 2004 and 2005) to 25.9% (between 2009 and 2010). Of the total workforce, nearly 87% of the workers worked in the unorganised sector (Karnataka. Planning, Programme Monitoring & Statistics Department, 2013). Compared to workers who accounted for 16% of the organized sector, the unorganized sector is comprised mainly of the self-employed (51%) and casual workers (33%). Despite the increase in the share of the organized sector workforce, the rise in the share of unorganised employment has not necessarily entailed a qualitative shift in work conditions. More specifically, the rise of an informal economy has corresponded to higher concentrations of workers in very low-paid, irregular, casual jobs with little job security.

In such an environment of unequal growth and precarious labour conditions, attending to the political economic conditions helps us to understand the complex gender relationships that shape how masculinities are organized and expressed by intimate partners.

Methods

Study setting and ethnographic data collection

The study was conducted in three *talukas* (sub-districts) of Bagalkot district in Northern Karnataka, where an extensive HIV prevention programme currently operates. More specifically, the study was undertaken in collaboration with the *Chaitanya AIDS Tadehattuva Mahila Sangha (CATMS)* – which is a community-based sex worker collective in the region.

In this study, access to the research participants (mainly the intimate partners) was gained through *CATMS*. Before interviewing the men, we asked permission from FSWs to interview their intimate partners (to ensure safety of these women and their relationships). Given the high concentration of ‘traditional’ FSWs in Northern Karnataka, most of the women entered sex work through the *Devadasi* tradition. The *Devadasi* cultural tradition involves a religious rite in which girls and women are dedicated, through marriage, to different gods and goddesses, after which they come to serve the deities and perform various temple duties (Orchard, 2007). These can include provision of sexual services to priests and patrons of the temples. Although the practice is legally banned in India, the *Devadasi* tradition is widespread in northern Karnataka, and the sex work associated with it is culturally embedded in many communities (Khan et al., 2017; Orchard, 2007).

Participant observation was undertaken over a six-month period to develop rapport with intimate partners and to cultivate a familiarity with their practices through an intensive engagement (Liamputtong, 2013). In the villages, a significant number of intimate partners worked in the fields, whereas in the towns men’s occupations included driving, factory work, tailoring and carpentry. The first author’s immersion in the local context where men congregated – that is, in temples, market places, and restaurants, and at cultural events – yielded important insights with respect to local practices of masculinity.

Additionally, the first author conducted two FGDs with FSWs with the aim of understanding their key concerns and challenges in the context of the relationships with their partners. The ideas they shared formed the basis for leading group discussions and interviews with the intimate partners. Using purposive and snowball sampling, navigated through the established contacts of the local community-based organization, intimate partners were invited to participate in FGDs that focused on issues of gender-based violence, masculinity and work, both in general and in relation to the FSWs.

In total, the study conducted two focus group discussions (FGDs) with FSWs ($N = 17$), 4 FGDs with intimate partners ($N = 34$) and 30 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with intimate partners, 15 each in rural and urban areas. IDIs were conducted with 12 selected intimate partners who participated in FGDs, primarily to follow up on ideas and themes shared in group discussions, and 18 additional participants who did not take part in FGDs. All interviews and group discussions were conducted by the first author (with support of an interpreter) and three research assistants, who were experienced qualitative researchers and fluent in Kannada.

Interview transcripts were transcribed in Kannada and were translated into English by bi-lingual research assistants, and reviewed and analysed by the first author. NVivo software was used to store, manage and organize the data. Themes were identified in two ways: first, at the ‘manifest level’ (from direct observation of the content in the transcripts) and second, at the ‘latent level’ (from previous knowledge of the context in which intimate partners live) (Boyatzis, 1998). The research team then organized the themes into four groups highlighting the ideas of masculinity pertaining to IPV among FSWs. Finally, the findings were validated by a process of peer checking and a validation workshop with the participants. The study was approved by University of Manitoba Ethics Review Board and the Institutional Ethical Review Board of St. John’s Medical College and Hospital in Karnataka. Written and

verbal consent to interviews assured participants of anonymity: all names appearing in this article are pseudonyms and minor alternations to their biographies have been made to protect respondents' identities.

Findings

Locating intimate partners

Over the past decade, research on transactional sex and male provider roles (Busch, Bell, Hotaling, & Monto, 2002; Dunkle et al., 2007; Jewkes, Morrell, Sikweyiya, Dunkle, & Penn-Kekana, 2012; Monto & McRee, 2005) has shown a strong correlation between these practices and men's use of violence. Work by Jewkes and colleagues (2012) reveals that South African men who are involved in either male provider relations or economic exchanges for sex with women are less violent than men engaged in both. The men involved in both were relatively more advantaged socially and economically. However, within the context of our study, despite occupying precarious economic positions, men were involved as providers of economic resources to both wives and sex workers. In particular, relationships with sex workers initially began as exchanges of cash for sex but developed into intimate partnerships especially when there were higher expectations of material and emotional support from both partners (Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Schuler, Lenzi, Badal, & Nazneen, 2017; Stoebenau, Heise, Wamoyi, & Bobrova, 2016). Given the unique location of intimate partners, the study highlights the complex interplay of societal norms and structural conditions that frame the gender relations and practices of intimate partners.

Demographics of intimate partners

Interviewed male participants ranged between 23 and 52 years of age, with the mean age being at 34 years. Seventeen of the men had received formal education, ranging from 1 to 9 years; 10 reported that they had continued their education after Middle School (and one had a university degree) while 3 were illiterate. All men reported to be involved in an intimate partnership with a FSW. The participants were from varied Hindu caste groups with only 4 being Muslims. Most of the participants belonged to the working class as their main occupations ranged broadly from being drivers ($N = 9$), construction workers ($N = 7$), services industry workers ($N = 5$), farmers ($N = 3$), electricians, tailors, factory workers, security guards to handloom weavers ($N = 7$).

Among the male FGD participants, the ages ranged from 20 to 50 with the mean age being 30. Like interviewed participants, the FGD participants came from a variety of castes with almost two-thirds from lower caste groups, and most were married (31 out of 34). The wives of participants were from the same caste and primarily engaged in domestic work. Almost equal numbers of the men had received formal education and post-middle school education (13 and 14, respectively) while 7 were illiterate. Two FGDs were also conducted with 17 FSWs all of whom except one identified as a *Devadasi*. Their ages ranged from 25 to 38. All these women were from the 'Scheduled Caste' (identified by the government as a socially and economically 'backward' caste). Most of the women (15 out of 17) received formal education, ranging from 5 to 10 years, while two women were illiterate.

Narrating manhood

In the following sections, we highlight some of the conflicts that occur in the relationships between FSWs and their intimate partners and examine these within the wider set of socially and structurally patterned relations of male power.

Nostalgic masculinities

To understand the power and gender relations within intimate partnerships, local ideologies of manhood must be located within the material and historical contexts in which social relations have become

informed. Amid the neoliberal transformation of the agricultural sector, intimate partners would often express a sense of alienation from each other and their environment. Harith, an eighteen-year-old, reflected on the uncertainty and hardships of his life. Having lost his father at a very young age, Harith had to drop out of school constantly travel to find work to support his mother. Feeling constrained by a narrow horizon of economic opportunities brought about a sense of isolation, which he discussed in an informal conversation in terms of fate: 'I must shoulder this burden alone. Some people were meant to suffer.' As such, some of the intimate partners would often express a nostalgic yearning for a time when men's work life could be imagined as part of more meaningful social relationships.

Men worked hard in those days. They were thinking about earning and providing money for their family. They were living in close relationships with greater understanding. (Hamid, 52, labourer)

Earlier, men used to work a lot. They were not fond of fashion. They earned less but they worked hard to feed their family. [N]ow, [men] only want to cheat and earn money without doing hard work. We had more trust and respect for each other back then. (Samir, 43, tailor)

However, men who failed to conform to such historical masculine ideals were met with disapproval. During the first author's interactions with the local village men, a young man in his early twenties was being chided by his friends for shaving his moustache and 'acting like a woman.' Calling him a *Chakka* (a derogatory term for homosexual) they made fun of him for being soft-spoken and shy. Similar sentiments were expressed by 33-year old agricultural worker, Charan:

If a man doesn't act like a man, he will be called a *Chakka*. If he likes to act like a woman and do womens work, we call him *Chakka*. There is a boy in my street who is always with women. He washes clothes and cleans the vessels. Is he a man? Tell me.

Performances of gender identity that do not meet certain expectations of masculinity were subject to stigmatization and marginalization by other men. Among the local men and intimate partners, terms such as *Chakka* were often deployed as mechanisms to reaffirm local ideals of masculinity and simultaneously denounce other men who did not conform to such ideals.

In addition to disavowing the masculinity of other men, utopic imaginings of gender roles were employed to express their disapproval of contemporary gender power relations. In the following excerpts, intimate partners imagined a time when women were more subservient to men:

The man kept the woman inside the house. He would never let her outside and she did as she was told. In times of quarrel, men used to hit their women so they would lead their lives with a fear of men in them. But women were good in those days – they respected men. (Fareed, 32, labourer)

In the earlier days, women had a lot of respect for men. They did not show their faces to other men except their husbands and they used to cover their faces with the saree when a stranger or elder comes. But now, women show whatever and go wherever they want. (Mallapa, 28, driver)

Such patriarchal conceptions of gender and traditional gender roles provided the basis for male dominance, and legitimised a subordinate view of women. In comparison to women considered to be 'traditional,' 'modern' women were regarded as transgressing the boundaries of appropriate femininity. As noted by Govender (2011, p. 898), 'fantasies of hegemonic power relates to the broader context of masculinities feeling threatened ... where women are becoming increasingly prominent in the "public" domain, and thus, impinging on a traditionally male space.'

Fleeting relationships

Within intimate partnerships, men generally claimed that their relationships with the FSWs, who they commonly referred to as their 'lovers,' provided intimacy and erotic satisfaction that they did not experience at home with their wives.

I will expect sexual pleasure from her ... She sleeps with me whenever I want (and) that gives me so much joy. She speaks to me nicely. I can share my feelings with her and she also shares her feelings with me. (Omkaara, 26 years old, construction worker)

We watch porn clips on my mobile and then we practice them. I cannot do that with my wife. My lover [a sex worker] ... satisfies me and gives me the pleasures that I desire and want ... I can't ask my wife to lick my penis and practice different sexual acts, like bending over and spreading out her legs. (Mallapa, 28 years old, driver)

At the same time, participants viewed their relationships with their lovers as 'fleeting', and expressed little emotional obligation towards them. Within the local context, t-shirt slogans with phrases like 'Girlfriends are like medicine: they have expiry dates' were commonly worn by the local men. Because men did not have the same familial obligation to their lovers as their wives, they viewed their relationships with them as unencumbered by commitment and, as a result, more replaceable.

If my wife goes against me, there are many choices to resolve the conflict. Elders, members from both the families, neighbours and relatives will gather and find out the reason for the conflict and later, the spouses will come to a consensus. But it is different for lovers [sex workers]. Our relationship is hidden. And like a flower, we can remove it any time when we don't want it. I got married to my wife in front of society. I have the right to make any demands from my wife but I don't have that right with my lover. (Omkara, 26 years old, construction worker)

We feel free to have sex with our lovers. Even if she is very close to me, she is still an outsider. We can stop talking to them anytime but we can't stop talking to our wives. We both have to interact because we are a family. We can give up our lovers, but we can't give up our wives. (Sadanand, 33 years old, farmer)

As is well known, significant social status comes through marriage in South Asia (Abraham, 2004; Vera-Sanso, 2000). But while men felt entitled to enact forms of masculine domination in their marriages, by expecting unconditional support and obedience from their wives, they could not expect the same from their lovers as these relationships were not socially sanctioned.

I must expect everything from my wife. I cannot expect from my lover that which I expect from my wife because my wife is the ultimate and everything. My wife takes care of me and will help me when I am in trouble. If I am suffering from financial problems, she will get money from her parents and support me, but I cannot expect this from my lover. (Gajanan, 33 years old, driver)

The wife is the ultimate. If I die tomorrow, my wife will cry and she has the right but a Devadasi [sex worker] will just find another person. The wife does not care about money; she has only love for us. It is a formal relationship bound in the presence of many people. (Lakhan, 28 years old, driver)

However, the female lovers who participated in the study expressed a different perspective on the relationships with their intimate partners. For instance, Oditi, a *Devadasi* sex worker and volunteer at CATMS, described in an informal conversation the one-sided emotional relationship between FSWs and intimate partners where the sex workers tended to have more genuine feelings towards their partners whereas the men would easily replace them for someone younger or more attractive. Sneh, another *Devadasi* sex worker echoed this sentiment: 'If he finds some other attractive woman, he will leave us. We love him, we won't leave him' (Sneh, 29, peer educator/sex worker).

Under the shadow of hegemonic masculinity, sex workers were aware that their partners regarded them with less respect than their wives; for their intimate partnerships existed outside the realm of formalized marriage, a system that (re)secured social status for men.

He will scold us by saying 'you are a bitch, you sleep with other people'. If we speak about his wife, he will beat us. He will get angry and ask us 'how dare you compare yourself to my wife?' (Puja, 30 years old, peer educator/Devadasi sex worker)

We treat him like more than a husband. We give him sexual satisfaction and do as he pleases, but he never speaks with us when he is with his family members. (Nada, 25, peer educator/Devadasi sex worker)

As described by both intimate partners and sex workers alike, sex workers tended to occupy a secondary position in relation to the wives of intimate partners. The wife-lover dichotomy served to regulate and control women's sexualities while enabling men's fantasies of power over women.

Violence in the market economy

Although the relationship with their lovers provided men a sense of emotional and sexual satisfaction and domination, it also added to their existing financial burden. As noted by Sadanand, a 33-year-old intimate partner who worked as a farmer, taxi driver and land labourer: 'Life runs on money. For everything we need money: school fees, family maintenance, food and so on.' For most intimate partners, the financial pressure to uphold the social responsibilities within their relationships with their lovers and wives was a constant theme that emerged across formal and informal discussions.

To understand the economic challenges of intimate partners, we must contextualize the structures that give rise to men's economic instability. In particular, such precariousness was reflected in the multiple casual jobs that men occupied amid a transforming market economy, as noted below:

Among the lower class and rural families, the women tended to work inside the homes taking care of their children while the men would work as wage labourers in fields or in towns. Unlike the landlords who owned large tracts of land, small landholders do not make enough to support their families. As a result, these men would seek work outside their villages. It was not uncommon to work simultaneously as an agricultural labourer, auto-rickshaw driver, land cutter, bus driver, courier, and so on. (First author fieldnote)

Furthermore, the ability to act as 'provider' was severely undercut within the context of mainstream consumerism in which local configurations of manhood were shaped and negotiated. Among intimate partners, the ability to 'spend' was an important indicator of social status in which men would make sense of masculinity. As noted by 48-year-old motor mechanic, Gagan: 'A real man is generous with his money and spends it on drinking, his friends, his lover and family'.

Such patterns of consumptions also figured into local aesthetics of masculinity. During the first author's visit to the village barbershop for a haircut, posters promoting hair colouring for men and skin whitening cosmetic procedures dominated the wall. Hansaraj, one of the barbers, emphasized that one can judge a man's character based on his physical appearance. Similar sentiments were also echoed by 28-year-old driver Kulik, who reflected on the changing aesthetics of masculinity: 'Women are only impressed by a man who has a vehicle, owns a mobile, wear sunglasses, and dresses well. They will not be interested in us otherwise.' Given the pressures to conform to such ideals, masculinity often manifested in practices of consumption and strategic presentations of the self.

Along with these pressures of conspicuous consumption, the financial strain of providing for both their lover and wife also contributed to the stress and violence in intimate partners' relationships with their lovers. The intimate partners would often describe the FSWs as a reason for their precarious economic state making excessive claims over their economic resources,

My lover always waits for money; she makes plans to get money from me. She asks me for money ... like two thousand for rations and other expenses. I will ask her to manage it from her family members but she does not listen. I lost most of my money to her. (Quamar, 30 years old, band master/painter)

Likewise, Lakhan, a 28-year-old driver, notes: 'She is always in need of money. She asks me to get money when I go to her house. She never stops demanding.' Rahul, a 25-year-old construction worker, similarly said: 'She enquires with my boss how much I earn. If she comes to know I am spending money, she will ask me.'

Between managing their work and their wives' families, the intimate partners often had difficulty providing adequate time to their lovers, which often led to fights. As noted by Connell (2005, p. 117), hegemonic ideas of masculinity are constantly negated by cultural and economic weakness. Given the increasing casualization of labour, the inability of intimate partners to meet the economic and social needs of their lovers was not only an affront to their masculinity but a source of tension within their relationships with their lovers.

Sometimes we will be very busy with our family and work so we cannot go to the lover's house. If we go to the lover's house after 8 or 15 days, she starts shouting and she says I never care about her. Even if I reason with her she still yells at me, and that makes me angry and will lead me to hit her. (Prasham, 36 years old, factory labourer)

Against such pressures, a man who did not perform his function as 'provider' was disqualified as a 'real' man, as characterized by 35 year-old hotel server, Ijay: 'Being a man, we must be able to meet the needs of women. If we fail to do so, she will leave us for another man and people will laugh and call us *Chakka*'.

Although the role of the 'provider' was not an actual figure but an idealized type in the men's narrative, disciplinary mechanisms were still in place not only to enforce and normalize dominant ideas and practices of masculinity but also punish subordinate versions in the process.

Violence: a form of control

As noted above, precarious work conditions and growing practices of consumption undermined men's role as providers and thus troubled their position of power in relationships with women. Given the fraught changes in the pattern of hegemony, intimate relationships therefore became vivid sites where men's frustrations played out, where they attempted to regain a sense of power 'given' by society, through violence. For the intimate partners, violence was a common tool to correct their lover's lack of obedience. In particular, intimate partners often described their partners by employing animal metaphors, which, to them justified the control.

Our ancestors have a saying: 'We have to hit an ox for every corner of the field it moves.' When we beat an ox, it will go in the right line. The same goes for woman. We must beat her sometimes, then she will stay under our control and listen to us. Otherwise she will do whatever comes to her mind. She will go the wrong way. (Neeraf, 45 years old, farmer)

We treat her like an animal because animals eat whatever they want. If we do not beat her when she strays she will do whatever she wants. She must have at least some fear of us. (Dharamveer, 25 years old, tractor driver)

As these narratives show, fear and violence were socially sanctioned tactics used to keep women in line and relegating them to their acceptable roles. Although some men suggested that they had no authority over their lovers because they were not married to them, the financial support and gifts men provided them licensed their sense of expectation and entitlement over their lovers, which further limited women's ability to negotiate the power dynamics in their relationships.

She has to obey me. She should not sleep with other men when I take care of her need. She should be mine. She should wait for me. She should have sex in all the ways that I want. (Fareed, 32 years old, labourer)

If she is found standing and chatting with any other person, then we can beat her. (Gagan, 48 years old, motor mechanic)

Here, Fareed is expressing a feeling of sexual propriety which is further rationalized by Gagan with the use of violence. Similarly, the FSWs expressed feeling constantly monitored and restricted in their daily interactions. 'He beats me if I go anywhere without his permission. He says "If you go out without my permission, I will see you" (Veda, 28, peer educator/sex worker)'. In FGDs, FSWs said that men were highly controlling and suspicious of them – monitoring their mobile phones, text messages, choice of attire and whereabouts. However, the material and emotional support provided by intimate partners increased women's sense of obligation and loyalty towards their partners. Prana, a 38-year old *Devadasi* sex worker, says,

They ask about and meet needs of ours and our children. We are like family to them, like their wife and children. Their caring attitudes enhance more love on them and start to believe this person will protect and secure us.

Arthi, a 28-year-old *Devadasi* sex worker, recounts: 'My boyfriend stabbed me on the thigh when he suspected me of cheating but I'm still with him because he takes care of me.' Like the other women in the group who had been victims of severe physical violence, she had chosen to stay with her intimate partner even after pressing charges against him. Unlike client-based relationships, intimate partnerships are often entangled in new forms of emotional and material reciprocity, which are marked by mutual, albeit uneven, obligations that extend over time (Abraham, 2004; Walle, 2004).

Integral to the subordination of FSWs to men was the larger gendered division of labour that constrained what men and women could do in public and private spaces. As sex workers and lovers of their intimate partners, women had to negotiate between what was considered 'acceptable' work and their relationships. Through physical force, surveillance and a sense of obligation imposed by their intimate partners, these women were sometimes limited in practicing sex work in secret, under the persistent threat of their intimate partner's discovery and punishment. This is further elaborated on by 33-year-old Radhika: 'We have our children and family to think about but the men only think about what they want. He will kill us if he finds out what we do.'

Discussion

As illustrated by our findings, masculinity was enacted and asserted in complex ways to reinforce a fantasy of male power within intimate partnerships with FSWs. This fantasy was often tied to a nostalgia for male domination, one that imagined a time when women were subservient to men and fulfilled their sexual needs. However, against the pressures to provide for multiple relationships and achieve mainstream norms of masculinity, ideals of male power were increasingly difficult to achieve. Violence, then, was a way for men to re-establish a sense of dominance and control, especially when the fantasy of male power and relationships they established became challenged.

Within the context of neoliberalism and emergent forms of economic marginalization on the one hand, and growing consumerism and new configurations of patriarchal relations on the other, the highly contested nature of men's relationships with their lovers demonstrates the contingent, relational and tenuous construction of masculinity that must be accounted for with the help of ethnographic data. Moreover, we cannot understand masculinity without recognizing that it is laden with tensions that at least partially derive from enactments of masculinities themselves – that is, conflicts that replay themselves as men reposition, re-secure and attempt to maintain their hegemonic positions (Chopra et al., 2004; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In response to the alienation men expressed, nostalgic depictions of masculinity were invoked to criticize contemporary forms of masculinity and simultaneously reassert the subordination of women under the guise of 'tradition'. Although the relationships with their lovers provided men with a sense of emotional and erotic satisfaction they did not receive from their wives, men tended to maintain a conceptual distinction between 'my wife' and 'my lover' in order to question the morality of and exert domination over FSWs (Walle, 2004).

On the other hand, the participants' sense of manhood was continually thrown into jeopardy by the economic demands that prevented them from being able to achieve mainstream ideals of masculinity and to act as providers. Under such conditions, the regulation of women's bodies and sexualities, whether through monitoring or the use or threat of violence, was a way for men to ensure their control over women and to fulfil fantasies of male dominance.

Moreover, the fact that not all intimate partners benefited equally from the dividends of hegemonic masculinity further leads to important distinctions to be made between the ideals of masculinity and the men who can actually mobilize these ideals. For instance, the perspectives of intimate partners in working class occupations, who lack the social status that comes with material wealth, reveal the internal contradictions at play within masculinities – *contradictions that expose deep insecurities with respect to their tenuous positioning in manhood*. Future research on masculinity then, instead of viewing men as merely instigators of violence, must account for the ways in which material and social conditions inform men's practices of masculinity and embody specific acts of domination.

Limitations

The first author's reliance on translators for the IDIs is a limitation of the research, as it constrained the ability to spontaneously probe participant narratives. To ensure the overall quality of the research process, we were particularly diligent in double-checking information, and assuring translation accuracy with quality checks by a separate translator. All fieldwork was conducted in the peri-urban areas of Bagalkot, where HIV and social support networks are well established for FSWs, and findings may not be transferable to other settings.

Implications for policy and practice

The lessons learned from the study raise important questions about the limitation of programs that focus solely on FSWs, generally in India and beyond. Future work must not only focus on the democratisation of the gender order, but also how hierarchies of masculinities can be taken into account. This will involve looking at how certain men's social and structural marginalization contributes to their

likelihood of being victims of violence at the hands of other men as well as perpetrating violence against other men and women.

Conclusion

The findings from this study with respect to masculinity underscore that it is crucial to involve men in gender-related programs. Over the last decade, HIV-related programs focussing on sex workers' communities primarily emphasize the individual behaviours, empowerment and mobilization of women who sell sex, and tend to ignore their intimate partnerships. This narrow focus, however, fails to address the roots of sex workers' vulnerability – that is, the forms of gender power inequalities enacted and reinforced by men's attitudes and social practices. Attending to the social and structural realities that shape local ideologies and practices of masculinity is especially important within the context of public health interventions that attempt to address the power dynamics within sexual relationships that limit women's capacity for self-determination and self-protection against unwanted sexual intercourse and HIV. By understanding masculinity as socially constructed, contested and locally-structurally determined, it is possible to challenge the existing hierarchical gender order by engaging men in more egalitarian forms of gender relations and practices (Connell, 1995; Dworkin, 2015; Verma et al., 2006).

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