2025

Formation of Gendered Assumptions in Adolescent Boys

A study in Select Regional Contexts in Telangana

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Acknowledgements

This study was commissioned by Samagra Shiksha, Telangana and was assigned to Professor K. Suneetha Rani, Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad, with financial and technical support from UNICEF, Telangana. We express our sincere gratitude to Sri E.V. Narasimha Reddy, IAS, former State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha, Telangana, for commissioning this study and extending his support at its inception. We are equally grateful to Sri Dr. E. Naveen Nicholas, IAS, present State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha, Telangana, for his continued encouragement in seeing the study through to completion.

We would also like to thank Smt. Radha Reddy, Additional State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha and Sri. P. Rajeev, Joint Director, Samagra Shiksha for their support. We thank Dr. Hazari Sirisha, Gender and KGBV Coordinator, Samagra Shiksha, for her guidance and facilitation during the study. We extend our sincere thanks to the Centre of Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad for their support and guidance throughout the course of this study. We acknowledge the contributions of Mr. Sheshagiri Madhusudhan, Education Specialist, UNICEF, whose insights and support were crucial throughout.

We extend our thanks to the District Education Officers and Gender and Equity Coordinators across the study districts for their cooperation, and to the headmasters, teachers and students of the participating schools for sharing their time and experiences with us. Finally, we wish to acknowledge the efforts of the field enumerators and research team, whose dedication ensured that the voices of adolescent boys were carefully documented.

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Photo taken in a Zilla Parishad High School, Mahabubnagar District

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1.1 Introduction

Socialisation in childhood plays a pivotal role in shaping one's understanding and acceptance of gender. While the foundations of such understanding are laid at home, interactions and instructions at school consolidate these notions. The immediate surroundings and institutional agencies of family, community, education systems, peer groups and media, guide children in choosing their models and images of gender identity. Social, economic, cultural and regional status also contributes to these understandings, producing distinct gender images across contexts.

Patriarchal, phallocentric societies not only prioritise the male child but also actively cultivate courage, dominance and entitlement, while pushing the female child into self-denial and self-hatred. Girls face threats to life and dignity even before birth, through practices of sex selection and female foeticide, and continue to encounter systemic discrimination throughout their lives. Boys, in contrast, are taught to assume power, assertion and ownership. In this process, genders often turn against one another: men through self-assertion and women through self-denial. Violence against women is not only perpetrated but also normalised, as patriarchal institutions grant men the authority to discipline and punish women in both public and private spheres.

Although gender socialisation begins in early childhood, adolescence marks a crucial stage of consolidation. During these years, educational spaces, peer interactions, media exposure, hormonal changes and the desire for individuality intensify and complicate the making of gender identities. Interacting with adolescent boys in schools therefore provides critical insights into the making of masculinity and femininity. Boys are not only "men in the making" but also active designers of gendered images of the self and the other. Understanding how adolescent boys construct masculinities inevitably sheds light on the femininities that accompany these constructions, offering a window into how self-image, ideals and punishable deviations are produced.

This study engages with adolescent boys between the ages of 11 – 17 studying in select government schools in Telangana. Telangana's cultural specificities, regional variations and caste-based and class-based social identities of respondents make it an important context to examine. Exploring gender formation among boys in such diverse settings and intersectionalities, allows us to understand both the similarities and differences in the construction of gender inequalities, and how these may contribute to gender-based violence.

Against the backdrop of increasing gendered violence in India, it becomes crucial to examine how aggressive masculinities are formed and reinforced in adolescence. Identifying the agencies and factors that position such masculinities as the ideal can offer pathways to prevention and to the achievement of gender equality, mutual respect and healthier gender interactions. While most adolescents conform to assigned identities, some struggle with expectations, facing ridicule for failing to "perform" masculinity in expected ways. Prioritisation of the male gender, subordination of the female, and ridicule of other genders together contribute to a gender order built on violence. While public and private spaces tend to be neatly divided between genders, the COVID-19 pandemic further added another layer of complexity with public life suspended and the home becoming the only space of gendered interaction. This period revealed both reinforcement and disruption of gender roles, raising questions about whether shifts in domestic dynamics might transform broader gender relations.

This study thus seeks to examine the images, models, factors and influences that shape adolescent boys' ideas of gender, their self-identity, their perceptions of women and other genders and their expectations in gendered interactions.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study examines a crucial phase of life when adolescent boys consolidate gendered identities and internalise gender hierarchies, by tracing the everyday processes through which such violence becomes normalised in the first place. The construction of masculinity is deeply tied to the construction of femininity, producing oppositional binaries that underpin inequalities and often violence. Understanding the process of how boys learn to be men, how they interpret femininity and how these interpretations shape their interactions with peers, families and communities is central to designing interventions that disrupt the roots of gender-based violence rather than merely responding to its outcomes.

In Telangana, these questions take on particular urgency. The state's government schools bring together children from highly diverse social and cultural locations. Many students come from families negotiating displacement, economic insecurity and shifting aspirations, while others are embedded in contexts where community honour, gender segregation and traditional norms strongly shape everyday life. The study foregrounds how markers such as caste, class, religion and region intersect with gender to produce distinctive yet overlapping masculinities. This intersectional lens is crucial, for it resists the temptation to

treat “the adolescent boy” as a universal figure and instead highlights the many ways in which boys’ lives are fractured by inequality.

The findings of this study contribute both to academic debates on gender performativity and masculinities and to the design of practical interventions. They demonstrate that classrooms, families and peer groups function as key sites where gendered norms are reinforced by silencing boys’ emotional expression, policing girls’ behaviour and valorising aggression over vulnerability. Schools, through hidden curricula and everyday practices, emerge as active participants in this process rather than neutral spaces. These dynamics underscore the need for policymakers and educators to move beyond one-off sensitisation programmes towards sustained efforts that engage with how boys are socialised to think, feel and act as gendered subjects. Recognising boys’ own vulnerabilities shaped by caste, class and media cultures provides critical entry points for preventing gender-based violence and fostering more equitable social relations.

At a broader level, the study highlights the importance of recognising boys’ vulnerabilities, ranging from struggles with anger and shame to the internalisation of caste hierarchies and exposure to hyper-masculine media cultures, as integral to understanding gendered socialisation. Acknowledging these dynamics does not justify harmful behaviours but offers pathways for prevention and transformation. The significance of the study lies in reframing gender equality as a collective social project: by foregrounding the voices of adolescent boys in Telangana, it provides insights that can inform curriculum reform, teacher education, community engagement and policy initiatives aimed at dismantling rigid constructions of masculinity and advancing gender justice.

1.3 Identification of the Research Gap

Most discussions of gender in India highlight the vulnerability of girls and women focusing on school dropouts, child marriage, sexual harassment and domestic violence. While these are urgent and critical issues, there is comparatively little attention paid to the making of the male subject who occupies the other side of this equation. Boys, often seen only as potential perpetrators or as future breadwinners, are rarely studied in their own right. This invisibility is not benign as it reinforces the idea that boys’ socialisation is natural, inevitable and unworthy of scrutiny. This study challenges that silence by showing that boys, too, are learners of gender, shaped by the contradictions of care, control, authority and vulnerability.

While adolescence, gender and education have been studied in varied contexts, most studies are located outside India or focus solely on girls' education. In the Indian context, post-Nirbhaya the scholarship has concentrated on gender-based violence, women's vulnerability and prevention, but the roots of aggressive masculinity in childhood and adolescence remain underexplored. Research on gender and education often reduces to enrolment ratios, dropout rates and facilities, with limited attention to the formation of oppositional gender binaries in adolescence.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on adolescent boys in government schools in Telangana, offering a profile that is often missing in gender research. It foregrounds how cultural specificities, caste and class identities and regional variations shape boys' understandings of masculinity, femininity and gender order.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To understand how adolescent boys in Telangana construct their views of masculinity and femininity.
- To examine the different forces that shape these views, including family, school, peers, community, language, tradition and region.
- To explore how broader historical, social, economic and cultural contexts mould boys' gender identities.
- To investigate how the existing gender order links masculinity with control and aggression, contributing to gender-based violence.

1.5 Research Questions

In order to address the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated. These questions guided the data collection and analysis, focusing on the processes through which adolescent boys construct and negotiate their gender identities:

1. How do social and cultural surroundings of adolescent boys, including family, peers, schools and community, influence how they formulate gender identities?

2. In what ways does their understanding of masculinity shape their interactions at home, at educational institutions and in public spaces with people of their own and other genders?
3. What roles, images or models are made available to them, or chosen by them, as they attempt to mould themselves into "masculine men"?
4. What kinds of pressures and expectations push adolescent boys toward asserting aggressive forms of masculinities?
5. What are their expectations of other genders, and how do these expectations contribute to patterns of gendered violence, including against women and transgender people?
6. Does the dominant masculine model repress on adolescent boys themselves, leading to frustration, anger and violent behaviour?
7. How do boys come to perceive women's bodies as hypersexualised, docile or available, and how does this perception fuel desire, aggression and conflict?
8. How does gendered language at home, in school and in peer groups, contribute to the construction of masculinities during adolescence?

Chapter 2:
Theoretical Frameworks and Methodology

2.1 Review of Literature

Adolescence is recognised as a socially constructed stage of life in which gendered identities are consolidated and hierarchies internalised. Research demonstrates that this phase is not merely biological but shaped by discourses, expectations and cultural practices. For example, Aapola (1997) shows how adolescence is narrated differently for boys and girls, producing divergent expectations of maturity and behaviour. Similarly, Martin (1996) illustrates how puberty intensifies gendered understandings, while MacLean et al. (2010) highlight how stereotypes around health and emotional expression deepen gender asymmetries from childhood into adolescence. Together, these studies stress the importance of adolescence as a moment when social norms harden into lived practice.

The study of masculinities offers a related body of scholarship that interrogates how boys come to embody, resist or negotiate gender roles. Chopra, Osella, and Osella (2004) explore both continuities and changes in South Asian gender orders, while Fouten (2010) highlights how marginalised boys in South Africa construct masculinities under conditions of inequality. Gelfer (2013) further demonstrates how globalisation shapes young men's identities. In the Indian context, Kumar (2001) argues that examining how boys are socialised is crucial to understanding the broader condition of women, while Gundi and Subramanyam (2020) provide insights into boys' confusion and curiosity regarding menstruation. Collectively, this literature underscores that masculinities are neither uniform nor static; they are produced within particular social, cultural and historical contexts.

Schools and peer cultures have been identified as particularly significant spaces where gender is reproduced. Hoglund (2007) shows how gendered responses to peer victimisation shape early adolescent school functioning, while Musto (2019) demonstrates how school processes reproduce social inequalities and reinforce gendered hierarchies of achievement. Menon and Nayar (2015) further illustrate how classroom practices, hidden curricula and peer relationships regulate what counts as "acceptable" masculinities and femininities. These studies demonstrate that the school is not a neutral space of learning but an institution that actively shapes gendered identities and reinforces wider structures of inequality.

A smaller set of intervention-focused studies indicates possibilities for change. Gupta and Santhya (2020), for instance, find that boys may be receptive to alternative models of gender at specific points in adolescence, suggesting windows of opportunity for transformative engagement. Such research highlights

that gendered subjectivities are not fixed, and that interventions during adolescence can disrupt cycles of inequality and violence.

Despite this expanding body of work, significant gaps remain. Much of the global literature on adolescence and masculinity is located outside India, while Indian research has tended to focus more on the vulnerabilities of girls – dropout rates, early marriage, sexual violence – than on the processes through which boys learn and perform gender. The scholarship post-Nirbhaya has rightly emphasised women's safety and gender-based violence, but comparatively less attention has been paid to the making of the male subject and the everyday ways in which masculinity is normalised. Even where boys are studied, the focus is often statistical (enrolment, dropout, facilities) rather than interpretive, leaving unexamined the lived experiences through which binary notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed.

This study seeks to address these gaps by focusing on adolescent boys in government schools in Telangana. By situating boys' narratives within their family, school and peer contexts, and by attending to caste, class, religion and regional variations, it aims to produce a textured account of how gender assumptions are formed and sustained. In doing so, it builds on existing theoretical and empirical work while contributing a context-specific analysis of the everyday making of masculinities in India.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

This study draws on four interrelated theoretical perspectives that together provide the conceptual scaffolding for analysing adolescent boys' understandings of gender.

Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity highlights that gender is not an innate identity but something repeatedly enacted through gestures, practices and interactions (Butler, 1990). Masculinity and femininity are thus constituted through performance and policing rather than biology. In this study, Butler's framework illuminates how adolescent boys in Telangana "do gender" in everyday life, for example refusing household chores coded as feminine or using anger and aggression as visible performances of masculinity.

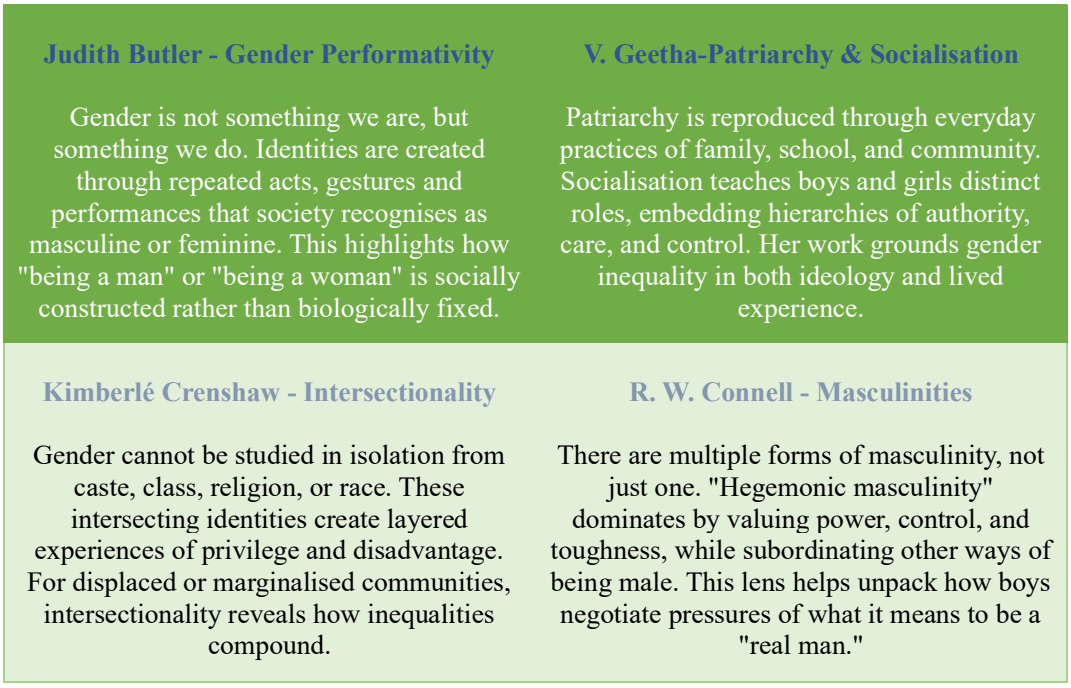

Figure 1. Theoretical Frameworks Used in the Study

Building on this, R. W. Connell's theory of multiple masculinities underscores how one dominant form of masculinity that is hegemonic masculinity legitimises men's power over women while subordinating other masculinities, such as those shaped by caste, class or non-heteronormative identities (Connell, 1995). This is particularly useful for interpreting boys' narratives about protecting their sisters, ridiculing peers as "weak" or "girlish," and valorising aggression as strength. Connell's emphasis on plurality also allows the analysis to recognise resistant or alternative masculinities that surfaced in the field data.

While Butler and Connell provide global theoretical anchors, V. Geetha's analysis of patriarchy and gender socialisation in India situates these processes in the South Asian context (Geetha, 2002). She demonstrates how patriarchy is reproduced through every day cultural practices, family arrangements and customs that naturalise men's authority and women's subordination. This lens helps to make sense of boys' accounts of family honour, gendered codes of behaviour and rigid divisions of labour within the specific social and cultural structures of Telangana.

Finally, Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality reminds us that gender is always experienced in relation to other axes of identity (Crenshaw, 1989). In India, caste, class, religion and regional location are critical. This framework is essential for understanding variations across field sites. Intersectionality ensures

that the "adolescent boy" is not treated as a universal figure but as someone whose gendered experience is fractured and stratified by layered inequalities.

Together, these four perspectives provide a multidimensional lens: Butler foregrounds gender as performance, Connell highlights hierarchies among masculinities, Geetha grounds the analysis in Indian patriarchal structures and Crenshaw draws attention to intersecting inequalities. In combination, they enable this study to view adolescent boys not simply as potential perpetrators of gender-based violence but as subjects whose lives are shaped by social structures, performances and contradictions of gender.

2.3 Methodology

This section outlines the design and sampling strategies employed, the tools and processes of data collection and the procedures followed for data analysis. It also details the ethical principles that guided the study, ensuring that the voices of participants were recorded with sensitivity, confidentiality and respect, as well as acknowledges the limitations of the study.

2.3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative, exploratory design to interrogate the processes through which adolescent boys in Telangana constitute and articulate their gendered subjectivities. A qualitative orientation was considered particularly appropriate, as it allows for depth, contextual specificity and the interpretive dimensions of meaning-making that are obscured in positivist or survey-based approaches.

The methodological orientation of the study was informed by feminist research paradigms (Oakley, 1981; Harding, 1987), which foreground ethics of care, reflexivity and the dismantling of hierarchical researcher–researched relations. Feminist epistemologies emphasise the importance of recognising the power asymmetries inherent in adult–child encounters and the necessity of attending to participants' voices not merely as data points but as situated knowledges. This orientation shaped the study's insistence on centring adolescent boys' narratives as a way of challenging the silences and normative assumptions that have historically rendered them visible only as potential perpetrators or as unmarked beneficiaries of patriarchy.

In addition, the research design was guided by child-sensitive principles, recognising children and adolescents as actors with evolving capacities. Interview protocols were deliberately adapted to age-appropriate registers and conducted in familiar environments to minimise intimidation. Agency was foregrounded by allowing respondents to decline questions, suspend participation or articulate responses through non-verbal registers such as silence, gesture or affective display.

Elements of participatory research methodology were incorporated, most notably through the use of culturally resonant visual prompts to catalyse reflection. These techniques facilitated a dialogic encounter in which participants could externalise gendered assumptions and reflect on them obliquely, thereby displacing the pressures of self-disclosure and enabling richer insights.

The research process was also underpinned by a commitment to reflexivity. Enumerators maintained detailed field notes that captured not only participants' responses but also their own affective reactions, positionalities and the dynamics of interaction. Reflexivity thus functioned as a methodological tool for interrogating the co-construction of knowledge in the field and for recognising the ways in which researcher subjectivities mediate data production.

2.3.2 Sampling and Participants

The study population comprised adolescent boys enrolled in government schools in Telangana, specifically those in Grades 8, 9 and 10, and aged between 11 and 17 years. Government schools were chosen as the field of study because they cater to children from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, thereby offering an appropriate site to examine the intersection of gender with caste, class, religion and region.

A multi-stage sampling strategy was adopted, combining purposive and random selection. At the first stage, five districts were purposively chosen to reflect the state's social and cultural diversity:

- Adilabad, representing tribal communities;
- Mahabubnagar, representing rural areas with significant migrant populations;
- Hyderabad, representing urban and minority populations;
- Hanumakonda and Mulugu (treated as a single unit), representing semi-urban contexts and displaced populations.

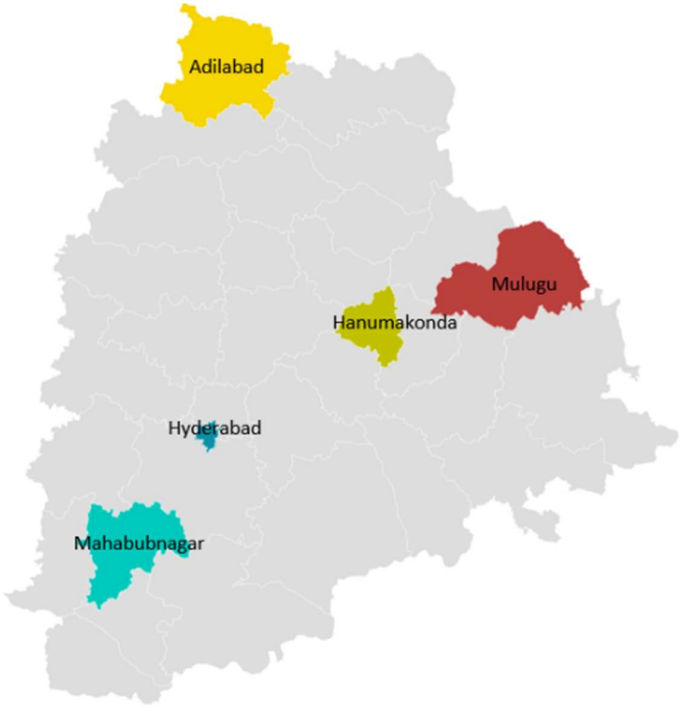

Figure 2. Map of Telangana Showing Selected Districts

At the second stage, 40 government schools (10 from each district) were selected, with the inclusion criterion of a minimum enrolment of 50 students to ensure adequate diversity and scope for random selection within schools.

At the third stage, a minimum of six and a maximum of fifteen boys were randomly selected from each school, depending on the enumerators' presence and the availability of time. This approach allowed for both logistical feasibility and representational diversity across schools.

In total, 345 boys were interviewed. After data cleaning, which involved the removal of incomplete or unusable interviews, 327 interviews were retained for final analysis. This sample represents a cross-section of adolescent boys from varied social locations across Telangana, ensuring that the findings are grounded in the diversity of contexts that shape gender socialisation in the state.

2.3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data collection was undertaken primarily through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted within school settings. This format enabled the generation of data around pre-identified themes while simultaneously allowing space for

participants to resist, redirect, or elaborate beyond the interview schedule. Such an approach was critical in engaging adolescents, whose articulations of self and gender are often fragmented, emergent, and situated. All interviews were carried out in person within school premises, ensuring familiarity and accessibility for the participants. Each session lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, allowing adequate time for boys to articulate their experiences, perceptions and reflections on gender.

The fieldwork spanned from December to mid-March 2025. All interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent, supplemented by detailed field notes maintained by enumerators. These notes captured non-verbal cues, contextual observations and reflections that could not be fully conveyed through audio recordings alone. Enumerators also maintained reflexive journals throughout the process, documenting their own positionalities, impressions, and challenges in the field. This reflexive practice helped strengthen the reliability of the data while acknowledging the interpretive role of researchers.

The combination of recorded narratives, detailed field notes and reflexive journaling provided a rich and layered dataset, enabling both descriptive analysis and interpretive insights into the formation of gender assumptions among adolescent boys.

2.3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data was guided primarily by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis. All 327 interviews were transcribed and coded line by line to identify recurring patterns, sub-themes and counter-narratives. The process included:

1. Familiarisation with data through repeated reading and transcription.
2. Generating initial codes across all responses.
3. Searching for themes by clustering codes into broader categories.
4. Reviewing and refining themes against the full dataset.
5. Defining and naming themes to ensure conceptual clarity.
6. Producing a narrative account linking themes to the research questions.

In addition to thematic analysis, discourse analysis was applied to examine how boys spoke, paying attention not only to the content of responses but also to silences, contradictions and the language used. This helped reveal social scripts

of masculinity, patriarchy and gender order that shaped adolescent boys' self-expression. The analytic process was reflexive and iterative. Grounded, feminist principles of research informed coding decisions, ensuring that children's voices were central, while also attending to the wider social, cultural and institutional contexts influencing them.

2.3.6 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the study, multiple safeguards were incorporated. Prior approval and support were obtained from Samagra Shiksha and the Department of School Education. At the field level, consent was sought from school authorities, and assent was obtained from all participating students. Participation was strictly voluntary, and students could withdraw at any point.

Enumerators followed child-sensitive principles, including ensuring privacy during interviews, using language appropriate to the age group, and adopting a non-judgmental stance. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising all data, and care was taken not to reproduce any identifiable details in transcripts or the final report. Enumerators were trained on ethical conduct, sensitivity in handling disclosures and maintaining consistency in approach across schools. Reflexive field notes were also maintained to critically reflect on researcher influence during data collection.

2.3.7 Limitations

As a qualitative study, the findings offer depth of insight rather than statistical generalisability. While the dataset of 327 interviews is substantial, intersectional aspects could not always be fully explored given the sample spread and representation. Further, responses were shaped by the school setting, which may have constrained some students from speaking openly about sensitive issues. Despite these limitations, the study provides rich evidence of how adolescent boys in Telangana construct and perform gender identities, and it opens avenues for future mixed-methods research to build on these insights.

Chapter 3:
Introduction to the Field and Observations

3.1 Field Context and Demographic Profile

This study was conducted across five diverse districts of Telangana, which together provide a composite view of the varied environments in which adolescent boys construct their understandings of gender. The boys interviewed were primarily in Grades 8 and 9, with a very small number in Grade 10. In terms of age, the sample covered boys between 11 and 17 years, with the highest concentration at 14 years, followed by 15 years. This distribution reflects the typical age profile of middle and high school students in government schools.

Table 1: Grade Distribution of Respondents

Grade	Number of Boys
Grade 8	155
Grade 9	164
Grade 10	8

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Number of Boys
11-year-olds	4
12-year-olds	9
13-year-olds	43
14-year-olds	121
15-year-olds	91
16-year-olds	43
17-year-olds	16

The caste composition of the sample showed a predominance of Backward Class, followed by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. With respect to religion, the majority identified as Hindu, followed by Muslim and Christian, and a negligible section made up the remaining.

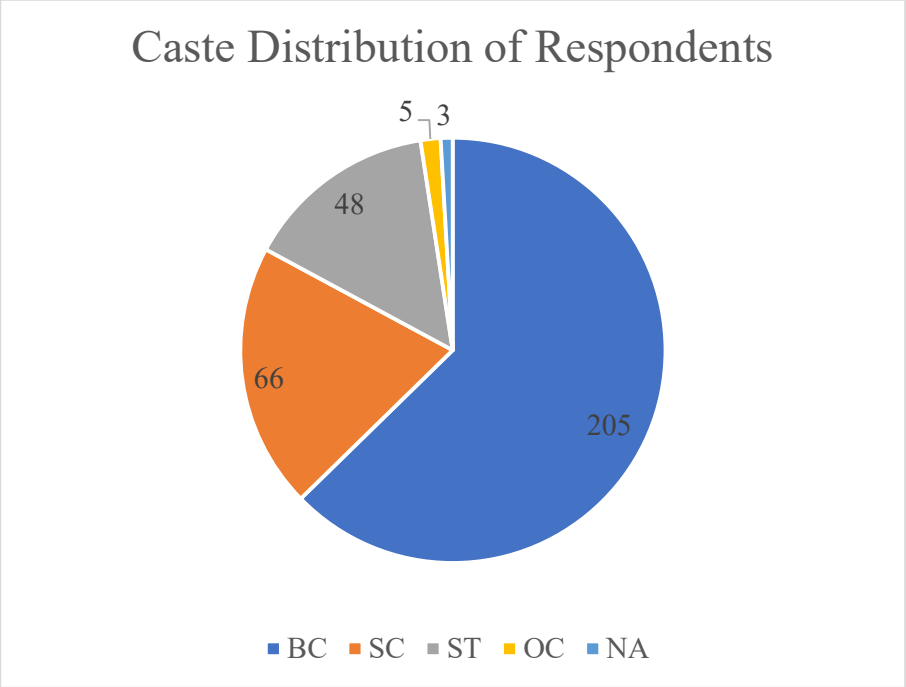

Figure 3. Caste Distribution of Respondents

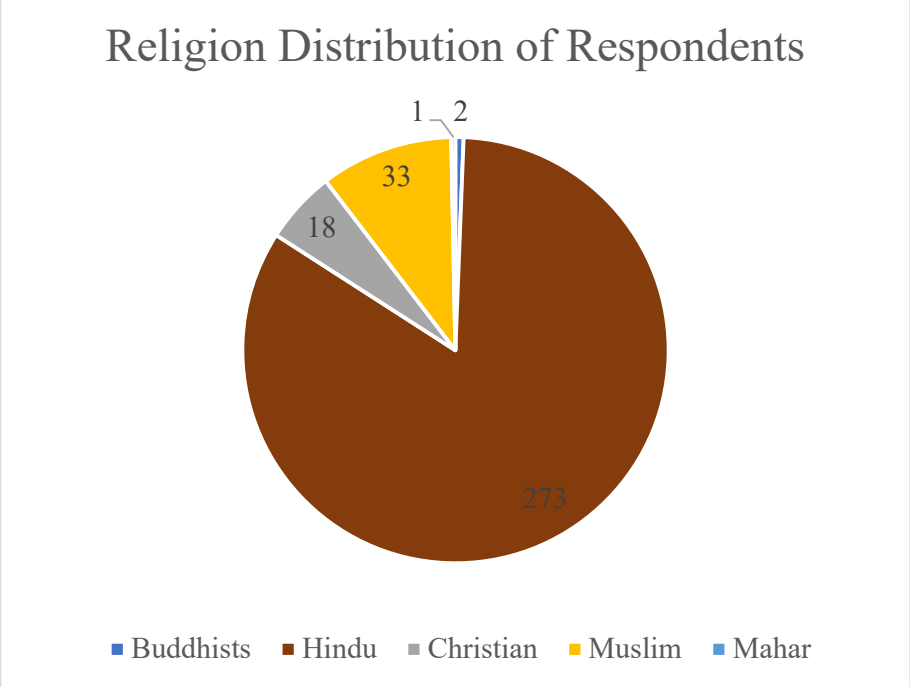

Figure 4. Religion Distribution of Respondents

Taken together, these demographic patterns highlight the heterogeneous social background of respondents providing a rich ground for exploring how adolescent boys negotiate gender in multiple and intersecting contexts.

3.2 Family Demographics

Alongside individual demographic profiles, the study also mapped key aspects of living conditions and respondents' family backgrounds to better situate their everyday social contexts.

While 272 boys resided at home, a smaller section of 55 boys stayed in hostels.

Out of the 327 families, 236 families reported owning at least one vehicle, most commonly motorbikes, whereas 91 families did not own any vehicles.

306 families own mobile phones, whereas 22 families do not own mobile phones. Out of this, 99 boys reported having their own phones. Overall, this indicates a very high spread of digital access.

Educational attainment of parents revealed stark inequalities. About 31% of mothers and 27% of fathers were reported to be illiterate. In addition, a significant proportion of boys (14% for mothers; 12% for fathers) stated that they did not know their parents' educational qualifications. For those who did, most mothers' education clustered around Grade 10, while fathers were more likely to have completed Grade 10 or intermediate education.

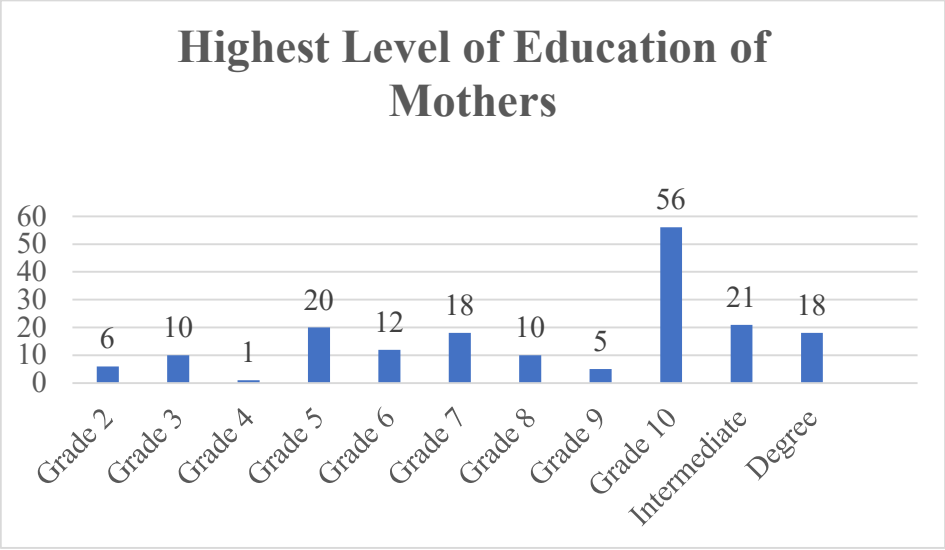

Figure 5. Highest Level of Education of Mothers

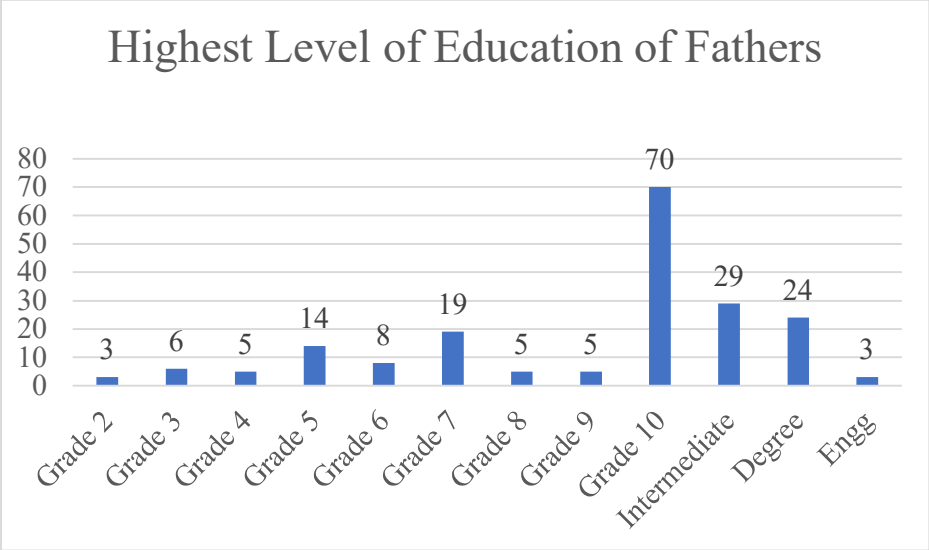

Figure 6. Highest Level of Education of Fathers

In terms of occupation, mothers were most frequently employed as farmers, daily wage labourers or in informal services such as tailoring, cooking or domestic work. A smaller number worked in shops, government-linked roles such as ASHA workers or as teachers. However, 31% were not engaged in paid work outside the home and were full-time homemakers.

Table 3: Job Profiles of Mothers

Job Profiles of Mothers	**Number**
Farmer	64
Daily Wage Labourer	52
House Help / Domestic Maid	23
Tailor, Dhobi and Cook	30
Shopkeeper / Vegetable Seller	15
Office help: cleaning (bank, petrol bunk, salon, hostel, hotel etc)	10
Beedi Worker	10
Govt. ASHA worker, GHMC worker, hospital staff, bus helper	9
Teacher	7
Cattle Rearing	3

Fathers' work also reflected low-income, labour-intensive profiles. They were concentrated in farming, daily wage labour and service roles such as office help or skilled trades like carpentry and electrical work. Smaller groups were drivers, auto drivers or engaged in business. A minority of 7% fathers were unemployed.

Table 4: Job Profiles of Fathers

Job Profiles of Fathers	**Number**
Farmer	70
Daily Wage Labourer	58
Office help: office boy, cleaning, helper etc	52
Barber / Electrician / Carpenter / Mastri	35
Driver	32
Auto Driver	24
Business	11
Cook	6
Watchman	6
Cattle Rearing	6
Teacher	3

This background information highlights the intergenerational transmission of educational opportunities, the influence of parental occupations in shaping household stability, and the persistence of economic precarity, alongside the growing but uneven spread of digital access. These contextual factors are critical to interpret how boys' gendered worldviews are shaped by their families' educational levels, livelihoods, and everyday resources.

3.3 Field Research Team and Training

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken by a team of five field researchers. The field researchers came from were diverse in age, background and gender, and were carefully selected for their prior exposure to social sciences, gender issues

and experience working with children. This diversity and experience equipped them to engage sensitively and effectively with adolescent boys across different regional and cultural contexts.

Training of the field team was structured in two stages. The process began with an introductory orientation session, which introduced the objectives of the study, ethical guidelines and protocols for engaging with schools. This was followed by a three-day intensive in-person training programme held at the Department of School Education, Samagra Shiksha, Telangana.

The training sessions covered:

- Familiarisation with research instruments (semi-structured questionnaires, prompts and visual aids).
- Child protection protocols and safeguarding measures.
- Practice through mock interviews and role-plays, enabling enumerators to refine interviewing skills and build confidence.
- A pilot exercise conducted in a local government high school, which provided hands-on experience and feedback for further refinement of tools and approach.

Throughout the data collection, the team followed a standardised field protocol. This included approaching school principals and headmasters for permissions, obtaining informed child assent and conducting interviews in a consistent manner. The protocol placed particular emphasis on sensitivity, ethics and confidentiality, ensuring that all interactions respected the dignity and comfort of the respondents.

This combination of preparatory training, field piloting and adherence to standardised procedures enhanced the reliability, ethical rigour and quality of the data generated in this study.

3.4 Observations from the Field

This section captures the field researchers' direct observations recorded during data collection, as well as based on their field notes. These are not structured interview responses but contextual notes on the school environment, classroom interactions, respondent behaviours and broader community dynamics. Such reflections provide important background for interpreting the boys' narratives, as they reveal the everyday atmospheres, challenges and informal cues that shaped the interview process and the kinds of answers given.

3.4.1 School and Classroom Contexts

Fieldwork revealed strong patterns of gender segregation within schools. In most settings, boys and girls were seated in separate rows or in entirely separate classrooms, with very limited interaction permitted between them. Teachers often discouraged cross-gender communication, creating an atmosphere of discomfort and fear around such exchanges. In some schools, symbolic practices reinforced divisions, such as girls being asked to tie rakhi to boys, positioning them as "sisters" and boys as protectors. While boys tended to remain quiet within classrooms, they were noticeably more articulate and forthcoming in interviews.

3.4.2 Family Contexts

Many respondents came from households marked by paternal alcoholism, strictness or absence of fathers in parenting, and is some causes due to death or separation. These circumstances profoundly shaped boys' attitudes toward family roles and emotional expression. Mothers often emerged as central figures and role models, particularly in families where fathers were absent or abusive. However, mothers too reinforced gender norms, discouraging sons from performing household chores and emphasizing male authority. In some cases, boys assumed significant responsibilities, such as managing household work majorly when female family members were unavailable. Sibling dynamics were complex: while many boys expressed protectiveness toward sisters, they also displayed controlling behaviours, often restricting their sisters' mobility and friendships.

3.4.3 Family Honour and Role Models

Questions around family honour elicited silences, nods or confusion from many respondents, suggesting that the concept was not easily articulated but remained influential. A few associated honour with girls' behaviour, mobility or education, echoing patriarchal norms. Role models within families varied: where fathers were aggressive or absent, mothers were seen as resilient heads of households; yet the gendered division of labour persisted. Some boys admired mothers despite recognising inequalities, such as women being paid less for the same work as men.

3.4.4 Socialisation and Interactions with Girls

Interaction with girls was widely marked by shyness, embarrassment or fear of being mocked. Many boys avoided eye contact, smiled nervously or laughed when asked about friendships or qualities of girls. Teasing was common wherein boys who spoke to girls risked being labelled with derogatory terms or ridiculed by peers. In rare cases, boys mentioned playing together with girls, but these were exceptions. Some reported boasting (e.g., about rejecting a proposal in earlier classes) as a way of asserting masculinity.

3.4.5 Perceptions of "Good" and "Bad"

Responses to questions about "good" and "bad" boys and girls were marked by discomfort, confusion or nervous laughter. The criteria offered reflected moral and gendered judgments: boys leaving shirts unbuttoned were labelled "bad," while girls who wore jeans or "modern" clothes were considered "bad" but those wearing no makeup, braiding their hair and covering their bodies were "good." These assessments highlighted rigid stereotypes and anxieties around moral behaviour.

3.4.6 Gendered Roles, Leisure and Emotions

Household roles were strongly divided: boys claimed that men should earn while women should cook, and that cleaning vessels or sweeping was inappropriate for boys. Gendered norms extended to leisure as well where certain sports and games were coded as exclusively male or female.
Emotional expression revealed a striking pattern: anger was commonly expressed through physical acts like punching walls, shouting or physically violent behaviours. Sadness and fear were rarely admitted openly, and when discussed, it was often reluctantly linked to experiences of family conflict. Some boys described strategies like counting numbers to manage their anger.

3.4.7 Peer Influence and Community Norms

Peers played a significant role in reinforcing gender expectations. Boys reported being mocked with girls' names or pressured to demonstrate toughness. Friendship circles were described as close-knit, but also spaces where expressing fear or sadness was ridiculed. Community norms further reinforced double

standards: boys enjoyed freedom of mobility, while girls' movements were restricted under the guise of safety or honour. Some boys expressed overtly protective attitudes toward sisters, but these often translated into controlling behaviour.

3.4.8 Media and Cultural References

Films, television and mobile gaming emerged as powerful influences. Hyper-masculine film heroes were frequently admired, with boys adopting their mannerisms and language. Some reported being deeply attached to television serials that they watched with their mothers. Mobile gaming was particularly widespread and often associated with competition, aggression and male bonding. A few boys avoided media altogether, citing religious reasons and career aspirations.

3.4.9 Gender Spectrum and Transgender Identities

Understanding of transgender identities was limited, often marked by discomfort, avoidance or ridicule. Some boys expressed support for transgender rights, while others repeated stereotypical views or used derogatory terms. Explanations were sometimes attributed to "hormonal changes" without deeper understanding. Overall, awareness and acceptance were minimal, reflecting broader societal prejudices.

3.4.10 Sensitive Topics: Menstruation, Body Image and Self-Perception

Questions on menstruation were often met with embarrassment, irritation or silence, though a few spoke openly. Body shaming was a recurring theme, with peers mocking boys for being "black," "short," "fat," or "soft-voiced." These experiences were painful where in one instance, a boy admitted feeling depressed after repeated ridicule. When asked why they valued being boys, many highlighted independence, freedom of movement and protection from risks faced by girls, such as sexual violence. Some boys expressed curiosity about adornments and behaviours associated with girls but ultimately reaffirmed pride in being male.

3.4.11 Enumerator Reflections

Enumerators noted that many boys displayed nervousness or reluctance during interviews, avoiding eye contact or responding with minimal answers. Others, however, were animated and enthusiastic, often eager to continue talking beyond the formal interview. Shifts in expression from sarcasm to sadness or irritation, frequently accompanied sensitive questions. These behaviours underscored how social context, peer dynamics and cultural taboos shaped boys' willingness to articulate views on gender.

3.5 Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

The composition of the field team was intentionally diverse, spanning differences of gender, age, social location and prior professional experience. This diversity shaped the fieldwork in important ways. With four women and one man, the team brought varied perspectives on how gender is expressed and negotiated in everyday life. The presence of both younger researchers in their late twenties and more senior researchers with many years of grassroots experience ensured a balance between fresh perspectives and seasoned insights into community dynamics. Team members also came from distinct social identities, cultural and religious backgrounds, including minority identities, which enriched the sensitivity with which questions were framed and responses interpreted.

This heterogeneity required the team to remain reflexive about their own positionality in relation to respondents. The fact that interviews were conducted by adults of different ages and genders influenced boys' comfort levels, shaping the degree of openness or hesitation in their responses. For instance, certain sensitive topics provoked laughter, silence or shyness that may have been linked to the presence of a female interviewer, while in other cases familiarity with local contexts fostered trust and candidness. The research process was therefore not neutral as it was mediated through the social positions and identities of the enumerators.

By foregrounding reflexivity, the study acknowledges that the data gathered is co-produced through these interactions. Rather than treating such dynamics as bias, the project views them as part of the research process, adding depth to the analysis and allowing for a more nuanced understanding of adolescent boys' negotiations of gender.

Chapter 4:
Findings and Analysis

4.1 Thematic Analysis

This chapter presents the core findings from the study and is organised into 13 themes that reflect the multiple spaces where boys learn, negotiate and reproduce gendered meanings from the household and school to friendships, peer culture, aspirations and everyday practices. Each theme is structured uniformly, beginning with a short overview, followed by patterns observed in the responses, interpretive insights into the construction of gender ideas and identities, along with a frequency analysis wherever possible.

Table 5. List of Themes and their Descriptions

Name of the Theme	**Description**
1. Family Dynamics and Household Responsibilities	Examines household roles, responsibilities and patterns of authority.
2. Sibling Relationships	Explores relationships, interactions and perceived fairness between siblings.
3. Friendships	Understand how friendships shape trust, influence and negotiation of gender boundaries.
4. Emotions	Captures how masculinity is closely intertwined with expression of emotional vulnerability and restrictions.
5. Gender Identities	Understanding the social construction of masculine and feminine identities.
6. Aspirations and Role Models	Examines future ambitions and the figures shaping these aspirations.
7. Participation in School Activities	Focuses on boys' interest and engagement in academics, activities and relationships within school.
8. Family Honour	Explores boys' views on how honour and reputation are tied to family behaviour.
9. Menstruation	Captures boys' perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes around menstruation.
10. Use of Phones and Social Media Content Consumption	Captures how boys use mobile phones, including the kinds of content they consume and their everyday
11. Movies	Looks at how films shape and reinforce ideas of gender, relationships, and aspirations.
12. Responses to Images	Probes immediate reactions to visual stimuli related to gender roles.
13. Transgenders	Investigates boys' attitudes and understanding of transgender persons.

While the themes are presented separately, they are not discrete. Everyday experiences of family life, peer interactions and schooling overlap and reinforce each other in shaping how boys understand gender. To capture these overlaps, the chapter concludes with a cross-thematic analysis that synthesises recurring and divergent patterns, highlighting broader cultural scripts, contradictions and counter-signals that cut across domains. Together, the thematic and cross-thematic analyses provide a textured account of how adolescent masculinities are formed, sustained and occasionally challenged.

Theme 1: Family Dynamics and Household Responsibilities

The family home is the earliest and most influential space where boys encounter gendered expectations. It is within the rhythms of daily life entailing who makes decisions, who does the cooking, who expresses anger, and who receives care etc., that abstract ideas of masculinity and femininity are translated into lived lessons. These household practices are not neutral routines but powerful social scripts that shape how boys come to understand authority, responsibility and emotional expression.

Exploring boys' perspectives on family roles reveals how gender identities are quietly produced and reinforced long before adolescence. The stories they tell of fathers as decision-makers, mothers as caregivers or siblings negotiating responsibilities illuminate how the household becomes both a site of social reproduction and a training ground for boys' own gendered selves. By examining these reflections, this theme captures the intimate processes through which patriarchal norms are absorbed, questioned or contested in everyday family life.

1. Household Labour

This section examines how adolescent boys understand and engage with household labour, including daily chores, sibling responsibilities, festival work and the justifications offered for gendered divisions. Across narratives, housework is consistently feminised, with mothers and sisters bearing the bulk of responsibility, while boys' contributions are framed as irregular "help." These dynamics shape how boys internalise entitlement, detachment and a sense that masculinity is defined in opposition to domestic work.

- **Chore Distribution – Cooking, Cleaning and Daily Chores:** Boys overwhelmingly described mothers as responsible for cooking, cleaning and other daily routines. Fathers were absent in these accounts. Boys rarely

participated and when they did, it was framed as "help," often only when asked. Even when mothers worked outside the home, their domestic workload was taken for granted, with boys recognising but not questioning the imbalance. Some explicitly stated that doing chores was "not boys' work" and feared ridicule for trying.

- **Sibling Participation in Chores:** Sisters were consistently expected to sweep, cook and care for younger siblings, while brothers were not. Boys described their own contributions as optional, even when older than sisters and noted that sisters were more strictly disciplined for failing to help. This normalised divide was justified as "natural," with boys framing girls' chores as training for marriage and responsibility.
- **Festival and Occasional Labour:** During festivals, household workloads intensified for mothers and sisters, who took on elaborate cooking, cleaning and guest preparation. Visiting female relatives were also expected to help, reinforcing that women's labour is obligatory even outside their own homes. Boys' contributions were limited to errands or entertaining guests, reinforcing the illusion of participation while preserving the unequal distribution of work.
- **Gendered Justifications for Labour Division:** Many boys rationalised household roles by saying women are "better" at these tasks or "meant to do them." Housework was described as training for girls to become "good wives," while boys associated masculinity with earning and independence. These beliefs were expressed casually, without guilt and some boys reported being mocked for helping at home, further policing gender boundaries.
- **Gendered Reasons for Division of Labour:** Boys explained the split of tasks through ideas of space (indoor as feminine, outdoor as masculine), physical ability (women as patient, men as strong), and tradition (fathers and grandfathers not doing chores). Some noted that men cooking or cleaning would be shameful, revealing how stigma enforces inequality. These rationales positioned men's absence from domestic work as natural or even respectable, while women's contributions were undervalued.

Taken together, these narratives show how household labour becomes a central site of gender socialisation. Boys learn to view domestic work as women's duty, while their own detachment is justified as cultural or natural. This everyday division of labour not only entrenches gender hierarchies but also prepares boys to carry expectations of entitlement and exemption into adulthood.

2. Caregiving

This section explores how adolescent boys perceive and participate in caregiving roles within the household, with a focus on emotional labour, childcare and care for the sick or elderly. While caregiving is central to family life, it is consistently feminised in boys' accounts, with mothers and sisters carrying the weight of responsibility. Boys, by contrast, described themselves as observers or occasional "helpers," reinforcing the idea that nurturing and emotional presence are not part of masculine identity.

- **Care and Emotional Labour:** Boys overwhelmingly associated caregiving, especially emotional support with their mothers and sisters. Mothers were described as those who "listen," "understand," and provide comfort, even when unwell themselves. Boys rarely positioned themselves as caregivers; at most, they mentioned noticing or passively responding to others' needs. Fathers were almost entirely absent from these narratives. This reinforced the cultural norm that emotional competence belongs to women, leaving boys socialised to distance themselves from caregiving and suppress empathy or vulnerability.
- **Childcare and Elderly Care:** Responsibilities for younger siblings, the sick and the elderly were almost always placed on mothers, followed by sisters. Boys described their role as minimal, reduced to bringing medicines, informing a parent, while the day-to-day, intimate care work was shouldered by women. Grandmothers were sometimes included, but grandfathers and fathers were absent except in purchasing medicines. This entrenched caregiving as women's duty, with boys viewing their rare contributions as optional "help," not shared responsibility.

These patterns highlight how caregiving is naturalised as women's work, while boys' detachment from such roles fosters emotional distance and dependency on women for relational labour. The absence of fathers in caregiving further deepens this divide, shaping boys' masculinity around avoidance of care and limited practice of empathy or shared responsibility.

3. Decision-Making and Authority

This section examines how adolescent boys perceive power, decision-making and authority within their families. Fathers were almost universally described as the "head of the family," with rule-setting, discipline and financial control seen as inherently masculine. Mothers were acknowledged for their involvement in daily

or household-level decisions but rarely described as final authorities. Even when joint decision-making was mentioned, boys framed fathers as having the last word. These patterns reveal how masculinity is tightly bound to dominance and financial control, shaping boys' understanding of what it means to "be a man."

- **Decision-Making Authority:** Fathers were consistently described as the ones who take major decisions and enforce rules, while mothers handled smaller or internal matters like food or schooling. Boys often emphasised that fathers made the "final decision" even if mothers contributed. In some households, absent fathers were still consulted by phone, showing how authority remained tied to men even at a distance. This positioned leadership and discipline as masculine traits, while mothers' decision-making was seen as secondary or temporary.
- **Financial Control and Economic Power:** Boys almost always identified fathers as the earners and controllers of money: "he gives money," "he manages everything." Even when mothers worked, their contribution was either unacknowledged or described as supplementary. Fathers decided on major expenses and school fees, while mothers were associated with food purchases or household items. Some boys mentioned fathers demanding money from mothers for drinking, further linking male authority with economic power and coercion. These views reinforced the belief that earning equals dominance, while women's labour was undervalued.
- **Perceptions of Authority and Respect:** Fathers were portrayed as authority figures to be feared and obeyed. Respect was tied to obedience and distance, while mothers were respected for care and hard work but not authority. Boys justified fathers' power with statements like "he is the man" or "he is older," treating authority as natural and deserved. Only a few mentioned listening to both parents, but even then, the father was framed as the primary figure of control.

These narratives show how boys internalise authority as a masculine domain, associating respect with fear, dominance and distance. Mothers' authority was rarely acknowledged, reinforcing unequal power structures. These lessons train boys to see their future roles not as equal partners but as heads of households who lead through control rather than collaboration.

4. School Involvement

This section explores adolescent boys' perceptions of parental involvement in their education, including homework support, exam preparation and participation in parent-teacher meetings (PTMs). Mothers emerged as the primary figures in both daily academic engagement and school-facing responsibilities, while fathers were described as reactive, short-tempered or largely absent unless discipline was required. These patterns reflect how educational caregiving is feminised, with emotional and practical labour assigned to mothers and authority or punishment tied to fathers.

- **Homework Support and Educational Engagement:** Boys overwhelmingly credited mothers with providing academic support, from helping with homework and reminding them about exams to making them study. This was true even when mothers were not highly educated; their role was framed as effort and presence rather than expertise. Fathers rarely appeared in homework narratives, and when they did, their involvement was described as pressuring or angry. Many boys said fathers were "busy" or told them to "ask mother," reinforcing the idea that educational caregiving is women's responsibility.
- **Parent-Teacher Meeting Attendance and Engagement:** Mothers were also identified as the default attendees at PTMs, often going even when burdened with domestic work. Fathers' involvement was rare and usually associated with anger or punishment as boys described hiding PTM dates to avoid fathers attending. Some boys said no one attended PTMs, while very few reported both parents going together. Mothers' steady presence reinforced their role as caregivers, while fathers' occasional involvement sustained the view of men as disciplinarians rather than partners in education.

These narratives highlight how schooling responsibilities reproduce gender divisions within the family: mothers embody patience, presence and care, while fathers represent authority, discipline or absence. For boys, these patterns normalise unequal parental roles in education and shape expectations for future gendered parenting.

5. Emotional Bonds

This section explores the emotional relationships of adolescent boys within the family, particularly with their mothers and sisters. Boys often described deep

attachment to mothers through meals, routines and comfort, while their bonds with sisters were more variable ranging from playfulness to distance. A strong theme across responses was the reduction of time and closeness with female family members as boys entered adolescence. This distancing was rarely questioned and instead framed as natural or linked to modesty and maturity. These narratives highlight how emotional restraint is absorbed not only through social norms but also through the gradual erosion of everyday intimacy at home.

- **Time Spent with Mother and Sister:** Many boys reported spending more time with mothers and sisters during childhood but noted a decline as they grew older. Reduced proximity and interaction were often accepted as normal, linked to ideas of maturity or gender separation. While routine interactions with mothers continued in activities like sharing meals, watching TV, discussing school, sisters were described variably, from playmates to increasingly distant figures.
- **Nature of Conversations and Emotional Sharing:** Conversations with mothers were mostly practical, revolving around food, school or instructions. Emotional openness was rare, though some boys admitted turning to mothers for comfort when afraid or upset, citing their empathy compared to fathers' anger. With sisters, conversations were minimal, often limited to joking or fighting. Many boys said they did not share personal matters at home, instead managing emotions alone, reflecting early internalisation of restraint.
- **Shifting Emotional Closeness Over Time:** Boys often recalled greater closeness in childhood, marked by play and daily intimacy, which later diminished in adolescence. This change was accepted as natural saying "Now I'm older" or "She is a girl, so we don't talk much." While regret was rarely expressed, the contrast between remembered intimacy and current distance underscored how emotional independence becomes normalised as part of masculinity. Mothers remained central to routines but less as confidantes, while sisters were reduced to peripheral roles.

All these patterns reveal how boys learn emotional restraint through every day distancing from female family members. Intimacy and vulnerability become childhood memories, while independence and silence are absorbed as masculine norms, leaving boys emotionally isolated with few spaces to express care or vulnerability.

6. Parental Anger and Punishment

This section examines how adolescent boys perceive and experience parental anger, scolding and punishment. Fathers were described as more severe and fear-inducing, often resorting to beatings or loud outbursts, while mothers' anger appeared more frequent, verbal and tied to daily routines. Across responses, anger was normalised as discipline, rarely questioned even when violent. These narratives reveal how boys grow up in environments where power, fear and correction are intertwined, shaping their views of authority, masculinity and acceptable ways of handling frustration.

- **Father's Anger – Fear and Authority:** Fathers were consistently portrayed as authoritative, unpredictable and violent, with boys using phrases like "he beats me" or "I am scared of him." Anger was described as loud, physical and final. Many boys accepted violence as deserved punishment, often describing a chain where mothers reported misbehaviour and fathers delivered punishment. Despite fear, fathers were associated with respect and discipline, reinforcing the idea that to be feared is to be respected. These experiences fused masculinity with dominance and left little room for emotional connection.
- **Mother's Anger – Everyday Frustration and Emotional Weight:** Mothers' anger was reported as more routine and verbal, often tied to household management, schooling or sibling disputes. While some boys mentioned occasional physical punishment, maternal anger was generally seen as corrective rather than fear-inducing. Many linked it to stress or exhaustion from managing multiple responsibilities. Boys often described maternal scolding as both frustrating and caring blurring the lines between discipline and affection.
- **Punishment Patterns and Emotional Impact:** Fathers' punishments were often physical, involving sticks, belts or hands, while mothers' punishments were more verbal. Boys connected punishment to misbehaviour such as poor performance or disobedience and often framed it as normal or necessary. Yet emotional impacts included fear, shame, confusion or distance, especially from fathers. Some boys rationalised punishment as care, while others described lingering hurt. These dynamics reinforced obedience through fear but also normalised violence as discipline, teaching boys to equate toughness and control with masculinity.

These patterns show how anger and punishment are central to boys' early lessons in authority. Discipline is equated with love, violence with care and fear with

respect, embedding masculine ideals of dominance and emotional suppression that boys may carry into adulthood.

7. Food Sharing and Order of Eating

This section explores the gendered practices around food preparation, serving and the order of eating within families. Cooking and serving were almost always described as women's work, while men and boys were often served first, with women, especially mothers eating last. These everyday practices carry symbolic weight, reinforcing hierarchies of respect, authority and entitlement in the household. For boys, such routines become formative lessons in gender and power, normalising inequality as part of daily life.

- **Gendered Food Preparation and Serving:** Cooking was overwhelmingly positioned as mothers' responsibility, sometimes shared by sisters. Serving food was also largely done by women, though in a few households older boys occasionally helped. Boys rarely mentioned cooking themselves except in rare or temporary contexts. Cooking was often framed as an essential skill for girls, linked to preparing for marriage, while boys were exempt from learning it. This division naturalises women as caregivers and men as recipients, embedding caregiving and domesticity into femininity and entitlement into masculinity.
- **Order of Eating and Food Distribution:** Boys consistently described men eating before women. Fathers and elder brothers were typically served first, followed by younger boys and sisters, with mothers often eating last. This order was explained as respect or sacrifice but functioned as a marker of status and hierarchy. In some cases, boys noted spatial differences where men and boys sat on cots or chairs while women sat on the floor during meal times, further reinforcing gendered divisions. Such rituals not only reflect but also reproduce patriarchal authority, teaching boys to associate masculinity with privilege and positioning women's labour and needs as secondary.

These narratives highlight how something as routine as food becomes a site for the performance and reproduction of gender inequality.

Theme 2: Sibling Relationships

Sibling relationships occupy a unique space in boys' lives, where gender roles are observed, practiced and contested. Brothers frequently set behavioural benchmarks of masculinity through authority, independence or emotional restraint, while sisters embody contrasting scripts of caregiving, expressiveness or modesty. Together, these interactions create a powerful arena where boys learn what is considered masculine or feminine, and where they position themselves within this gendered order.

At the same time, these dynamics mirror broader family hierarchies and cultural traditions. Boys may be granted privileges or tasked with protective responsibilities, while girls are expected to assist in domestic work. Such treatment reinforces gender inequality, yet sibling relationships also open space for empathy, cooperation and resistance. Exploring these dynamics reveals how everyday exchanges within the family help shape boys' perceptions of masculinity, femininity and the possibilities of change.

1. Sibling Interaction, Relationship Quality and Time Spent

Sibling relationships play a formative role in boys' socialisation, offering both companionship and conflict that shape understandings of gender roles. Interactions with brothers often reinforce masculine ideals of loyalty and rivalry, while experiences with sisters highlight caregiving, emotional expressiveness and gender boundaries. Together, these dynamics serve as a training ground where boys negotiate closeness, competition and cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity.

- **Positive Interactions:** Boys reported supportive ties with brothers, built around sports, studying and teamwork. With sisters, closeness was often linked to caregiving and emotional sharing, though constrained by cultural norms as they grew older.
- **Negative Interactions:** Rivalries with brothers frequently took the form of physical fights, while conflicts with sisters were more verbal, centring on teasing or irritation over gendered expectations. Many boys also expressed jealousy over perceived parental favouritism.
- **Emotional Closeness and Bonding:** Bonds with brothers were generally strong, grounded in companionship and shared responsibility. Relationships with sisters showed more variation, from trust and comfort to distance shaped by modesty norms.

- **Changes Over Time:** Many boys noted reduced interaction with sisters during adolescence, citing social expectations around segregation. Ties with brothers tended to remain steady, sometimes shifting into more independent companionship.
- **Shared Activities:** With brothers, activities revolved around outdoor play and academics, reinforcing masculine peer culture. With sisters, activities were more domestic, helping with chores or caregiving, though these diminished as boys grew older.

These patterns reveal how sibling relationships both reproduce and challenge gendered expectations. While bonds with brothers strengthen masculine identity through play and rivalry, interactions with sisters introduce boys to caregiving and emotional expression, yet often decline over time, reflecting wider norms of gender segregation.

2. Sibling Roles and Influence

This section examines the roles adolescent boys assume and observe within sibling relationships, emphasizing how these roles are deeply gendered and shape their understanding of masculinity and femininity. Older brothers often serve as role models, embodying leadership, independence and emotional restraint, while sisters are associated with caregiving, emotional labour and domestic responsibilities. Boys may also assume protective roles, particularly toward younger sisters, aligning with masculine ideals of strength, while caregiving remains feminized and largely performed by sisters.

- **Older Sibling as Role Model (Gendered Modelling):** Many boys looked up to older brothers as examples of toughness, responsibility and authority, often seeking to emulate these traits. Older sisters were described as models of caregiving and domestic work, reinforcing femininity as separate from masculine ideals. Some boys, however, expressed resistance when older siblings, especially brothers imposed strict expectations, showing that role modelling could be both influential and contested.
- **Caregiving and Protective Roles (Gendered Expectations):** Boys often described taking protective responsibility for younger siblings, particularly sisters, reflecting masculine ideals of guardianship and strength. Caregiving tasks such as chores, childcare or emotional support were framed as feminine roles carried out by sisters or mothers. While boys

occasionally engaged in caregiving, only in emergencies, the work was still coded as less masculine, even when its importance was acknowledged.

These observations reveal how sibling roles reinforce gendered divisions: protection is aligned with masculinity, caregiving with femininity. Boys' occasional involvement in caregiving suggests small but significant openings for expanding masculine identities to include nurturing and care.

3. Emotional Support and Conflict Resolution

This section examines how adolescent boys experience and navigate emotional support within sibling relationships, highlighting differences in dynamics with brothers versus sisters. Boys often described emotional support as more accessible with sisters, who provided empathy, advice and comfort, while interactions with brothers tended to reflect emotional restraint.

- **Sharing Emotional Support (Gendered Openness):** Many boys reported that sisters offered listening and understanding, making them approachable for sharing problems or fears. Emotional support with brothers was more limited and usually indirect, expressed through humour or shared activities rather than open disclosure. Some boys described feeling ambivalent about showing emotions, torn between wanting connection and conforming to masculine norms of strength and self-reliance.

This indicates a broader socialization process where emotional openness is feminised and restraint masculinised. Sisters often act as confidantes, offering boys a rare avenue for emotional learning, though societal norms limit full openness.

4. Perceptions of Equality and Favouritism

This section explores adolescent boys' perceptions of parental favouritism and equality within sibling relationships, focusing on how differential treatment reinforces gender norms and affects boys' sense of fairness and identity. Boys consistently observed that sisters received preferential treatment, particularly in discipline, where fathers often spared them harsh punishment while holding boys to stricter standards. This unequal treatment extended to privileges, attention and leniency in expectations, creating feelings of resentment, frustration or resignation among boys, while simultaneously reinforcing cultural norms of protection for girls and toughness for boys.

- **Perceived Parental Favouritism by Sibling Gender:** Boys frequently reported that sisters were treated more leniently, especially spared from beatings or scolding, while boys faced stricter discipline. Fathers were noted as particularly protective of daughters, reflecting cultural values of safeguarding girls. This favouritism also extended to privileges and attention, which boys found frustrating or unfair, though some acknowledged the caregiving responsibilities that sisters continued to shoulder.
- **Impact of Favouritism on Sibling Relationships and Self-Concept:** Many boys described feelings of resentment, sadness or being overshadowed due to unequal treatment, which sometimes created distance or rivalry. Others internalized this inequality, linking masculinity with endurance, sacrifice and acceptance of stricter discipline. In some cases, favouritism reinforced protective instincts toward sisters, adding complexity to family bonds.

Together, these patterns show how perceived favouritism reinforces gendered family hierarchies: girls are positioned as protected and dependent, while boys are socialized into toughness and responsibility, shaping both sibling dynamics and boys' emerging sense of masculinity.

Theme 3: Friendships – Gendered Dynamics, Trust and Social Boundaries

Friendships play a central role in shaping the social world of adolescents, providing spaces where boys negotiate identity, belonging and everyday practices of masculinity. Beyond the family and school, peer groups become critical arenas where norms are reinforced, challenged or policed. In contexts where cross-gender interaction is limited, friendships also act as a mirror through which boys learn what is considered acceptable or unacceptable behaviour for males their age.

This theme explores how adolescent boys describe their friendships, the nature of interactions within peer groups and the role of schools and teachers in shaping these dynamics. It examines who is considered a "friend," the quality and depth of boys' relationships, how peer culture regulates behaviour, and the ways in which bullying, trust and emotional sharing are experienced. In doing so, the theme sheds light on how friendships serve as both a source of belonging and a mechanism of enforcing gendered expectations.

1. Predominance of Male Friendships and Absence of Female Peers as Friends

The data reveals a strong pattern where friendships are overwhelmingly male-dominated. Almost all respondents identify their friends as boys, and female peers are rarely considered "friends" in the same way. When probed about the absence or limited presence of female friends, several recurring reasons emerged:

- **Girls as 'Sisters' or Functional Contacts, Not Friends:** Many boys articulated that female peers are treated more like sisters or acquaintances to interact with only when necessary, rather than as equal in friendships. For example, borrowing classroom notes or during specific cultural events. The sentiment of females being "different" and not truly part of the friend group was consistent.
- **Fear of Social Mockery and Stigma:** A significant number of boys mentioned that social norms and peer pressure discourage open friendships with girls. They fear being mocked or teased by other boys for associating too closely with females. This social policing creates a barrier to cross-gender friendships.
- **Lack of Teacher Encouragement:** Some responses reflected that teachers do not encourage or facilitate mixed-gender friendships. In fact, they sometimes reinforce these gender boundaries, either explicitly or implicitly, maintaining the separation between boys and girls in school social life.

This gendered separation in friendships contributes to limited interaction between boys and girls in these adolescent spaces, reinforcing traditional gender norms and social divisions.

2. Nature of Male Friendships: Superficial Bonds and Limited Emotional Sharing

While boys frequently named male peers as friends, the quality and depth of these friendships often appeared superficial and instrumental rather than intimate or emotionally close.

- **Casual and Superficial Interactions:** Most boys described their friendships in terms of playing together, hanging out or sharing jokes, but seldom mentioned sharing personal feelings, secrets or deep emotional

support. This suggests a friendship culture focused on activity and surface-level camaraderie rather than emotional vulnerability.

- **Fear of Mockery and Trust Deficits:** A common reason for limited emotional openness was fear of being mocked or ridiculed by friends. Boys are wary of showing vulnerability or sharing sensitive feelings, fearing this could lead to bullying or loss of respect within their peer group.
- **Limited Trust Among Peers:** Many boys expressed a general mistrust of their friends, noting that while they may play or study together, they do not fully trust them with personal matters. This guardedness indicates emotional self-protection strategies in peer relationships.

3. Social Bullying: Colour, Weight and Physical Appearance

Bullying related to physical appearance was a recurrent theme in the responses. Many boys reported experiencing or witnessing teasing about skin colour, weight and other physical traits. Some key points include:

- **Prevalence of Casual Bullying:** Such bullying appears normalized and is often described as casual or playful teasing, though it causes hurt. Boys tend to not complain or report these incidents.
- **Reluctance to Complain:** There is a strong reluctance to speak up due to fear of repercussion of losing friends or belief that teachers will not take complaints seriously. This reflects distrust in adult authority and a culture of silence around peer harassment.
- **Impact on Emotional Well-being:** While boys acknowledge feeling bad due to bullying, many seem resigned to it as an unavoidable part of school life, which can negatively affect their self-esteem and sense of safety.

4. Role of Teachers and School Environment

Teachers appear as ambivalent or negative influences in the dynamics of friendships and bullying:

- **Lack of Support in Bullying:** Boys consistently report that teachers are either unaware of bullying or ineffective at addressing it. This reinforces feelings of helplessness among victims.

- **Gendered Expectations:** Teachers may reinforce gender norms by not encouraging cross-gender interactions or by subtly policing boys' behaviour regarding friendships with girls.

5. Other Observations

- **Girls' Social Roles:** While girls are mostly absent as friends, boys noted that girls tend to be involved in school decorating, rangoli and other cultural activities, roles that are gender-typed and separate from boys' social spaces.
- **Boys' Limited Participation:** In some responses, boys described their roles during school events as limited to physical tasks like lifting benches, reinforcing gendered division of labour in school activities.

This theme vividly captures how entrenched gender norms shape adolescent boys' friendship patterns and emotional lives. The overwhelming male dominance in friendships, coupled with the social stigma against cross-gender friendships, reinforces a segregated social world. This segregation limits boys' exposure to alternative relational models that might foster empathy, emotional expression and gender equality. The superficiality and guardedness in male friendships reflect a hegemonic masculinity that prizes toughness, emotional control and peer approval over vulnerability and deep connection. Fear of ridicule and peer policing curtail boys' abilities to share real feelings or build trusting friendships, which can have long-term consequences for their emotional development.

Table 6. Frequency Analysis of Key Patterns in Friendships (N = 327)

Aspect	**% of Boys Responding**
Friends mostly male	90%
Female peers considered 'sisters' or not friends	60%
Fear of social mockery for female friendships	57%
Teachers not encouraging cross-gender friendships	40%
Male friendships superficial / limited emotional sharing	76%
Fear of being mocked / mistrust in friendships	65%
Experience of bullying based on appearance	62%
Reluctance to complain about bullying	60%

Bullying based on physical traits, normalized as casual teasing, further compounds the precariousness of peer relations. The lack of effective adult intervention allows such behaviours to persist, fostering an environment of silence and resignation. The gendered division of roles in school activities and social life also signals how gender norms extend beyond friendships to influence boys' and girls' participation and status within the school community.

Theme 4: Emotions and Expression – A Window into Adolescent Boys' Inner Worlds

This theme explores how adolescent boys understand, experience and express core emotions such as anger, fear, sadness and happiness along with the overarching patterns of suppression or expression that frame their emotional world. Based on the dataset, the analysis does not merely tabulate emotional states, but seeks to interpret the broader cultural, social and gendered dynamics that govern these emotional responses. Each emotion is deeply intertwined with boys' environmental factors like their families, friendships, schooling and the roles they are expected to perform. What emerges is not merely a list of emotional responses, but a vivid picture of boys taught to feel intensely while remaining largely silent about their emotions.

1. Anger — Frequency, Triggers and Responses

Frequency and Degree

Anger was the most commonly expressed emotion, both in intensity and frequency. An overwhelming number of boys reported that they feel anger frequently, with several experiencing intense or daily outbursts. Unlike other emotions that were hidden or downplayed, boys described anger with startling vividness. Many said they felt angry "every day," or "most of the times." For several, anger was not just an emotion but a state of being. The emotional climate of these boys is not marked by stability but by a constant undercurrent of frustration, helplessness or irritation, indicating that anger is not episodic but habitual in many lives.

Table 7. Frequency Analysis of Anger (N = 327)

Anger Frequency Level	**% of Mentions**
Never / Doesn't get angry	1%
Rarely	2%
Sometimes	18%
Often	55%
Most of the time; intense	23%
Avoided response / No answer	1%

Triggers

A detailed line-by-line coding of boys' responses revealed 11 core trigger themes. The most common triggers for anger were interpersonal - teasing, bullying, being hit or unfairly compared. Peer humiliation (particularly being teased in front of others) and fathers' verbally and physically abusive behaviour, drinking also featured prominently. For many, this anger was rooted in injustice: not being heard, being scolded for no reason or witnessing someone else (often their mother) being treated unfairly. A striking number of boys said they became angry when they were compared to others or accused wrongly.

Table 8. Frequency Analysis of Triggers in Anger (N = 312)

Anger Trigger Theme	**% of Mentions**
Friendship conflict / peer teasing	33%
Father's physical/verbal aggression/drinking	18%
Possession being taken / touched	16%
Being compared or blamed unfairly	14%
General parental scolding	7%
Conflict with sibling	6%
Unspecified	4%
Conflict with mother / perceived unfairness	3%
Disturbed during tasks	3%

Note: 15 responses could not be coded meaningfully for this analysis

Coping Strategies: How Boys Manage Their Anger

The coping strategies described by adolescent boys offer a stark glimpse into the emotional architecture of boyhood, one that is structured more by reaction than reflection, and where emotional literacy is alarmingly limited. From the moment anger is triggered, boys are often propelled into physical action. A few other coping mechanisms of anger, through which many boys manage frustration, hurt or helplessness are analysed below.

Table 9. Frequency Analysis of Anger Coping Strategies (N = 312)

Coping Strategy Theme	**% of Mentions**
Physical aggression	45%
Verbal aggression/fighting	16%
Suppression/internalizing	13%
Crying/emotional outlet	3%
Others, not grouped easily	23%

Note: 15 responses could not be coded meaningfully for this analysis

The ways boys responded to anger were telling. A significant number described physical reactions: hitting walls, punching themselves, breaking objects or hitting others. For some boys, it is only through pain - their own or someone else's - that their emotion of anger finds expression. The danger here is not just the harm caused to others or self, but the way boys are learning to associate emotional regulation with violent release, reinforcing gendered scripts of toughness, stoicism and dominance.

A smaller but equally significant group of boys coped with anger through verbal confrontation: shouting, scolding or arguing. This was more common in peer settings, where boys perceived equality. In contrast, another set of boys reported suppressing their anger. This was more frequent in hierarchical situations like family conflict or with teachers, where boys felt they could not respond. Some described “keeping it inside,” “becoming quiet” or “repressing it silently.”

A very small set of boys admitted to crying, and these were almost always private, when they were alone. The fact that crying is so rare reflects not emotional strength but the socialized stigma of emotional vulnerability in boys. The final category of “Other / Not Grouped Easily” includes vague, contradictory or

unexplained behaviours. Many boys said they "just get angry" or "walked away" without describing further. This may reflect an emotional vocabulary gap, where boys feel but cannot articulate.

What Anger Tells Us About Boys' Emotional Lives

This thematic analysis reveals that adolescent boys are not emotionally indifferent. In fact, they are emotionally overwhelmed, and often emotionally unequipped. Anger is the one emotion they are allowed to feel and perform, even when the root of their experience may be fear, sadness, shame or loneliness. Whether provoked by peer ridicule, paternal violence or boundary violations, anger reflects boys' desire for dignity, justice and emotional space. But in the absence of emotional scaffolding, they turn to aggression, silence or self-erasure.

2. Fear — Quiet, Widespread and Shameful

Fear was far more private than anger. Boys often resisted speaking about their fears, and several explicitly said "I don't want to share" or "I'd rather not say." Still, a detailed analysis of responses revealed a layered emotional terrain.

Table 10. Frequency Analysis of Causes of Fear (N = 327)

Category	**% of Mentions**
Fear of Future (Jobs/Exams)	37%
Fear of Father/Teachers	18%
Fear of Darkness / Ghosts	14%
Fear of Animals	9%
No Fear Reported	7%
Refused / Don't Want to Tell	7%
Other / Unclear	8%

The most frequently reported fear was the future: exams, failure, not getting a job, and disappointing their families. Many said they worried constantly about marks, performing in class or failing in life. Alongside academic fear was the fear of authoritarian figures: teachers and more often, fathers. Boys were afraid of being hit, shouted at, mocked or humiliated. For some, this fear took on a traumatic texture: they described not attending school or falling sick as escape routes.

There were also childhood fears such as fear of darkness, ghosts, snakes. A considerable number of boys reported being afraid of being alone, especially at night, or being the subject of ridicule by peers. There was still a sizeable chunk of boys that refused to share their fears, or articulated it in unclear terms. A considerable number of them also said they don't fear anything.

What Do Boys Do When Scared

Coping mechanisms for fear were overwhelmingly passive and solitary. Most boys said they didn't talk about it to anyone. Silence was a recurring motif. When asked why, many said they would be laughed at, or that no one would take them seriously. Some boys did cry, but almost always in secret. A few spoke to their mother or close friend, but these were exceptions. Suppression and not confrontation or sharing was the dominant response. Some coped by avoiding the situation entirely, while others distracted themselves through music or play. The emotional landscape here was one of isolation: boys were scared, but more scared to admit it.

Table 11. Frequency Analysis of Fear Coping Strategies (N = 327)

Coping Response	**% of Mentions**
Do not share / remain silent	52%
Cry (mostly alone)	26%
Repress / suppress feelings	15%
Avoid the feared situation	11%
Tell mother / trusted friend	8%
Pray or seek comfort in faith	5%
Distract themselves (music/play)	5%
Physical reactions (shivering, sleeplessness, falling sick)	3%

3. Sadness — Deep, Silenced and Invisible

Sadness emerged as the most emotionally complex of the four categories.
Unlike anger, which was outward and expressive, or fear, which was reluctantly disclosed, sadness was experienced deeply but spoken about rarely.

The most frequent triggers for sadness were related to family violence and conflict, particularly father beating mother, father drinking or witnessing fights at home. Underlying feelings of sadness were feelings of helplessness as well. Others described feeling sad when friends ignored them, teachers punished them unfairly, or they were bullied or teased. Academic failure also appeared

repeatedly, with a handful of boys saying they cried when they received low marks, fearing parental anger or public humiliation.

Table 12. Frequency Analysis of Causes of Sadness (N = 327)

Category	**% of Mentions**
Father Beating Mother / Family Violence	34%
Friends Ignoring / Bullying	18%
Teachers Punishing / Academic Failure	17%
Poverty / Hardships at Home	9%
Personal Reasons (couldn't be categorized in the above)	4%
Did not want to mention the reason	18%

What was striking was how boys processed their sadness. About 70% said they cried, and of those, nearly 90% said they cried alone. Crying was done in secret and they were not comfortable sharing this emotion in public. Boys said they avoided crying in front of anyone because they would be "mocked", called "weak" or "like a girl." Friends, in some situations, were described as unkind in moments of vulnerability.

Only a small group said they shared their sadness with someone, most often a friend or mother. But even among these, the act of sharing was described as rare or done in desperation. Repression was the dominant strategy. Boys kept their pain private, believing there was no use in expressing it.

Table 13. Frequency Analysis of Coping Methods of Sadness (N = 327)

Coping Response	**% of Mentions**
Crying (mostly alone)	70%
Repress / Suffer in Silence	20%
Sharing with Someone	7%
Other Coping Mechanisms	3%

4. Happiness — A Fleeting and Underdeveloped Emotion

Unlike the other emotions, happiness was rarely articulated. When boys were asked what made them happy, over 60% said they didn't know, couldn't think of anything or didn't respond. For many, it seemed like happiness was not something

they expected or thought about. It was an unfamiliar emotion or one that wasn't given much space in their lives.

When happiness did appear, it was tied to external events such as winning a game, doing well in exams, celebrating festivals or being with family during peaceful moments. No boy spoke of happiness as something intrinsic or continuous. It was occasional, conditional and momentary.

Table 14. Frequency Analysis of Happiness (N = 327)

Category	**% of Mentions**
No Response / Could Not Articulate	61%
Good Marks / Academic Success	17%
Winning Games / Sports	9%
Festivals / Family Gatherings	8%
Other Small Joys (Food, Play, Dance)	5%

Few boys described how they expressed happiness. Some said they laughed or smiled. Others said they played or ate their favourite food. Only a handful mentioned dancing or celebrating. Most said they didn't really do anything and that they just "felt okay" or "enjoyed the moment quietly." The expression of happiness, much like sadness or fear, seemed subdued and internalized.

5. Expression vs Suppression — What Do Boys Choose?

The final and perhaps most revealing layer of this theme was how boys spoke about sharing their emotions or more accurately, not sharing them. Across the board, from anger to happiness, the overwhelming pattern was emotional suppression.

Table 15. Frequency Analysis of Sharing of Emotions (N = 327)

Category	**% of Mentions**
Do Not Share with Anyone	80%
Share with 1 Trusted Friend	11%
Share with Mother	6%
Share with Sibling	2%
Share with Teacher	1%

About 80% of boys said they did not share their emotions with anyone. They carried their fears, sadness and worries silently. They cried alone or simply "kept it in." When asked why, the answers were consistent and gendered: "If I say something, they will laugh", "They will call me weak", "Nobody understands", and There is no point."

These statements were not expressions of individual reticence, but reflections of a deeply internalized culture that shames emotional vulnerability in boys. Many said their male friends would tease them if they showed fear or sadness. Some said their parents would not like it. A few said they didn't even know whom to talk to. This created a closed circuit of emotion that was felt intensely, but never released.

Among those who did share, the most common confidants were one trusted male friend, mother (especially for sadness and fear), sibling or cousin (rare) and teacher (very rare). Even in these cases, sharing was sparse and hesitant. It was not part of a regular emotional practice. Most boys described such moments as one-off or last resort. They had learned to manage emotions alone, not because it helped, but because it was what they were taught. The reasons for not sharing were painfully clear. Boys feared being mocked, ignored or dismissed. They didn't want to be seen as soft or weak. Some genuinely believed that emotions didn't matter or shouldn't be spoken about. And many simply had no one they trusted enough to open up to.

This theme reveals that adolescent boys are not emotionally indifferent but that they are emotionally silenced with no healthy outlets. They feel deeply, but they are rarely given the tools, permission or models to process those feelings.

Theme 5: Gender Identities

Adolescence marks a formative stage where boys begin to actively negotiate gender identities, moving from childhood norms into more conscious ideas of who they are and who they should become. This theme examines how boys construct notions of "good" and "bad" men and women, the moral vocabularies they use and the pressures they feel in performing masculinity. These ideas are shaped through intersecting influences of family, peers, school, media and community, and they carry real implications for how boys relate to others, view gender roles and understand themselves. By analysing both ideals and perceived pressures, this section highlights how patriarchal norms are reproduced and followed. The discussion was structured around four prompts:

1. The Good Man – How should a man be? What are the most important traits, qualities and behaviours that make a man "good" or "ideal" in their eyes?
2. The Good Woman – How should a woman be? What defining characteristics and behaviours make a woman "good" or "ideal"?
3. The Bad Man – What traits, actions or attitudes make a man "bad" or unacceptable?
4. The Bad Woman – What traits, actions or attitudes makes a woman "bad" or unacceptable?

The respondents were encouraged to go beyond superficial descriptions and focus on what they considered most important, whether related to moral values, social conduct, physical appearance, skills, attitudes or ways of interacting with others. By asking for both "good" and "bad" examples, their aspirational ideals as well as the lines they draw between acceptable and unacceptable masculinity and femininity were captured.

Good Man:

Boys' descriptions of a "good man" centred on strength, discipline and responsibility, framed within a traditional patriarchal model of masculinity. Physical traits such as a strong body, height, a deep voice and neat grooming were seen as visible markers of manhood. Just as important were behavioural boundaries that excluded vulnerability, emotional openness or engagement in "feminine" tasks, reinforcing clear gender divides.

At the core lay the provider–protector role: earning well, being financially independent, supporting wife and children, caring for parents after marriage and safeguarding women in the household. Alongside this, boys stressed moral respectability such as avoiding addictions, respecting elders and women, and in a few cases, rejecting domestic violence. Discipline and self-control were equally valued, with expectations to study well, work hard, control anger and avoid unnecessary fights. Authority and courage also stood out, with leadership and the ability to command respect treated as inherently masculine qualities.

Less frequently, boys mentioned religion, social connectedness, sporting ability or consent. Overall, the "good man" was imagined as a strong, authoritative provider whose morality and discipline earned him social respect. While a minority of responses highlighted care and fairness, these were framed as extensions of responsibility rather than as alternatives to patriarchal ideals.

Table 16. Frequency Analysis of Traits and Qualities Attributed to Good Man

Cluster	Traits / Qualities Mentioned	Number of Mentions
Provider – Protector	Take care of family, parents, protect women in household; settle in good job, earn well	152
Moral Respectability	No bad habits (alcohol, smoking, gutka), respect elders and women, honest, sincere, earn good name	126
Authority & Courage	Brave, able to fight others, guide others, command respect	29
Embodied Masculinity	Physically strong, neat grooming, manly voice, well-dressed, not feminine, be good in sports	74
Discipline & Self-Control	Study well, work hard, behave well, avoid unnecessary fights, not laugh much, not cry to	110
Care & Sociality	Helpful, social/friends, not beat wife and children, fairness	54
Religious & Cultural Observance	Pray, go to temple, follow traditions	11

Constructions of the "Good Man"

- **The Provider – Protector as Core Identity**: Boys consistently framed provision and protection such as earning, caring for parents, safeguarding women, as the defining duties of men. Masculinity was equated with responsibility, authority and moral legitimacy through these roles.
- **Moral Respectability and Social Approval**: Visible morality, such as avoiding addictions and respecting elders was central. Yet respect for women often carried a paternalistic tone, where non-violence was treated as an exceptional virtue rather than a baseline norm.
- **Authority, Courage and Control**: Leadership, bravery and decisiveness were celebrated as inherently masculine. A good man was expected to command respect and guide others, reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies where male authority is unquestioned.
- **Embodied Masculinity and Gender Boundaries**: Physical strength, grooming and restraint in emotions or humour symbolised manhood. Boys drew firm boundaries rejecting anything "feminine," embedding masculinity in bodily markers and emotional toughness.
- **Discipline and Self-Control**: Education, hard work and control over anger or desires were emphasised as marks of manly respectability. Self-mastery was framed as a masculine hallmark tied to social approval.
- **Emerging Care-Oriented Masculinities**: A minority of boys mentioned kindness and fairness, but these traits were positioned as extensions of duty

rather than alternatives to patriarchal norms. Care remained secondary to strength and authority.

Good Woman:

Adolescent boys' descriptions of a "good woman" centred overwhelmingly on her role as a caretaker and homemaker, with domestic labour, obedience and service framed as her primary duties. Value was tied to her ability to cook, clean and support the family, while freedom of movement was described as restricted and conditional. Boys repeatedly emphasised limits on where women could go, how they interacted with men outside the family and the need for constant surveillance to protect family honour.

Appearance and behaviour were closely policed. A good woman was expected to dress modestly, wear traditional clothing and avoid excess adornment, while also embodying humility, patience and emotional restraint. These qualities were less about individuality and more about preserving social order and male authority. Respectability was measured through compliance, silence and modest self-presentation, making obedience a moral marker of womanhood.

Mentions of education and employment surfaced occasionally but were secondary to household duties and rarely associated with autonomy. Even qualities such as kindness, selflessness and nurturing were framed as extensions of her obligation to family rather than as independent virtues. Taken together, the findings depict an idealised womanhood defined by self-sacrifice, modesty and restricted freedom, where worth is tied to serving others and upholding patriarchal norms.

Table 17. Frequency Analysis of Traits and Qualities Attributed to Good Woman

Cluster	Traits / Qualities Mentioned	Number of Mentions
Domestic Roles and Caregiving	Should always stay at home; Household chores / cooking / cleaning / care; Serve everyone; Helping nature; Caring; Selfless	198
Modesty and Respectability	Dressed appropriately – saree, dupatta, langa voni, no short clothes; Traditional; Simple; Long hair; Soft voice; Should always smile; Shy; Good physical structure – fair, slim, shorter	241
Restricted Mobility and Surveillance	Should not be out after evening; Inform while going out; Should not interact with men/strangers; Should not use phone; Should not go to pubs/bars	134
Obedience and Male Authority	Listen to husband/parents/elders; Never question / obedient / no ego; Compromise/understanding; Should not argue or fight; Forgiving even if not wrong; Should give men freedom	213
Emotional Demeanour and Virtues	Patient; Polite / calm / no bad language; Cry often; Trust husband; Loyal to husband	92
Conditional Education and Work	Study; Job outside; Should have goals; Confident; Not be scared	70
Sexual Purity and Boundaries	Should not fall behind men / no lovers; Marry as per parents' wishes; Should treat boys as brothers; Should be within limits	86
Frugality and Social Expectations	Economical / not spend on shopping; Should not show off success; Earn a good name in society	32
Low-Frequency Mentions	Strong; Live freely; Same as men – equal	15

Constructions of the "Good Woman"

- **Domestic Roles and Caregiving:** A woman's identity is anchored in the household. Cooking, cleaning, frugality and care for family are treated not as tasks but as measures of virtue. Movement outside the home is restricted and conditional, reinforcing her role as the moral and economic stabiliser of the family.
- **Modesty and Respectability:** Clothing and appearance are policed as markers of morality. Sarees, dupattas, long hair and simplicity are praised,

while “modern” attire, makeup, or visible style are condemned. Beauty is narrowly defined as fair, slim, shorter than men, soft-spoken turning the female body into a site of surveillance and respectability.

- **Restricted Mobility and Surveillance:** Freedom of women is curtailed through curfews, avoidance of public spaces like pubs and restrictions on technology use. Informing family of movements and avoiding interaction with men outside kinship lines are framed as necessary safeguards but function as controls over autonomy.
- **Obedience and Male Authority:** The good woman listens without question to parents, elders and husband. She avoids ego, argument or pride, accepts blame to protect male honour and forgives even when wronged. Success must be downplayed, humility and subordination consistently upheld.
- **Emotional Demeanour and Virtues:** Patience, politeness, selflessness and constant smiling are idealised. Shyness and calmness are praised as markers of modesty. These traits are celebrated as moral virtues, but they place the burden of harmony on women’s restraint and sacrifice.
- **Conditional Education and Work:** In few cases, studying or working is acceptable but should be managed alongside domestic duties. Confidence, goals or autonomy appear rarely, and equality with men remains a marginal view, tolerated more as exception than norm.
- **Sexual Purity and Boundaries:** Moral worth is tied to chastity. Women are expected to avoid romantic relations, treat men as brothers, marry as per family wishes and remain loyal to their husband. Kinship metaphors and control over sexuality serve as central tools of regulation.

Comparative Analysis: Good Man vs Good Woman

The ideals of the “good man” and “good woman” imagined by adolescent boys are not complementary versions of the same virtue. They are two sharply different blueprints, preparing boys and girls for unequal lives. Masculinity is outward-facing, tied to action, authority and presence in the public sphere. Femininity is inward-facing, tied to restraint, obedience and the preservation of domestic order.

For boys, being “good” means providing, protecting, earning respect and exercising control. Strength, discipline and authority are celebrated as proof of manhood. Respectability comes from visible achievements such as education, employment and leadership. Emotional restraint is framed as maturity, while helpfulness or fairness appears only at the margins.

Table 18. Mapping Contrasting Ideals of the Good Man and Good Woman

Domain	Good Man	Good Woman
Core Identity	Public actor, achiever, leader; identity tied to earning, respect, and visible	Moral guardian of the home; identity tied to domestic work, modesty, and preserving family honour
Primary Sphere	Public sphere – work, sports, community presence, decision-making	Private/domestic sphere – household chores, child-rearing, caregiving
Agency & Autonomy	Expected to take initiative, guide others, confront problems, make decisions	Expected to obey, accept guidance from elders/men, compromise, avoid confrontation
Mobility	Free movement in public spaces; active social life encouraged	Restricted movement, especially after dark; avoid interaction with unrelated men
Productivity	Measured by career success, earnings, education, public respect	Measured by service to family, maintaining the home, fulfilling traditional roles
Emotional Expression	Emphasis on emotional restraint – should not cry, should control anger	Expected to be patient, forgiving, self-sacrificing, and emotionally available for others
Physical Presentation	Strong, tall, masculine body; neat, well-dressed; may be stylish within "manly" bounds	Modest dress (saree, dupatta, langa voni); avoid short clothes; minimal or no makeup; long/braided hair
Behaviour Toward Others	Should help others, respect elders, protect women, treat women as sisters	Should serve everyone, be polite, speak softly, avoid bad language, give men freedom
Moral Boundaries	Avoid addictions, bad habits; maintain reputation and social respect	Avoid sexual/romantic relationships outside marriage; avoid pubs, bars, phone use; stay "within limits"
Gendered Contradictions	Encouraged to be both non-violent and able to fight when needed	"Equal to men" or "live freely" mentioned, but overshadowed by heavy restrictions on autonomy
Markers of Goodness	Hard work, honesty, earning a good name, providing for family	Obedience, modesty, chastity, selflessness, adherence to family and societal norms

For girls, being "good" means anchoring the household, obeying elders and men, and embodying modesty. Freedom of movement is curtailed, appearance policed and behaviour framed around humility and sacrifice. Education or work is

tolerated, but always secondary to domestic duties. Respectability rests on chastity, obedience and service, with autonomy seen as a threat to honour.

Even where traits such as kindness, respect, self-control overlap, the meanings diverge. In men, they are extensions of leadership; in women, they signal deference and self-denial. Just as telling are the silences: men are not expected to share domestic work, women are not expected to lead. These omissions highlight how boys' moral imagination itself is bounded by patriarchy. If these ideals persist, they risk shaping men into unquestioned authorities and women into unquestioned dependents, reinforcing cycles of control, compliance and inequality across generations.

Bad Man:

When adolescent boys were asked to describe what makes a "bad man," their responses were not random lists of disliked traits but formed a coherent moral and social portrait rooted in everyday observations, peer culture and gender norms. This composite figure emerges as someone whose behaviour disrupts social harmony, violates moral codes and undermines respectability in the eyes of both peers and the broader community.

The characterisation of a "bad man" spans three broad dimensions: moral failings, social misconduct and gendered violations. Moral failings included substance abuse, idleness and irresponsibility, indicating behaviours that signal a rejection of societal responsibilities. Social misconduct covered rudeness, quarrelling, boasting and an unkempt or "flashy" appearance, all interpreted as visible signs of arrogance, lack of discipline or nonconformity. Gendered violations stood out sharply: disrespect towards women, harassment, making women cry and being physically violent were strong red flags for boys in defining what places a man beyond moral acceptability.

While some descriptions were rooted in concrete acts, others reflected deeper social scripts about masculinity. The picture that emerges is a hybrid of tangible behaviours and normative ideals, showing that boys' ideas of "badness" are not only about harm but also about conformity to a gendered code of conduct.

Table 19. Frequency Analysis of Traits and Qualities Attributed to Bad Man

Cluster	Traits / Qualities Mentioned	Number of Mentions
Moral and Habitual Failings	Bad habits; Lazy / irresponsible; Jobless; Doesn't study well; Porn consumption; Not religious	65
Social Misconduct and Public Disruption	Uses bad words; Always fights; Angry; Bullies / shouts; Shows off / has ego; Long / stylish hair, open shirts, earrings, untidy appearance; Speaks a lot / non-serious	95
Gendered Disrespect and Violations	Follows / harasses / touches women / stares; Doesn't respect women; Makes women cry; Have lovers; Talks to girls; Cheats / disloyal	61
Violence at Home and Family Neglect	Physical abuse (against women, parents, children); Doesn't respect elders / parents; Doesn't take care of family / parents	29
Weakness, Cowardice and Negative Influence	Scared / weak; Bad role models; Discriminates	8

Constructions of the "Bad Man"

- **Moral and Habitual Failings:** A bad man is marked first by self-destructive habits: smoking, drugs and gutka are seen as clear signs of decline. Addiction signals not just physical harm but moral weakness, a man unfit for responsibility. Laziness, idleness and joblessness add to this image, framing productivity and hard work as non-negotiable for masculine respectability.
- **Social Misconduct and Public Disruption:** Disorderly behaviour in public such as fighting, shouting, abusive language defines moral failure. Importantly, disrespect is heightened when performed "in front of women," amplifying shame. Even appearance is moralised: styled hair, flashy clothing, jewellery or untidiness signify arrogance and defiance of accepted masculine norms.
- **Gendered Disrespect and Violations:** Harassment, staring, touching and making women cry are treated as unambiguous markers of badness. Boys framed these acts as socially contaminating, where disrespect toward women corrodes a man's character. Strikingly, even consensual romance like talking to girls or having lovers was sometimes collapsed into this category, reflecting rigid policing of male–female boundaries.

- **Violence at Home:** Beating wives, parents, or children is identified as a critical moral breach. Unlike other misconduct, domestic violence is described as irredeemable, a line that disqualifies a man from respectability. Its strong presence in the accounts is notable given broader societal normalisation of such violence.
- **Failure of Responsibility:** The bad man neglects family, ignores elders and shirks duties. These omissions are coded as active failings, positioning him as selfish and unreliable, the opposite of the dutiful provider and caretaker expected of men.
- **Ego and Arrogance:** Arrogance, boasting and inflated pride corrode trust as much as physical misconduct. Ego signals a man who prioritises self over community, undermining humility and respect, traits considered essential to social belonging.

Bad Woman:

Adolescent boys' descriptions of a "bad woman" reveal a moral boundary of how womanhood must be contained. Unlike the "bad man," whose failures are defined by harmful acts, the "bad woman" is judged for visibility, independence and self-direction. Her fault lies in being seen, heard or making choices that challenge male authority, with everyday acts like talking too much, socialising freely or using a phone framed as breaches of respectability.

Appearance is a central site of judgement. Short clothes, open hair or makeup are not treated as personal style but as deliberate signals of immorality, reclassifying women outside modest norms as "bad." Here, the female body becomes a stage for public morality, where deviation from traditional dress or demeanour is conflated with sexual looseness. In this framing, visibility itself is equated with impropriety and modest concealment becomes the only acceptable marker of virtue.

Romantic and sexual autonomy is especially stigmatised. Falling in love, having male friends, choosing marriage partners or showing physical affection are coded as betrayals of family honour. Disobedience, whether to parents, husbands or in-laws is moralised as arrogance, while assertiveness or confidence celebrated in men is recast as ego in women. What emerges is a gendered double standard where women's morality is measured by erasure of autonomy, positioning the "bad woman" as a symbolic threat to social order rather than as an individual with agency.

Table 20. Frequency Analysis of Traits and Qualities Attributed to Bad Woman

Cluster	Traits / Qualities Mentioned	Number of Mentions
Social Behaviour and Visibility	Talks a lot; Talks to men / male friendships; Social life / too many friends / roaming outside; Active on social media; Gossip	170
Romantic and Sexual Autonomy	Have lovers / fall in love / love marriages	37
Appearance and Respectability	Short clothes; Makeup / hair open	78
Defiance and Family Relations	Disrespect to parents / not listening to them or husband; Fighting with husband, neighbours, in-laws; Controlling of husband; Doesn't understand husband	95
Ego and Personality Traits	Proud / egoistic / oversmart / studying	19
Habits and Vices	Uses bad words; Drinks and smokes	26
Other Failures	Not educated; Beats children	6

Constructions of the "Bad Woman"

- **Social Behaviour and Public Presence**: A "bad woman" is judged less by wrongdoing and more by visibility. Talking to men, having male friends or being socially active is framed as moral failure. Even ordinary sociability is treated as transgression, reflecting a belief that female morality is preserved only through seclusion and restraint.
- **Policing Sexuality and Romantic Autonomy**: Romantic or sexual agency is heavily stigmatised. Love marriages, boyfriends or even clothing and grooming choices are read as sexual signals rather than autonomy or self-expression. Unlike men, whose actions are judged by harm, women are condemned simply for asserting choice, reinforcing patriarchal control over female sexuality.
- **Obedience and Family Hierarchy**: Defiance, arguing, refusing to listen or "controlling" husbands is moralised as arrogance. What might be ordinary assertion of opinion is cast as immorality, normalising women's subordination to men. Domestic harmony is framed as women's duty to comply, silencing female agency within families.

- **Appearance and Respectability**: Dress and grooming serve as moral shorthand. Short clothes, makeup or open hair mark women as "bad," while modest attire signifies virtue. Women's bodies thus become the stage on which family honour is policed, placing the burden of respectability on them in ways men are never subjected to.

Comparative Analysis: Bad Man vs Bad Woman

The "bad man" and "bad woman" are judged by entirely different standards. A bad man is condemned for harmful actions such as fighting, harassing, abusing, shirking duties and his failures are outward, disruptive and tied to responsibility. A bad woman, by contrast, is condemned for visibility and autonomy: talking to men, moving freely, wearing short clothes, using social media or asserting herself. Male badness is framed as disturbance of order; female badness as defiance of boundaries.

Table 21. Mapping Contrasting Ideals of the Bad Man and Bad Woman

Domain	Bad Man	Bad Woman
Core Identity	Seen as dishonourable and irresponsible; identity tied to vices, aggression, and neglect of family and societal duties	Seen as immoral and disreputable; identity tied to violating gendered norms of modesty, loyalty, and domestic conduct
Primary Sphere	Public sphere – causing trouble in community, fighting, harassing women, visible misconduct	Private/domestic sphere breaches – inappropriate male contact, disobedience within family, visible social life outside home
Moral Framework	Measured by self-control, avoidance of vices, respect for others, and fulfilling provider role; failures framed as moral	Measured by sexual propriety, obedience, modesty, and service; failures framed as moral corruption or immodesty
Gendered Expectations	Failure to meet masculine ideals of strength, respect, and provision; being "weak" or not manly enough is shameful	Failure to uphold feminine ideals of purity, obedience, and restraint; being "too visible" or assertive is shameful
Social Relations	Harm defined by aggression, harassment, and lack of respect for women and elders	Harm defined by overstepping relational boundaries, especially with men, and undermining male authority
Appearance & Behaviour	Negative markers include untidy/stylish hair, chains, earrings, smoking, drinking, vulgar speech	Negative markers include short clothes, makeup, hair open, active social media use

Sexuality illustrates this asymmetry sharply. For men, badness lies in acts of violation like harassment, touching, staring. For women, it lies in choice itself: having lovers, preferring love marriage, showing physical affection, even dressing "improperly." While men are judged for harm inflicted, women are judged for freedom exercised. Appearance and style sit at the core of female morality, while for men they remain only secondary signs.

These contrasting scripts train boys to see themselves as moral actors whose worth is tied to control and responsibility, while expecting girls to prove morality through self-erasure and restraint. In practice, this produces not just double standards but a hierarchy: men entitled to voice, movement, and authority; women required to limit theirs. Unless disrupted, these moral maps harden into adult expectations that normalize control and inequality as natural.

Gender Pressures of Being Male

For most adolescent boys, "being male" is not experienced as a neutral identity but as a role defined by obligation. Their narratives reveal a strong sense of duty to provide, protect and uphold family honour, often long before they have the means to do so. While a small minority reported feeling no particular pressure, the overwhelming majority articulated expectations that link masculinity with economic provision, familial responsibility, physical strength and moral accountability. These pressures shape how boys see themselves now and anticipate their futures, embedding adult responsibilities into adolescence.

- **Provider Role – Breadwinner and Economic Security**

  Boys feel pressure to study, get good jobs and earn to support families, repay debts and secure siblings' futures. Masculinity is tied to financial success, producing early anxiety, especially among poorer households.

- **Familial Responsibility – Care, Marriage, and Honour**

  Expected to uphold family honour, support parents and arrange sisters' marriages. Boys are positioned as custodians of family reputation and female relatives' futures.

- **Protector Role – Physical Safety and Security**

  Masculinity linked to safeguarding wives, children, parents and property. Physical dominance is treated as a male duty, reinforcing hypermasculine ideals that reject vulnerability.

- **Held to Higher Standards – Responsibility and Pressure from Elders**

  Boys reported closer monitoring and stricter expectations than female siblings, being told to “act mature” and carry responsibility early.

- **Physical Activity and Performance**

  A few boys linked masculinity to excelling in sports or physical labour, reinforcing strength as a gendered marker.

- **Absence of Pressure**

  About 7% said they feel no gender-based pressure, either due to more egalitarian families or because they had not yet internalised such expectations.

Theme 6: Aspirations, Role Models and Future Goals

This theme explores the aspirations adolescent boys hold for themselves and their family members, including the presence or absence of role models, the nature of their ambitions and their future goals. Responses reveal a complex mix of personal ambition, family expectations, social influences and gendered norms that shape how boys envision their futures.

1. Presence and Absence of Aspirations

78% of the respondents expressed clear aspirations related to professions, sports or family roles, while a minority of 22% either paused, remained silent or explicitly stated they had no defined goals. This ambivalence or absence of articulated aspirations is an important marker of uncertainty and possible limited exposure or motivation.

- **Clear aspirations:** Many boys aim to become police officers, collectors, doctors, army personnel, cricketers and businessmen.
- **No answer/uncertainty:** Multiple responses showed boys who were silent or said "don’t know," "no role model," or had not yet decided.
- **Family care emphasis:** Some boys who lacked specific goals emphasized the desire to be self-sufficient and care for their family and parents.

The silence or indecision around future goals may indicate socio-economic and environmental constraints limiting these adolescents' ability to envision or confidently articulate a career path. The emphasis on family care, even in the

absence of concrete aspirations, reflects culturally ingrained values of familial responsibility that shape identity and future orientation.

2. Role Models and Inspirations

Role models play a vital role in shaping aspirations. 70% of the respondents identified someone they admired, often a family member, local figure, actor or sports personality. Conversely, 30% stated they had no role model or were unsure of who could inspire them.

- **Family members:** Fathers, brothers, cousins, uncles majorly followed by a small number of mothers and sisters frequently appeared as role models, especially those with steady jobs or hard work ethic.
- **Sports figures:** Cricket players like M S Dhoni, Virat Kohli and kabaddi players were popular role models, reflecting sports as a major aspirational domain. Many indicated their aspiration to become a sports star.
- **Actors:** Actors like Allu Arjun and Prabhas were frequently mentioned as role models reflecting the powerful cultural influence of media. Interestingly, there was not a strong indication of boys aspiring to become actors.
- **Other Role Models:** A diverse range of professions such as civil servants (both as collectors as well as police officers), army personnel, local police personnel, businessmen appeared as role models and as aspirational professions. A few responses mentioned teachers rarely. Male figures from neighbours, community also occupied the roles of role models.
- **No role model:** A substantial portion explicitly said they lacked any role model.

Role models embody traits that adolescents value, such as hard work, respectability, success and strength, all of which are often linked to masculinity ideals. The prominence of family figures suggests strong familial influence on aspirations, while the admiration for sports and popular culture figures indicates wider social influences. The lack of role models for some signals possible emotional or social isolation or limited exposure.

3. Gendered Aspirations and Identity

The aspirations and role models often align with traditional gender norms, with boys aspiring to careers associated with strength, protection and public service (army, police, sports), while girls' aspirations were less frequently discussed.

- **Masculine roles:** Predominantly police, army, sports and business are aspired to, reflecting societal ideals of masculine strength, protection and provider roles.
- **Ambivalence about female aspirations:** Few respondents mentioned their sisters' or female relatives' goals; where mentioned, it was only discussed until completion of her education and career aspirations were not widely referenced. The few references limited themselves to teachers, doctors or marriage, often with parental approval.

These gendered aspirations reflect the intersection of masculinity with social status and respect, where "good men" are providers, protectors and hard workers. The less articulated or stereotyped female goals highlight prevailing gender roles and the limited scope offered to girls in these communities. The rejection of deviant identities also aligns with hegemonic masculinity ideals stressing discipline and respectability.

4. Moral and Social Boundaries in Aspirations

Almost 60% of the respondents expressed clear boundaries on what they do not want to become, frequently defining undesirable identities (e.g., drunkard, rogue, lazy, wastrels) that threaten social respect and family honour.

- **Explicit rejection of bad behaviour:** Drinking, smoking, fighting, and idleness are commonly condemned.
- **Social respect and family honour:** Aspirations are linked with maintaining family dignity and avoiding shame.
- **Moral framing of success:** Success is not only professional but tied to being morally upright and responsible.

The moral framing highlights how adolescent boys negotiate their masculinity through positive role models and rejection of stigmatized identities. The strong emphasis on family honour and respect underlines social pressures influencing identity formation and goal setting.

5. Role Models: Gendered Patterns and Implications

Role models play a crucial role in shaping adolescent boys' emerging identities, aspirations and understanding of gendered social order. Through their narratives about who they admire and why, these boys reveal the deeply gendered nature of aspirations, social expectations and the traits they associate with ideal men and women. This section explores the nature of these role models, the gendered traits boys admire and how these preferences both reflect and reproduce dominant notions of masculinity and femininity within their social contexts.

The vast majority of role models mentioned by adolescent boys are male: fathers, brothers, uncles, male neighbours, police officers, army men or well-known male figures such as sports stars, actors and influential leaders. Approximately 90% of cited role models are men. On the contrary, Female role models are mentioned only in a small minority of responses, estimated around 10%.

Predominance of Male Role Models: A Reflection of Hegemonic Masculinity

Analysis of the responses reveals a clear pattern: male role models overwhelmingly dominate the boys' aspirations and admiration. Fathers, brothers, uncles, and community men are most frequently cited as inspirations. These men embody traits associated with strength, responsibility, leadership, and moral integrity, all of which are core ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

- Boys admire men who are hardworking providers, seen as the backbone of family survival and social respectability. The father, for instance, is often described as the "strongest" figure, the one who endures hardships silently, works tirelessly and maintains family honour.
- Physical and moral strength is another dominant theme. Male role models are often associated with bravery, resilience and the ability to confront challenges. These are qualities exemplified by sports heroes, military personnel and police officers. Boys conceptualize strength not only as physical robustness but as emotional toughness, the ability to withstand adversity without showing vulnerability.
- Boys also emphasize leadership and social authority as valued masculine traits. Aspirations towards careers in the police force, military, civil services and other positions of social power underscore their desire to be recognized and respected public figures who uphold order and protect the community.
- Moral integrity and avoidance of negative behaviours such as drinking, smoking or loafing around are recurrent reasons for admiration or

disapproval. Role models are men who embody honesty, hard work and respectability, reinforcing socially approved masculine ideals. Boys frequently express a desire "not to become like bad boys who smoke and drink", reflecting the moral policing intertwined with masculine identity formation.

Marginalisation of Female Role Models: The Private, Supportive, and Subservient Ideal

In stark contrast to the prevalence of male role models, female role models are a distinct minority, largely confined to mothers and sisters within the family. The traits admired in these women underscore the deeply entrenched gender norms that assign women primarily to domestic, nurturing and emotionally supportive roles.

- Female role models are lauded for their patience, endurance and hard work, particularly within the household. They are the unseen labourers who sustain the family emotionally and practically. Boys admire their mothers for "never complaining and doing all the work at home", and sisters for "studying well and taking care of the family."
- Women are also valued for their modesty, restraint and social respectability. Qualities such as dressing "properly," behaving with decorum and adhering to social expectations about femininity are seen as markers of an ideal woman. These traits are closely linked to family honour and community standing.
- Importantly, female role models often provide educational and emotional support, helping boys with homework and encouraging their studies. Yet, this contribution is seen as secondary, supportive rather than aspirational.

Table 22. Gendered Contrast in Role Model Traits

Trait Category	Male Role Models	Female Role Models
Labour & Work Ethic	Hardworking, breadwinner roles	Hardworking in household & emotional labour
Strength & Courage	Physical, moral strength, bravery	Emotional patience and endurance
Social Role	Leadership, authority, protector	Caregiver, supporter, nurturer
Moral Virtue	Honesty, integrity, no bad habits	Modesty, restraint, social respectability
Educational Support	Role models in profession/skills	Helpers with education, homework

Theme 7: Participation of Boys in School Activities

School activities are not merely extracurricular engagements; they are crucial sites where adolescents learn social roles, rehearse identities and negotiate gender norms. For the adolescent boys in this study, participation in school life revealed a deeply gendered pattern, shaped by cultural expectations, peer policing and institutional reinforcement. The responses point to a landscape where boys' involvement is robust in some areas (notably sports) but heavily restricted in others (particularly cultural and collaborative activities), reflecting the ways hegemonic masculinity constrains both their choices and their expressions of self.

Table 23. Frequency Analysis of Category of Participation (N = 313)

Category of Participation	**% of Mentions**
Sports (Cricket, Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, Volleyball, etc.)	67%
Academic & Assembly (Quiz, Debates, News Reading, Thought for the Day, Anchoring)	12%
Cultural (Singing, Dancing, Drama)	5%
Event Organization (Decoration, Rangoli, Fund Collection, Coordinating)	7%
Non-Participation (Any School Activity)	9%

Note: 14 responses could not be coded meaningfully for this analysis

1. Sports: The Dominant and Legitimate Space

The most striking finding is the overwhelming dominance of sports participation. About 67% of boys reported involvement in games like cricket, kabaddi, kho-kho and volleyball. These functioned as a primary arena where boys could assert their masculinity, gain peer approval and perform strength, endurance and competitiveness, all of which are qualities aligned with social ideals of boyhood.

Sports were consistently described as the "natural" activity for boys, while the absence of girls in these spaces reinforced a gendered segregation of school life. Participation in sports was not questioned or stigmatized; instead, it was considered the rightful domain of adolescent masculinity.

2. Academic and Assembly Roles: Limited and Selective

Only 12% of boys reported engaging in academic or assembly-related activities, such as quizzing, debates, news reading or delivering the "thought for the day." These activities were viewed as requiring confidence, eloquence and public speaking skills, traits not every boy felt able or willing to display. Boys who did take part often described themselves as chosen by teachers or recognized for their academic performance, suggesting that participation here was selective and tied to achievement.

3. Cultural Participation: The Feminized and Stigmatized Domain

Participation in cultural activities such as singing, dancing and drama was strikingly rare reported by only 5% of boys. When asked, most dismissed these as "girls' activities." Even boys who admitted to enjoying singing or dancing said they refrained from participating publicly due to the risk of being mocked or labelled effeminate. Here, the data points clearly to peer policing, where boys regulate one another's behaviour in unspoken ways to ensure conformity with dominant masculine ideals. The stigma surrounding cultural participation reveals how masculinity is constructed through exclusion not only of girls, but also of boys who step into traditionally feminized domains.

4. Event Organization: Gendered Division of Labour

Responses around school event organization showed a stark gender divide. 7% of boys said they participated in activities like decoration or coordination, but further probing revealed that their involvement was usually limited to contributing money or helping in physical tasks. Girls, on the other hand (as described by the boys), led decoration, rangoli, fund collection and overall coordination of cultural events. This reflects how even when labour intensifies during school functions, traditional gender roles remain firmly intact. Girls shoulder the creative and organizational responsibilities, while boys are expected to remain peripheral, reinforcing ideas of male detachment from domestic or aesthetic labour.

5. Non-Participation: Shyness, Fear, and Exclusion

Around 9% of boys explicitly reported not participating in any school activities. The most common reasons were shyness, fear of mockery and stage fear. Several

boys admitted they avoided participation not because they lacked interest, but because they feared being teased or humiliated. Others said they had little encouragement from teachers, reflecting institutional failures to include less confident boys.

This silence around participation reveals another face of masculinity: the pressure to conform makes boys withdraw from activities where they risk being judged, preferring invisibility over vulnerability.

Table 24. Frequency Analysis of Reasons for Non-Participation (N = 28)

Reason for Non-Participation	**% of Mentions**
Shyness / Stage Fear	43%
Fear of Mockery by Peers	35%
Not Interested (No Reason Given)	8%
Not Encouraged by Teachers	14%

Note: Only 28 responses that indicated Non-Participation were considered for this analysis

When asked if boys and girls ever did activities together, the answer was almost universally no. Joint participation was absent, with each gender confined to its socially sanctioned roles. Boys described cultural contributions like singing, dancing, and decoration as feminine, while identifying sports and physical work as masculine. This separation not only maintained strict gender boundaries but also denied boys opportunities to experience collaborative, cross-gender interaction that might challenge stereotypes or foster empathy.

Theme 8: Family Honour

Family honour is a pivotal construct in the socialization of adolescent boys and is deeply intertwined with notions of masculinity, femininity and the prevailing gender order. It functions as a moral compass regulating behaviour within the family and community, shaping boys' emerging identities by assigning them the role of guardians of the family's reputation. This theme highlights how family honour is both a source of pride and a heavy responsibility for boys, reinforcing patriarchal norms that emphasize male authority and control, especially over female relatives.

Understanding family honour is essential to grasp how adolescent boys negotiate their masculine identities while simultaneously enforcing gender hierarchies. The concept influences expectations around obedience, educational achievement, behavioural discipline and most notably, the control and surveillance of women's sexuality, as evidenced by concerns around elopement and love marriages. These dynamics illuminate the reproduction of gender inequalities and the social pressures boys face in conforming to traditional masculinity within their socio-cultural context.

1. Patriarchal Responsibility: Men as Protectors of Honour

The overwhelming consensus among respondents is that fathers and elder males bear the primary responsibility for upholding family honour. Boys see this role as central to their masculine identity and often anticipate inheriting it as they grow older underscoring a gendered transfer of authority. This responsibility is linked to men's roles as protectors, decision-makers and economic providers. A significant number of boys explicitly name their fathers or themselves as future bearers of this burden, reinforcing a hegemonic masculinity ideal characterized by authority and control.

While some boys acknowledge that all family members contribute to honour, this is framed hierarchically, with women and children often positioned as secondary or exempt from responsibility.

2. Threats to Honour: Gendered Morality and Social Discipline

The boys identified a range of behaviours and circumstances that threaten family honour, which cluster predominantly around social conformity, moral conduct and especially female behaviour. The responses link honour loss to fighting (within the family or community), substance abuse, debt, poor academic performance and economic failure.

While most of these apply to both males and females, unique behaviours linked strongly to female behaviours were further identified. Most strikingly, elopement, love marriages, disobedience or perceived promiscuity are repeatedly framed as some of the most dangerous threats to family honour. This reflects deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that control female sexuality and movement as a means of regulating masculine status and social standing.

These perceptions maintain strict surveillance and restrictions on girls, reinforcing gendered divisions of freedom and responsibility. The fear of

elopement or love marriage acts as a powerful social control mechanism, limiting female autonomy and reinforcing boys' roles as protectors and enforcers of family norms.

3. Gendered Accountability: Masculine Authority and Female Subordination

Linked closely to threats are the gendered divisions of accountability and authority. Boys express that men are the ultimate protectors and bearers of honour, while women, especially daughters and sisters, are often seen as "repositories" of honour who must be closely monitored and controlled. This dynamic creates a paradox where women are both the bearers of honour and the primary subjects of suspicion and discipline. Boys' narratives reveal that honour is not only about external reputation but also about controlling and regulating female behaviour to conform to patriarchal norms.

The boys' acceptance of this division underscores how masculinities are constructed through authority, control, and the management of femininity.

4. Emotional Dimensions: Pride, Anxiety and Ambivalence

The theme evokes a complex emotional landscape. Boys express pride in their family honour and the desire to uphold it, while also feeling the weight of anxiety and fear over its potential loss. At the same time, some boys reveal limited understanding or ambivalence, reflecting gaps in socialization or discomfort engaging with the full implications of family honour.

Theme 9: Menstruation Awareness and Perceptions Among Adolescent Boys

Menstruation remains a profoundly significant yet highly taboo topic within adolescent boys' socialization, particularly in traditional cultural contexts. The data reveals a striking landscape marked by pervasive ignorance, entrenched silence and fragmented knowledge. Most of this knowledge is mediated by indirect observation and limited educational exposure. Understanding this theme is critical, as it offers deep insights into how boys internalize gender norms, negotiate masculinity and relate to femininity within their families and society.

Table 25. Frequency Analysis of Responses About Menstruation (N = 327)

Category	% of Responses
No knowledge / "Don't know" / No answer	37%
Observed restrictions (seclusion, rituals, no cooking/puja)	17%
Mentions of "Periods" or "Menstruation" (without detail)	15%
School lessons (partial recall)	6%
Media/TV as knowledge source	4%
Pain or discomfort mentioned	7%
Household role redistribution	6%
Emotional discomfort or distance	3%
Menstruation as marker of femininity / gender boundary	5%

1. Pervasive Lack of Knowledge and Gendered Silence

A dominant pattern across the responses is a profound lack of knowledge about menstruation. 37% of the respondents simply indicated "don't know" or included no answer at all when asked about periods. This widespread ignorance is not accidental but rather a manifestation of a gendered silence and taboo that surrounds menstruation, making it an almost invisible subject in boys' worlds. The social norms that restrict open conversations mean boys are often shielded from menstrual education and discourse, which sustains a cycle of secrecy and misunderstanding.

2. Learning Through Observation: Restrictions and Practices Without Explanation

Despite limited factual knowledge, many boys have observed menstrual-related restrictions within their households. Around 17% mentioned women staying separately during menstruation, abstaining from cooking or religious rituals like puja, and the shifting of household responsibilities to male family members during this period.

However, these observations are rarely accompanied by meaningful explanations, leaving boys with ritualistic rather than informed understandings. The message conveyed is often one of secrecy and exclusion rather than empathy and education, reinforcing menstruation as an 'othered' female experience.

3. The Role of School and Media: Incomplete and Indirect Education

Schools and media emerge as notable sources of information, but their contributions are often limited, fragmented and problematic. Around 6% referenced school lessons on reproduction or adolescence, but many boys reported incomplete recall or lack of detail. Similarly, media and especially TV advertisements for sanitary products, was mentioned in roughly 4% responses as a source of knowledge. Yet, this exposure is largely commercial and lacks educational depth.

This fragmented dissemination does little to break down the taboos or provide emotional context, instead leaving boys with partial, sometimes confusing messages.

4. Emotional Distance and Limited Empathy

The data also highlights boys' limited emotional engagement with menstruation. While some noted personal actions like buying sanitary pads for sisters, few demonstrated deeper empathy or understanding of the physical and emotional challenges involved. This emotional distance aligns with broader gendered norms that discourage boys from engaging with women's bodily experiences openly, further entrenching gender divides.

5. Menstruation as a Marker of Femininity and Gender Boundaries

Finally, menstruation stands out as a powerful cultural marker that reinforces traditional femininity and masculine separation. The practices around menstruation - seclusion, abstaining from certain activities and male assumption of household roles - signal and reproduce rigid gender boundaries. Boys learn early that menstruation is a private, female domain, teaching them implicitly about their own expected roles and emotional detachment.

This theme on menstruation is vital to understanding how masculinity and femininity are constructed during adolescence. The gendered silence and exclusion surrounding menstruation symbolize a broader pattern where boys are systematically distanced from 'feminine' knowledge and experiences. This exclusion shapes not only boys' ignorance but also limits their emotional literacy and empathy toward girls and women.

Addressing these gaps requires breaking the silence with inclusive, sensitive education that integrates boys into conversations about menstruation by actively encouraging empathy, knowledge, and respect. Only then can more equitable gender relations be fostered.

Theme 10: Phone Usage and Content Consumption

For almost every adolescent boy in this study, the mobile phone has become an inseparable part of daily life. Nearly 99% of the dataset mentioned that they use a phone with internet connection. Only three boys reported not using a phone, either due to lack of access or because of religious restrictions in their families. This near-universal access highlights the depth of digital penetration in adolescent boys' everyday lives, shaping leisure, peer connection and even learning opportunities. 32% of adolescent boys mentioned that they have their own phone and do not share it with anyone else. Yet, how boys actually use these phones and the kinds of content they consume reveals a far more layered story. Use of phones for entertainment dominates the digital worlds and educational use remains marginal. The tradition of consuming family-level shared content is eroding, replaced by highly individual, solitary screen time.

Table 26. Frequency Analysis of Uses of Phones

Category	**% of mentions**
Entertainment (Reels, Shorts, Funny Videos)	80%
Sports Content (Watching Matches/Highlights)	66%
Online Games	63%
Educational Content (Tutorials, Homework Help)	16%

Note: This was a multiple-response item.

1. Individual Content Consumption: The Centrality of Entertainment

Entertainment is the main focus of boys' phone use. A vast majority of 80% of the dataset reported watching Instagram reels, YouTube shorts or similar bite-sized videos. Many described spending long stretches of time scrolling through these, especially during late evenings or at night. Sports-related content formed

the second pillar of digital engagement. About 66%reported watching matches, highlights or sports related content online. Cricket, basketball, badminton, kabaddi were the most popular choices.

Online gaming, mentioned by nearly the same proportion of 63%, added another layer to this entertainment-driven landscape. Games offered not just amusement but also a form of competitive, social interaction. If not gaming themselves, they watched videos of gaming channels on YouTube.

In sharp contrast, educational use of the phone was far less common, with only 16% reporting that they used their phones for study-related videos, tutorials or exam preparation. Even within this small group, most qualified their usage as occasional or exam-driven. The dominance of entertainment over education thus emerges as one of the most consistent findings, underscoring a missed opportunity to leverage digital access for learning.

2. Family-Level Content Consumption: Shared Spaces in Decline

The study also uncovered an important cultural shift: communal viewing as a family is in decline. Over half the boys reported that they usually consumed content individually, with little to no shared viewing at home.

Where family viewing did exist, it tended to revolve around a few specific forms of entertainment. Many mentioned watching *Jabardasth* and *Sridevi Drama Company*, both of which are Telugu language comedy shows known for their loud, slapstick humour and reliance on caricatures. They also said they watched *Bigg Boss* with family. Another set mentioned watching TV serials, though here an interesting gender dynamic emerged: boys frequently noted that mothers and sisters were the primary viewers of serials, while they themselves either joined occasionally or watched with mild reluctance.

The tone of family-level content consumption was often passive. Boys described these sessions as routine rather than engaging. Very few mentioned active discussion or bonding over the content. Instead, the family living room is increasingly being replaced by individualized, mobile-based consumption.

Contextual Section: Comedy Reels and Popular Television Shows

1. Comedy Reels (Instagram, YouTube Shorts, Similar Platforms)

Short-form comedy reels emerged as the most consumed category, with four out of five boys watching them daily. Typically 15–60 seconds long, these reels rely

on skits, trending songs, movie scenes or exaggerated dialogues to deliver instant humour. The humor, however, is rarely neutral.

- **Gendered Stereotypes:** Many reels feature jokes that ridicule women's appearances, portray them as frivolous or present them as objects of desire. Boys rarely reported questioning these messages. Instead, they laughed along, describing the content simply as "time pass."
- **Mockery as Entertainment:** The constant exposure to jokes based on body size, accents, sexual orientation or exaggerated "feminine" behaviour, filled with expletives normalizes ridicule as an acceptable form of fun.
- **Peer Bonding:** Watching and sharing reels often doubles as a way to bond with friends, further embedding these portrayals into peer culture. In group contexts, laughing at such humour becomes a marker of belonging.

2. *Jabardasth* and *Sridevi Drama Company*

Among television content, these two Telugu-language comedy shows were the most frequently mentioned, with majority of boys saying they watched them with family. Both are marketed as family entertainment, but the underlying humour is far from benign.

- **Caricatured Gender Roles:** Women in these shows are often mocked for their looks, speech or supposed emotional weakness. Male comedians frequently cross-dress, exaggerating "feminine" traits for laughs, reinforcing the idea of femininity as comic rather than serious.
- **Marriage and Relationship Jokes:** Many skits revolve around marriage, dowry or romantic relationships, where women are portrayed as obstacles, nags or passive recipients of men's decisions.
- **Family-Legitimized Humour:** Since boys watch these shows in family settings, the laughter of parents and siblings acts as social approval. This collective enjoyment makes it difficult for adolescents to critically reflect on the stereotypes embedded in the humour, perpetuating the cycle further.

3. *Bigg Boss*

Bigg Boss was also widely viewed by many boys. *Bigg Boss* is a reality show centered on the lives and conflicts of celebrity contestants locked in a house. While framed as entertainment, it normalizes certain aggressive, sensational and gendered behaviours.

- **Conflict and Confrontation:** The show thrives on arguments, dominance displays and emotional manipulation. Boys often described it as "fun" or "time pass," but rarely acknowledged how such content might normalize aggressive or attention-seeking behaviour.
- **Gender Coding of Roles:** Male contestants are often applauded for assertiveness and boldness, while female contestants are criticized for being "too emotional" or "creating drama." Boys' accounts of the show reflected this framing, reinforcing ideas that masculinity equates to dominance.
- **Family Viewing Dynamics:** Unlike reels, which are highly individualized, *Bigg Boss* is more often watched together. Yet the nature of the content means that families consume, without critique, a spectacle rooted in conflict and gender stereotypes.

Theme 11: Movies and Gender Perceptions

Movies play a powerful role in shaping adolescent boys' ideas of gender, relationships and social norms. For many of us, films are not only a source of entertainment but also a key space where ideals of masculinity, femininity and interpersonal gender relations are learned and rehearsed. In this theme, responses reveal that adolescent boys are especially drawn to movies featuring hyper-masculine heroes, physical fights and displays of dominance. At the same time, they showed discomfort with overt displays of intimacy and struggled with films where women occupy equal or agentic roles. By examining reactions to popular films such as *Pushpa*, *Arjun Reddy* and *Fidaa*, the analysis uncovers the values that adolescent boys admire, the aspects that unsettle them and the ways in which cinematic portrayals reinforce or challenge their gender beliefs.

1. The Allure of Hyper-Masculine Heroes

A near-universal theme emerging from the responses was the strong attraction to hyper-masculine heroes and action-filled storylines. Boys consistently described fights, displays of aggression and overt "macho-ness" as the most exciting parts of the films they watch. Heroism was equated not with moral courage or fairness but with physical dominance, fearlessness and the ability to overpower others, mainly physically. The figure of the macho hero provided a template of aspiration, one that combined swagger with a refusal to submit to authority.

- **Fights as Entertainment:** Action scenes were cited as the main reason to watch films, with boys often saying movies without fights were "boring."
- **Macho Projection as Heroism:** Heroes who walked, spoke and fought with swagger and style were admired unconditionally.
- **Uncritical Acceptance:** Even when the hero's actions involved crime or aggression, these were overshadowed by admiration for his boldness and strength.

This overwhelming preference underscores how strongly the cultural script of aggressive masculinity is embedded in adolescent imaginations. The valourisation of fights and macho-ness reflects an equation of masculinity with dominance, mirroring patterns from previous themes where boys defined strength in terms of physical power and fearlessness. Such preferences also show the limited space in which alternative models of male heroism, based on kindness, integrity or fairness can be imagined or celebrated.

2. Discomfort with Romance, Intimacy, and Female Sexuality

When asked what they disliked in movies, a strikingly consistent pattern emerged: boys expressed strong discomfort with depictions of romance, intimacy and female sexuality. The majority of responses fell into this cluster, with "romance movies," "love scenes," "kissing and hugging," "item songs," and "bad dressing" among the most repeated phrases. Their language was not neutral but heavily loaded with judgment, often describing such scenes as "dirty," "not appropriate," or associated with "bad culture." This discursive framing reveals that what unsettled them was not only the act of intimacy but also the perceived breach of moral codes and gendered respectability.

- **Romance Fatigue:** The repeated mention of "romance movies" as something they did not like points to a widespread rejection of love-centred narratives. This rejection was not linked to boredom alone but couched in moral terms, that such movies were "not appropriate" or were "wrong." The sheer repetition shows that romance was viewed almost universally as a problematic genre.
- **Intimacy as Shameful:** Boys specifically singled out physical closeness such as "kissing" and "hugging," describing them as "dirty scenes." The language of dirtiness and shame situates intimacy not as a normal part of human relationships but as an intrusion into cultural purity. This discomfort

contrasts starkly with their enthusiasm for violence and aggression, which were never described as dirty or shameful.

- **Item Songs and Policing of Women's Bodies:** Many boys targeted "item songs" and "bad dressing" as reasons for disliking films. The disapproval of heroines' clothing which was often described as "bad culture", reveals an undercurrent of moral policing directed specifically at women's bodies. While heroes' aggression or criminality could be excused or even admired, a woman's clothing was constructed as a marker of cultural decline.
- **Rejection of Emotional Vulnerability:** Beyond intimacy, boys also dismissed "sad, emotional movies," framing them as unappealing. This rejection of affective content highlights an unease with vulnerability and tenderness, reinforcing the idea that masculinity must remain detached from emotional softness.
- **Selective Rejection of Violence:** A small minority said they disliked movies with "too many fights" or "too much killing," but this was far less frequent than complaints about romance. Even here, violence was criticized only when excessive, whereas romance was rejected in principle.

It is important to situate these findings in the broader context of how romance and intimacy are portrayed in most Telugu cinema. Mainstream films rarely depict healthy or egalitarian relationships; instead, they frequently cater to the male gaze, where heroines are objectified in item songs, love is shown through coercion or possession and intimacy centres on male desire rather than mutual agency. In this sense, the boys' discomfort with romance and intimacy is not a rejection of problematic gender portrayals but a reinforcement of patriarchal respectability norms.

Their use of terms like "dirty," "bad culture," "not appropriate," and "bad dressing" reflects anxieties around female sexuality, rather than critique of the male gaze. In other words, while these scenes themselves are deeply gendered and problematic, the adolescents' rejection does not emerge from a lens of critical awareness. Instead, it positions women's bodies and intimacy as sources of dishonour that must remain hidden.

This pattern underscores a double bind: boys distance themselves from problematic cinematic intimacy not because they see its coercive undertones, but because they have internalized a cultural script where women's sexuality is to be policed and masculinity must remain untainted by tenderness or vulnerability.

3. Rejection of Female-Led Movies

When asked if they watched or liked movies centred entirely around female characters, with no presence or weak male hero roles, an overwhelming 97% of boys said they did not. The responses were remarkably consistent, describing such movies as "boring" or "not nice." Many explicitly stated that it felt unnatural or inappropriate for women to be in central, action-oriented roles. This rejection reflects not only disinterest but also a deep discomfort with seeing women displace men from their traditional position as heroes and saviours.

- **Boring and Unappealing:** The most common explanation was that female-led films lacked excitement or were "boring." This dismissal was not elaborated, suggesting an ingrained assumption that women cannot carry a film in the same way as men.
- **Cultural Unsuitability:** Some framed it as "not nice for women to do all that," implying that leading roles, especially in action or assertive contexts, are inappropriate for women.
- **Male Savior Complex:** Several boys admitted they preferred male-led films because heroes were needed to "save" the female characters reinforcing a narrative of male protection and dominance.
- **Conditional Acceptance:** Among the very few who did name female-led films, their choices were telling: they referenced movies where women performed conventionally masculine roles, such as being a cop, fighting, killing villains or taking revenge. Biographical films of exceptional women were also mentioned, suggesting that only women who adopt traditionally male-coded traits or extraordinary biographies were deemed worthy of central roles.

4. What Boys Find Problematic and Uncomfortable in Movies

When asked about scenes they found problematic or uncomfortable in films, boys' responses revealed a layered mix of hesitation, moral judgment and selective critique. Many initially said "nothing" or remained silent, indicating both a reluctance to speak openly about intimate or sensitive content and the difficulty of articulating discomfort in culturally taboo areas. Among those who did respond, the overwhelming references were to romantic and intimate scenes, especially kissing, hugging or sexual innuendo. These were often described in moralistic terms such as "dirty," "vulgar," "bad words," "short dresses" and framed as inappropriate, particularly when watched with family. "Item songs"

were repeatedly singled out, as were heroines wearing "short clothes" and dancing suggestively. A smaller set mentioned rape scenes, acid attacks and torture of women, acknowledging discomfort with violent gendered content.

- **Romantic and Intimate Scenes:** The most consistent source of discomfort was romantic intimacy: kissing, hugging or sexually intimate scenes. Many boys said they felt embarrassed, turned off the TV or left the room during such scenes, especially in the presence of family. Their descriptions carried a tone of shame, with repeated references to such scenes as "dirty" or "vulgar."
- **Item Songs and Women's Clothing:** Item numbers, often featuring women in revealing costumes, were described as problematic. Boys policed heroines' clothing, associating "short dresses" with "bad culture," while violence or aggression by men rarely attracted the same critique.
- **Hesitation and Silence:** Several boys initially said "nothing" or admitted that it was difficult to say what they disliked. Some spoke in euphemisms such as "we both know what I'm talking about", reflecting the taboo nature of discussing sexuality openly.
- **Gendered Double Standards:** A few articulated discomfort with women "betraying" lovers, referencing films like *Baby*, where heroines were described as "loose" for drinking or cheating. Interestingly, when given examples of men having multiple relationships (e.g., *Brindavanam*), they found this acceptable, underscoring a strong male bias in moral judgment.
- **Violence and Social Issues:** A smaller group found scenes of rape, acid attacks, caste discrimination and torture disturbing. These were recognized as problematic, though notably less frequently than romantic or sexual content.

These responses reveal a deeply moralized and gendered discourse around discomfort in films. The primary discomfort was not with violence or toxic male behaviour but with women's sexuality and intimacy, which were consistently coded as dirty, vulgar or culturally degrading. This mirrors broader social anxieties around female respectability, where women's choices of dress or intimacy are scrutinized, while men's aggression or coercion is normalized or excused.

The silences and hesitations are as telling as the explicit responses. Many boys could not name what made them uncomfortable, hinting at cultural taboos around

discussing sexuality. Those who did often couched their discomfort in euphemisms, suggesting that the subject was both personal and morally charged.

Case Studies of Popular Films

To complement the broader thematic analysis, the study examined adolescents' responses to three highly popular and influential Telugu films: *Pushpa*, *Arjun Reddy* and *Fidaa*. These films were deliberately chosen because of their mainstream success and cultural resonance. They offered contrasting portrayals of masculinity, romance and female agency, making them powerful lenses through which to understand how adolescents interpret and justify gendered representations on screen.

By focusing on specific scenes from each movie, the analysis sought to uncover not only what boys enjoyed or disliked, but also how they explained their reactions as well as the discursive strategies they used to rationalize or normalize behaviours, the silences they maintained and the values they projected onto characters. The case studies thus provide insight into how cinema serves as a site where boys rehearse their ideas of masculinity, femininity, love and power.

Case Study 1: Pushpa

Pushpa was one of the most widely cited and enthusiastically discussed films among the adolescents in this study. Almost all respondents were familiar with it and the majority admired the hero for his style, his attitude and his ability to outsmart powerful figures like the police and politicians. The film offered a concentrated projection of hyper-masculinity, with the hero portrayed as fearless, cunning and unyielding which resonated strongly with adolescent boys' ideals of what a man should be.

- **Admiration for Hyper-Masculinity:** Boys highlighted Pushpa's style, dialogues, and physicality. His refusal to bow down and his dominance over opponents were seen as admirable qualities.
- **Conditional Dislike Centred on Smuggling:** A significant portion said they did not like the film, but their reasons were primarily because the hero was a smuggler. Notably, these critiques were not grounded in gender norms or problematic behaviour toward women and were moral in a legalistic sense.

- **Criticism of the Heroine's Clothing:** Many expressed disapproval of the heroine's "dressing style", "exposing" linking her appearance with "bad culture" or inappropriateness. This repeated the broader pattern of discomfort with women's sexuality and presentation, while leaving male aggression unchallenged.

Scene Analysis 1: Hero Offering Money for a Kiss

Figure 7. A scene from the movie *Pushpa*

In this controversial moment, the hero offers money to the heroine in exchange for a kiss, while the heroine is visibly uncomfortable. This scene was probed specifically to see how adolescent boys interpret the ethics of such an exchange and the gender dynamics it reveals.

- **Moral Framing as "Wrong Because of Money":** Several boys said they did not like the scene, but their disapproval was rooted not in recognizing the coercion or disrespect toward the heroine, but in the idea that one should not "do such things for money." The discomfort centred on the transaction, not the violation of consent.
- **Love as Justification:** Few boys acknowledged they didn't like the scene but then added that the hero "really loved her," reframing the act as an expression of passion rather than coercion. This echoes patterns from *Arjun Reddy*, where aggression is excused as love. A few further went onto say that in most scenarios like this, the heroine is bound to eventually fall in love with the hero and that is a justification.
- **Normalization of the Act:** Some explicitly said the act was "not wrong" or interpreted it pragmatically: *"maybe this is a way to get kisses"*. Several justified the scene as acceptable because it was "just cinema" or "for

comedy," distancing it from real life. These responses showed little recognition of the heroine's visible discomfort or the problematic implications of pressuring a woman into intimacy.

- **Focus on the Heroine's Clothing:** Alongside commentary on the scene, some boys returned to criticizing the heroine's dress, saying she did not "tie the saree well." This indicates how boys displaced their discomfort onto women's appearance, rather than examining the hero's behaviour.
- **Normalization of Persistence:** A few explicitly said it was fine for the hero to continue pursuing intimacy even after the heroine said no, reflecting a deeply ingrained acceptance of male persistence despite refusal.

Scene Analysis 2: Heroine Touches Hero's Chin with Her Leg

Figure 8. A scene from the movie *Pushpa*

In another scene from *Pushpa*, the heroine's leg touches the hero's chin to indicate an important gesture in the film. Though only a small number of boys directly commented on this scene, the reactions it provoked, as well as the silences around it are deeply revealing of how adolescent boys interpret female equality and agency in expressions of intimacy.

- **Awkwardness and Discomfort:** The few who spoke about the scene described it as "strange" or "not nice," with some laughing off the question rather than giving a direct opinion. The physical assertiveness of the scene appeared to make boys uneasy, especially as it inverted the usual gender script of male initiative and female passivity.

- **Framing as Improper:** Some framed it as improper or culturally inappropriate, not because it involved intimacy, but because it was not proper for a wife to do something like this.
- **Silences and Evasions:** Several avoided responding altogether, indicating the difficulty of articulating reactions such a scene.
- **Nervous Humour:** For some, the response came in the form of giggles or deflection, signalling discomfort more than outright condemnation. This suggests the scene was memorable precisely because it challenged their expectations.

Case Study 2: Arjun Reddy

Arjun Reddy provoked a complex mix of admiration, discomfort and unease among the adolescent boys in this study. While some boys expressed excitement about the film's action and the hero's cool, confident image, many also voiced disapproval, but for reasons that centred less on gendered behaviour and more on "bad habits" like drinking, smoking and swearing. The hero being a doctor who exhibited such habits was frequently cited as a mismatch and a disappointment. At the same time, a significant number admired his personality, physical dominance and status among women.

This case study reveals how adolescent boys navigate films that portray toxic masculinity not as problematic, but as alluring and aspirational. Critiques focused less on gendered violence or emotional manipulation and more on superficial traits like foul language or substance use.

- **Discomfort with "Bad Habits":** Many boys said they didn't like *Arjun Reddy* because of his drinking, smoking, drug use and verbal aggression. They framed this as inappropriate, especially for a doctor.
- **Admiration for Swagger and Female Attention:** Despite this, several boys described him as "cool," praising how he was always around women or how he confidently stood out. His charisma and dominance especially over women were admired, even by those who claimed to dislike the film.
- **Dislike of Emotional Vulnerability:** Boys strongly disapproved of the hero crying over the heroine or appearing emotionally vulnerable. It was described as lowering his status.

Scene Analysis 1: The "Naa Pilla" Declaration

Figure 9. A scene from the movie *Arjun Reddy*

In this pivotal scene, the hero publicly claims the heroine as "naa pilla" ("my girl"), warning other students to stay away from her. Notably, the heroine herself has not expressed consent, awareness or agreement. The scene was selected to probe how adolescents interpret such acts of possession, and whether they recognize the absence of the heroine's agency.

- **Framed as Proof of Love:** Many boys praised the scene as powerful or romantic, saying it showed the depth of the hero's love. The possessive claim was reframed as a sign of intensity and devotion rather than a violation of consent.
- **Admiration for Boldness:** The act of warning others was seen as courageous and masculine. The hero's ability to assert control publicly added to his cool, dominant image.
- **Silence on Her Lack of Consent:** Almost no student pointed out that the heroine had not agreed to or even known about this claim. Her absence of agency was largely invisible in their discourse.
- **Status and Protection Justifications:** Several described the act as "protecting her" or "keeping other boys away," framing it as an act of care rather than control.
- **Discomfort Only with Aggressiveness:** A small minority said they disliked the scene, but their reasoning was often about it being too aggressive or lowering the hero's dignity, not about consent.

The responses highlight a strong romanticization of possession. By and large, boys did not read the scene as a denial of the heroine's autonomy; instead, they reframed the hero's unilateral claim as a sign of love, bravery and masculinity. Consent or the heroine's right to choose were conspicuously absent from their explanations.

What emerges is a cultural script where love equals possession and control, and male boldness trumps consent. The silence around the heroine's voice in this scene reveals how easily women's agency is erased when set against narratives of masculine passion and courage.

Scene Analysis 2: Hero Slaps the Heroine

Figure 10. A scene from the movie *Arjun Reddy*

In this controversial moment from *Arjun Reddy*, the hero slaps the heroine during an argument. The scene was probed to understand whether adolescents recognized the act as problematic or whether they rationalized it as part of love and passion.

- **Justified as Love or Passion:** Several boys said the slap was acceptable because it came from a place of love, echoing the logic that "if he didn't love her so much, he wouldn't get so angry." The violence was reframed as a passionate expression rather than abuse.
- **Minimization and Normalization:** Some described it as a "small mistake" or said it was okay because "all lovers fight." This minimized the seriousness of physical violence.

- **Framing as Discipline or Correction:** A few responses suggested the slap was a way of correcting the heroine because she must have made a mistake, reflecting patriarchal beliefs that men have the right to physically discipline women.
- **Discomfort but Not Condemnation:** A minority said they didn't like the scene, but their discomfort was often vaguely framed as "not nice", without clearly naming it as wrong or abusive.
- **Silences and Deflections:** Some boys avoided commenting altogether, showing unease in openly discussing gendered violence, but also suggesting a lack of strong moral opposition to it.

This discourse is especially troubling because it provides a cultural script for adolescents: that in relationships, male anger is legitimate and female consent or well-being can be sacrificed for it. The silences and evasions reinforce the taboo nature of openly questioning masculine violence, ensuring that such acts remain normalized rather than problematized.

Case Study 3: Fidaa

Fidaa offered a striking departure from typical male-centred Telugu films, focusing on a female lead who was vocal, assertive and resolute about her choices. The heroine's prominence in length, dialogue and agency made the film an ideal lens to understand how adolescent boys respond when the balance of gender power shifts on screen. Responses to the film were sharply divided: while many dismissed it as boring or uncomfortable because of the heroine's dominant presence, a notable number admired her for being traditional, cultured and devoted to family. The film thus became a mirror for boys' ambivalence about female agency: celebrated when tied to modesty and caregiving, criticized when expressed through assertiveness or leadership.

Dislike of Female Assertiveness

- **Too Loud, Too Dominating:** A majority complained that the heroine was "loud," "boisterous," "overacting" or "tomboyish." These descriptors framed her assertiveness as unfeminine and undesirable.
- **Talking Too Much:** Several explicitly said she "talks a lot," indicating that even verbal assertiveness felt excessive.
- **Hero Seen as Weak:** The male lead's easy-going and accommodating demeanour was criticized. Many boys said he was "not macho" because he let the heroine dominate, marking him as less heroic.

- **Absence of Action Scenes:** Boys described the film as "boring," noting the lack of fights or action sequences that usually excite them.

Conditional Appreciation Rooted in Traditional Femininity

- **The Real Actress's Image:** A large share of positive responses centred not so much on the character as on the actress's real-life persona. Boys admired her as cultured, modest and traditional, praising her for wearing sarees, not using makeup and being "well-behaved." This admiration for the actress carried over into their liking for the film.
- **Admiration for Caregiving:** Many boys appreciated that the heroine took care of her father, giving him medicine and supporting the family, and not her assertive agency.
- **Connection to Local Culture:** The Telangana village setting was cited as a reason for liking the film, as it felt close to their own cultural identity.
- **Acceptance of Male Coded Tasks:** Some admired her for working on a tractor, a conventionally male activity, but framed it as necessity ("no son in the house") rather than empowerment.

The reception of *Fidaa* shows how adolescent boys' appreciation of female agency is highly conditional. Many dismissed the film outright as boring because it lacked the usual mix of fights and macho swagger. Criticism of the male lead for being lenient underscores how masculinity remains defined by dominance.

At the same time, positive responses revealed that appreciation of the heroine hinged less on her assertiveness and more on her alignment with traditional femininity and cultural familiarity. In essence, *Fidaa* highlighted a double bind: female agency was criticized when it disrupted gendered expectations, and celebrated only when tethered to modesty, caregiving and tradition. The hero's lack of macho dominance further reinforced that for these adolescents, films are exciting only when men lead through aggression, not when women share or hold the centre stage.

Scene Analysis 1: The Chappal Response to the Hero's Proposal

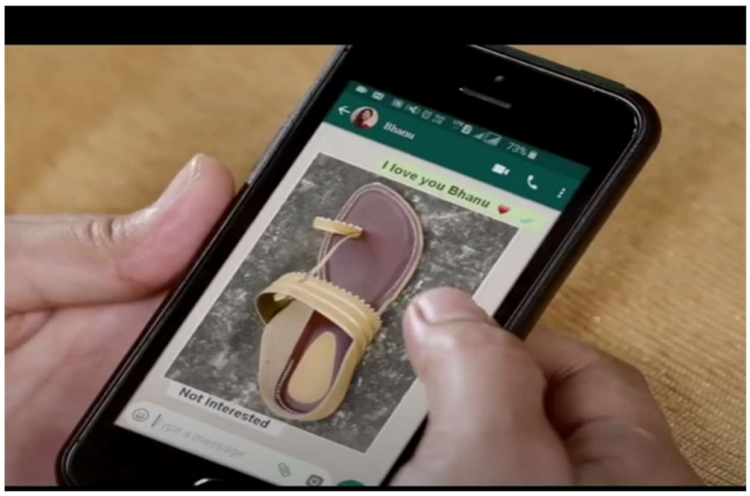

Figure 11. A scene from the movie *Fidaa*

In *Fidaa*, when the hero proposes to the heroine over the phone, she responds by sending a photo of a slipper as a symbolic rejection that is both playful and assertive. This scene was specifically chosen to test adolescent boys' comfort with a female lead directly refusing male advances in a humorous yet defiant way.

- **Framed as Disrespectful:** The overwhelming response was negative. Boys repeatedly described the act as "wrong," "insulting" or "arrogant." The use of the slipper was seen not as playful resistance but as a disrespectful rejection of male authority.
- **Belief that Women Should Not Refuse:** Several explicitly said that a "female can't say no" or that "a heroine should never reject a hero," reflecting the expectation that women must accept male advances, especially from a leading man.
- **Gendered Expectations of Submission:** Some linked the act to larger ideas of how women should behave, saying the heroine "should understand and respect him," "should be submissive" or "shouldn't scold the hero."
- **Ridicule and Dismissal:** A few laughed at the scene, trivializing the heroine's defiance instead of taking it seriously as an assertion of choice.
- **Moralizing Female Boldness:** Beyond the slipper image, boys criticized her boldness in general.

The repeated insistence that *"females can't say no"* or *"heroine should never reject the hero"* shows how refusal itself is seen as unacceptable and as a violation of the male entitlement that underpins much of their cinematic imagination. The

demand that girls should be “submissive” underlines how deeply patriarchy is internalized for woman’s boldness to be seen as transgression, even in a fictional scene.

What is striking is how few recognized the scene as playful or as a legitimate expression of autonomy. Instead, rejection was moralized as wrong, both because of the slipper’s symbolism and because it disrupted the expectation that women must yield to male advances. The ridicule by some respondents also works as a discursive move to trivialize female assertion.

Scene Analysis 2: Hero Moves to Telangana for the Heroine

Figure 12. A scene from the movie *Fidaa*

In *Fidaa’s* climactic twist, the heroine refuses to abandon her father and family to settle in the US. In response, the hero decides to leave behind his career and life abroad to live in her village. This reversal of the traditional expectation where a woman typically leaves her home after marriage, generated a wide range of reactions, from pride and admiration to disapproval and outright rejection.

- **Admiration for Sacrifice (But as Rare/Unrealistic):** Many boys admired the hero’s decision, saying it showed how much he loved the heroine. Yet several added that such sacrifices “never happen in real life,” where men rarely leave their families.
- **Pride in Cultural Affirmation:** A few said they felt proud that someone from the US chose a village girl, interpreting it as validation of their identity.
- **Discomfort with Reversal of Gender Norms:** A significant number argued it was “not right” for a man to leave his family. They said society

would gossip, men would lose respect and such actions diminish masculinity.

- **Reinforcement of Traditional Marriage Norms:** Several said, "After marriage, the girl must go to the boy's house," emphasizing that women are the ones who should adjust, not men.
- **Conditional Acceptance:** Some softened their critique by saying it was okay "since it was his choice," but they implied that it remained an exception to the rule.
- **Belief That Sons Are Indispensable:** A few justified the hero's move only because the heroine's family had no son, saying the hero would now fulfil that role. This reinforced the belief that families need a son to look after parents, a role that daughters were seen as incapable of performing.

Theme 12: Exploring Gendered Perceptions Through Visual Triggers

This thematic section was designed to go beyond verbal questioning and elicit spontaneous, unfiltered responses from adolescent boys when confronted with visual scenarios that challenge or disrupt conventional gender roles and perceptions. The use of images as prompts allowed boys to project their immediate cultural assumptions, emotional reactions and discursive strategies without the need for carefully constructed verbal rationales.

Drawing from visual ethnographic and projective techniques in qualitative research methodologies, the medium of images was deliberately used as research prompts as they provided a concrete and accessible entry point for discussion without needing abstract theoretical language. It helped in surfacing hidden discourses around masculinity, femininity and domestic roles; elicit metaphors and adjectives that revealed deep cultural anxieties; capture silences and evasions and to test the elasticity of norms by observing how participants justified, resisted or conditionally accepted role reversals. The three images chosen were crafted to provoke thought, unsettle traditional expectations and test the boundaries of acceptance. Together, they intended to reveal:

- How adolescent boys interpret role reversals in domestic labour, leisure and authority.
- What discursive paths they choose to explain, justify or resist unfamiliar gender scenarios.

- The underlying cultural logics that shape their comfort and discomfort with changing gender norms.

Across all three images, adolescents engaged in a process of discursive negotiation when confronted with visuals that challenged their existing conventional gender roles. While their responses recognized and sometimes accepted role reversals, they often relied on justifications, metaphors and silences to contain the disruption to traditional norms. Male authority, dignity and comfort were protected, while female authority or leisure was frequently reframed as abnormal, problematic, dominating or conditional. Together, the images illustrate how deeply embedded gender hierarchies remain in adolescent imaginations, even as some voices signal the possibility of change.

Analysis of Image 1: Man Cooking, Boy Washing Dishes

Figure 13. An image of a man cooking and a boy washing dishes

This image was included in the study to probe adolescent boys' perceptions of men and boys participating in household work, a domain traditionally coded as feminine within their social and cultural context. By showing a man cooking and a boy washing dishes, the picture was intended to challenge conventional notions of domestic labour as the sole responsibility of women and to test how adolescent boys interpret such a reversal. The aim was not only to gauge whether they found this scenario acceptable, but also to uncover the discursive strategies they employed to explain or justify what they saw.

The image served as a critical lens to examine whether boys view male participation in housework as a natural responsibility, a supportive gesture or a conditional necessity. Their responses reveal much about how they understand gender roles at home: whether they see domestic work as collective, as women's rightful domain or as inappropriate for men. In analyzing their language right from the frequent use of terms like *"helping"* to explanations involving the

mother's absence, and even outright rejection, this theme provides insight into how boys negotiate the boundaries of masculinity, responsibility and equality in the intimate space of the household.

Table 27. Frequency Analysis of Responses to Image 1

Category	**Description**	**% of Mentions**
Helping (Not Primary Responsibility)	Men/boys framed as "helping" with chores, not owning responsibility	27%
Conditional (Mother Absent/Unavailable)	Participation explained as necessary only if mother away/sick/dead	36%
Teamwork / Shared Effort	Father and son seen as working together, collaborative frame	10%
Neutral / Pure Description	Plain factual statements with no explicit judgment	30%
Negative / It's Wrong	Explicit rejection; chores labelled as "women's work"	8%

1. Helping (Not Primary Responsibility)

A striking number of responses used the language of "helping" when describing what they saw. Boys frequently said that the son was "helping" his father or that the father was "helping" with cooking. This choice of words is significant. It does not frame household work as a shared responsibility, but rather as something that properly belongs to women, with men's or boys' involvement presented as a voluntary act of support. In other words, they are not imagined as rightful co-owners of this responsibility, but as temporary assistants.

The repeated use of "helping" underscores the persistence of gendered hierarchies in domestic labour. The very fact that the father and son are not simply described as "cooking" or "washing" but rather as "helping", exposes the belief that these tasks are not their duty. Instead of redefining the act as men's work too, boys often interpreted it as stepping into a woman's domain. The framing positions male household work as supportive rather than equal.

2. Conditional (Mother Absent/Unavailable)

Many explained the scene by invoking the absence or incapacity of the mother. Boys wrote that the father and son must be cooking and cleaning only because the mother was away, unwell, dead or otherwise unavailable. Here, men's entry

into domestic chores is justified as a necessity, not as a normal pattern. A few responses already indicated that the man and boy must be working in a hotel.

These responses reveal a strong undercurrent of traditional gender ideology. The father and son are only "present" in the kitchen when the woman is absent. Far from suggesting a redistribution of domestic labour, this narrative reinscribes the idea that women own the kitchen. Male work at home is tolerated only under exceptional circumstances. The insistence on conditionality shows both awareness of gender expectations and reluctance to imagine alternative norms.

3. Teamwork / Shared Effort

A smaller group saw the image not as helping or substituting, but as an example of collective responsibility. These responses described the father and son working together, using words like "both," "together," "sharing" or "happily." Unlike the helping or conditional narratives, these boys did not rely on an absent mother to explain the scene. Instead, they saw collaboration as natural and even admirable.

4. Neutral / Pure Description

Over half of the responses simply described what the boys saw, without offering interpretation, approval or disapproval. These were matter-of-fact statements. The neutrality of these responses can be read in two ways. First, it may suggest that such depictions are slowly becoming normalized and are not surprising enough to provoke comment. Second, it could reflect a reluctance to articulate opinions about gender norms, either due to social conditioning or lack of comfort. Neutrality here does not mean indifference - it may mask internalized norms or quiet agreement without explicit endorsement.

5. Negative / It's Wrong

A very small but striking minority openly labelled the scene wrong or inappropriate. These responses often carried strong cultural or moral undertones, asserting that such work should belong only to women. Though numerically few, these responses show how entrenched gender norms can still shape young people's thinking. The association of household chores exclusively with women was so strong that some boys expressed laughter, discomfort or even religious language to delegitimize men's participation. This small cluster is a reminder that change, while emerging, is not uncontested.

Analysis of Image 2: Woman Relaxing with Tea, Man Standing Nearby with Folded Hands

Figure 14. An image of a man standing with folded hands and a woman sitting, drinking tea

This image was included to explore adolescent boys' perceptions of female leisure and comfort within the domestic space, a scenario rarely depicted in their everyday realities. The picture shows a woman sitting and drinking tea while a man stands beside her, reversing the normative expectation that men occupy positions of authority or relaxation while women manage the household. By situating a woman in a position of visible ease, the image sought to test whether adolescents could accept female comfort without reframing it as abnormal, undeserved or threatening.

Table 28. Frequency Analysis of Responses to Image 2

Category	**Description**	**% of Mentions**
Role Reversal as Servitude	Man described as maid/servant; woman sitting as if being served	28%
Madam / Boss Imagery	Woman described as madam, boss, controlling, showing attitude	24%
Conflict / Disrespect	Scene framed as wrong; man angry, tortured, humiliated, not respected	21%
Neutral / Pure Description	Plain factual statements, no explicit judgment	20%
Approval / Positive Equality	Scene described as good/normal; woman's comfort accepted	7%

The purpose of including this image was to examine whether boys interpret women's leisure as legitimate or as a disruption to traditional gender order. Their responses revealed not only whether they found the scene acceptable, but also the discursive frames they used to explain it such as casting the man as a servant or the woman as a madam, boss or controlling figure. In doing so, the analysis sheds light on how adolescent imaginations often equate female relaxation with male humiliation, reasserting gender hierarchies even in moments of supposed equality. This image thus provided a critical lens to understand the cultural anxieties tied to female authority and rest, and the conditional terms under which adolescents might accept such role reversals.

1. Role Reversal as Servitude

A substantial cluster of boys read the man's standing posture and the woman's leisure through the discourse of servitude. Instead of seeing the man as a husband or equal partner, they described him as a maid, servant or someone working for her. The woman's act of sitting comfortably and drinking tea was not framed as relaxation, but as a sign of the man's demotion to a lower social position.

- Frequent use of terms: "maid," "servant," "working for her," "serving tea."
- Metaphors of loss of status: the man no longer appears as the head of the household but as a subordinate.
- Some responses framed the woman as a "madam" (lady of authority) and the man as her servant, establishing a clear hierarchy.

This shows how adolescent boys struggled to imagine domestic equality without reframing it as male humiliation. The act of a man serving tea is stripped of dignity and re-coded as servitude, not partnership. The discomfort reflects deeply ingrained associations between masculinity and authority.

2. Madam / Boss Imagery

Another notable group of responses cast the woman not only as being served, but as authoritative and dominating. She was repeatedly called a madam, boss or someone controlling her husband. This language transformed her passive act of drinking tea into a symbol of active dominance.

- Adjectives: "madam," "boss," "dominant," "controlling," "owner," "showing attitude."

- Narratives of her having him “in her grip” or “making him do all tasks.”
- Power inversion imagery: the woman elevated, the man subordinate.

The discourse here reframes female leisure as female dominance. A woman simply sitting with tea came across as threatening as her comfort was equated with authority over the man. This shows how unsettling the boys found female authority: they struggled to see a woman resting without turning her into a controlling figure. The adjectives reveal a deep anxiety about a reversal of household hierarchy.

3. Conflict / It’s Wrong

Many boys explicitly described the scene as wrong or uncomfortable. They noted that the man looked angry, feared his wife or was being tortured. Some even added stories of women beating men or humiliating them.

- Emotional vocabulary: “angry,” “fear,” “torture,” “not respecting,” “wrong.”
- Framing of the woman’s leisure as abusive: “she beats father,” “he fears her,” “she is torturing him.”
- Some responses laughed or treated it as comic, masking discomfort in humour.

This cluster shows how strongly role reversal is experienced as threatening. The woman’s leisure is not just strange but coded as disrespectful or abusive, suggesting that boys see equality as a potential loss of male dignity. The laughter accompanying some responses reflects unease: humour is used to soften the anxiety that the scene provoked.

4. Neutral / Pure Description

About a fifth of the boys gave plain descriptions without overt judgment, saying only that the mother was drinking tea and the father was standing.

- A lot of the responses here used short, factual phrases: *“She is drinking tea and he is standing.”*
- There was absence of adjectives, interpretation or emotional cues.
- Possible avoidance of stating an opinion.

Neutrality here is less about genuine acceptance and more about either hesitation to express views or discomfort with framing the unusual scene. In discourse terms, silence or plain description may signal latent unease, meaning boys notice the reversal but decline to articulate their feelings.

5. Approval / Positive Equality

A small minority viewed the scene positively. They described it as good, nice, or happy, treating the woman's comfort as legitimate rather than humiliating for the man.

- Words: "good," "nice," "happy," "normal."
- Neutral or approving tone, without servant or boss imagery.
- Some framed it as care or respect: the man willingly serving his wife.

These responses are rare but important. They represent the possibility that adolescents can see female leisure as acceptable and even desirable. Unlike the majority, these boys did not equate the man's serving posture with humiliation. Instead, they framed it as a normal act of care within relationships.

What if there is a Role Reversal?

When probed further by asking how they would react if the roles in the image were reversed with the man sitting comfortably and sipping tea while the woman appeared in a serving role, nearly 30% of boys said that would be absolutely fine. They explained that such an arrangement would align with the norm and "how it should be." This reveals that their discomfort in the original image stemmed not from the act of serving itself, but specifically from the woman being the one in leisure and the man in a seemingly subordinate position. In discourse terms, while their immediate reactions relied on servant/boss metaphors to describe the woman as dominating or torturing, their willingness to endorse the reversal underscores that they remain firmly anchored in patriarchal scripts where male dominance is naturalized and female comfort is contingent. The finding highlights not openness to equality, but rather the sharp boundary of acceptance: boys could recognize their unease as rooted in the disruption of gender hierarchy, and they resolved it by reaffirming that the norm should preserve male authority.

Analysis of Image 3: Group of Mostly Women with One Male in Discussion

Figure 15. An image of a group of women with one man conversing with each other

This image was included in the study to explore how adolescent boys perceive male presence and authority in female-majority spaces. The image, showing a group of women gathered with one male among them, deliberately disrupted the conventional expectation that men dominate public and decision-making forums. The intent was to see whether adolescents could imagine women as leaders and decision-makers, and how they would rationalize the unusual gender composition.

Table 29. Frequency Analysis of Responses to Image 3

Category	Description	% of Mentions
Meeting Frame	Scene normalized as a meeting (PTM, school, family discussion)	28%
Male Justified as Relative	Male described as a son, brother or a younger relative rather than equal member	21%
Awkward Lone Male	Emphasis on discomfort; “weird,” “awkward” or “shy” being the only male	21%
Male as Boss / Authority	Male automatically cast as leader or decision-maker despite female majority	18%
Approval / Positive Equality	Some acceptance of the composition as good/normal	10%
Neutral / Pure Description	Plain factual description, no clear judgment	20%

The image tested whether boys were comfortable with a male in the minority and how they would frame his role. This image thus served as a crucial lens to understand the deep gendered logics around authority: it revealed how boys discursively protect male leadership even in contexts where women dominate and how the idea of female authority remains almost unimaginable.

1. Meeting as a Familiar Frame

Most boys described the image as some kind of meeting: a Parent–Teacher Meeting (PTM), school meeting or family discussion. This interpretive move served to normalize the otherwise unusual sight of a group dominated by women with one male present. By re-casting the setting as an institutional or family meeting, boys were able to situate the image within contexts they already understood.

The instinct to label the scene as a meeting shows a need for contextual justification. Without this, the visual of women sitting in a group with a male was unfamiliar, possibly unsettling. The meeting frame acted as a discursive "safe box" to contain the unusual image.

2. Justification of the Male's Presence

Boys repeatedly sought to explain why the lone male was there. Many deliberately described him as a son, brother or relative, stressing that he was not an equal participant but someone attached to a woman present.

The insistence on labelling the man as young or related signals discomfort with imagining a male fully embedded in a female-dominated group. By recasting him as a child or dependent, boys protected gender hierarchies: the women were framed as adults, while the male's presence was explained away as incidental.

3. Awkwardness of the Lone Male

Several boys explicitly noted that it felt "weird" or "awkward" for the male to be the only man in the group. The absence of other men was marked as unusual, suggesting that male comfort is tied to the presence of other men.

This reveals a deep unease with men occupying minority positions in female spaces. Masculine comfort is discursively tied to numbers where being alone among women was seen as suspicious or emasculating. This indicates how strongly group composition matters in adolescent gender perceptions.

4. The Male as Boss / Authority – Absence of Women in Authority Roles

A notable minority described the male as the boss or authority figure in the group. Interestingly, none of the boys described any of the women as the boss, even though the majority were women. Authority, when imagined, was attached to the male presence. The women were described as listening, attending or part of the meeting, never leading it.

This discursive move highlights the persistence of patriarchal assumptions: even when women form the majority, authority is symbolically vested in the man. The refusal to imagine a woman as the leader, despite visual cues, reflects how entrenched male-centred power is in adolescent thinking. It also shows how discourse works subtly: what is not said reinforces what is believed.

Overarching Patterns Across the Three Images

The adolescents' responses to the three images collectively reveal a set of recurring discursive patterns that show how gendered expectations are internalized, defended and sometimes cautiously negotiated. While each image prompted distinct reactions, the overarching themes demonstrate the ways in which boys read, justify and contain challenges to entrenched gender norms.

- **Containment Through Language:** Across all three images, boys used discursive strategies that allowed them to contain the disruption posed by nontraditional gender roles. Rather than acknowledging the images as representations of equality, they framed them in ways that re-anchored the scenario back to existing norms.
- **Masculinity Tied to Authority:** The responses across images underscored that masculinity, in the boys' imagination, remains inseparable from authority.
- **Female Authority as Unimaginable:** The silence and resistance around women's authority was a striking cross-cutting theme.
- **Conditional Acceptance of Equality:** While explicit rejection of equality was not always dominant, acceptance came with clear conditions.
- **Uneasy Negotiations of Change:** Together, the responses reveal adolescents caught in uneasy negotiations between entrenched gender beliefs and glimpses of alternative realities.

Theme 13: Perception of Transgenders Among Adolescent Boys

Perceptions of transgender individuals among adolescent boys provide a crucial lens into how gender diversity is understood, normalized or marginalized within patriarchal and heteronormative contexts. Based on all the responses, this theme reveals a complex spectrum of inter-play ranging from indifference and avoidance to curiosity, acceptance and empathy. The analysis highlights not only the dominant attitudes but also the silences and hesitations that structure these perceptions. Boys' responses reflect the influence of cultural taboos, religious and social beliefs, and peer norms that shape how they relate to gender nonconformity.

Table 30. Frequency Analysis of Responses to Transgenders (N = 327)

Category	**% of Mentions**
Neutral	41%
Avoidant	24%
Negative	15%
Curious	11%
Open-Minded	6%
Empathetic	3%

The majority of boys reported either neutrality or avoidance, with explicitly negative views forming a significant minority. Only a small group expressed curiosity, open-mindedness or empathy.

1. Neutrality — Social Invisibility and Ambivalence

The largest group of respondents expressed neutral or indifferent views, often stating they had never interacted with transgender individuals. Neutrality here functions less as acceptance and more as a marker of invisibility. Many responses indicated a lack of exposure and limited social frameworks for understanding gender diversity.

This ambivalence reflects the social silencing of transgender lives, where absence of contact results in ignorance rather than informed acceptance. It highlights the risk of neutrality reinforcing invisibility and maintaining the status quo. Neutrality may appear harmless but sustains the erasure of transgender

individuals. Without proactive engagement, it leaves boys unprepared to recognize or resist stigma when confronted with diversity.

2. Avoidance — Discomfort Rooted in Social Norms

A significant section expressed avoidance or discomfort. These responses often revealed unease around difference, with boys stating they would prefer not to interact with transgender individuals.

Avoidance reflects the policing of gender boundaries within peer groups and family environments. Boys are socialized to see gender conformity as "normal," and deviation from this norm triggers discomfort. Avoidance illustrates how patriarchy enforces conformity through subtle distancing rather than outright hostility. It suggests that while these boys may not actively stigmatize, they internalize social cues that cast transgender people as outsiders.

3. Negative Attitudes — Prejudice and Stigma

A smaller section expressed explicitly negative views, framing transgender people as "abnormal" or morally wrong. These responses draw heavily on cultural and religious justifications for exclusion.

Such perspectives contribute to upholding hegemonic masculinity, where rigid gender binaries are recognised and rewarded and those who challenge them are rejected. Negative responses also reflect fears of contamination of family honour and social reputation if boys associate with transgender individuals. These attitudes demonstrate the persistence of structural stigma rooted in patriarchy, religion and cultural narratives. They reinforce the exclusion of transgender individuals from social spaces, including schools.

4. Curiosity — Tentative Openness

An even smaller group displayed curiosity. These boys wanted to understand transgender experiences better, often framing their responses as questions or expressions of interest.

Curiosity represents a transitional space where ignorance meets potential learning. These boys are not entrenched in prejudice but lack avenues for dialogue or accurate information. This curiosity offers a promising entry point for educational interventions.

5. Open-Mindedness — Respect and Recognition

Very few expressed openly positive views, affirming respect for transgender individuals and their rights. These responses reflect an emerging counter-narrative within adolescent masculinity, where diversity is normalized and equality affirmed. Open-mindedness remains a minority stance, but it illustrates the capacity for adolescent boys to resist patriarchal gender policing when exposed to inclusive narratives.

6. Sub-Theme 6: Empathy — Recognition of Struggles

Even fewer showed empathy, explicitly acknowledging discrimination faced by transgender people and expressing a desire to support them.

Empathy represents the deepest level of affective engagement, moving beyond tolerance to solidarity. These boys connected transgender struggles to broader concerns about justice and fairness which are crucial for imagining and modelling inclusive masculinities.

4.2 Cross-Thematic Analysis

The cross-thematic analysis allows us to step back from individual domains and see how adolescent boys' gendered perceptions travel across contexts. This synthesis highlights recurring codes, contradictions and silences that together form a broader cultural script. Importantly, it shows how ordinary practices and moral vocabularies into systemic gendered expectations. By clustering similar codes from different themes, we observe how control, authority and surveillance work across spheres. This higher-order analysis reveals not only what boys think, but how fragmented, contradictory and deeply gendered these frameworks are.

1. Control of Girls' Mobility

Across household, siblings, schools, and peer relations, restrictions on girls' movement appear as a cross-cutting norm. Boys repeatedly describe rules about where girls can go, who they may talk to, and whether they may use phones or social media. These restrictions are justified as "protection," but they embed control within everyday practices. By normalising surveillance, boys reproduce the idea that female safety is contingent on limited freedom, while boys themselves enjoy comparatively unrestricted mobility.

2. Male Authority in Decision-Making

From fathers' dominance in household decisions to brothers acting as guides or enforcers, male authority is reproduced across sites. Boys internalise the assumption that men make decisions while women comply. This pattern is visible not only in families but also in peer groups, where boys take on leadership roles and frame their authority as natural. The result is a continuum of masculine dominance that flows from domestic hierarchies into aspirations for adulthood.

3. Gendered Division of Labour

Domestic work—cooking, cleaning, caregiving—remains coded as female responsibility. Boys often describe detachment from these roles, seeing them as irrelevant to their own identities. This exemption begins early, socialising boys into habits of entitlement while reinforcing women's identity as caretakers. The cross-thematic presence of this code shows how household gender roles echo into schools, friendships, and even future aspirations, limiting imagination about shared labour.

4. Silence Around Femininity

Menstruation, girls' emotions, and romantic relationships are silenced topics across domains. Avoidance reinforces ignorance and stigma: boys know little about these experiences but still attach shame and taboo to them. This silence is reproduced in families, schools, and peer conversations, showing how the erasure of femininity maintains distance between genders and discourages empathy.

5. Peer Policing of Masculinity

Peers enforce toughness and mock vulnerability, especially crying, close friendships with girls, or "non-manly" behaviours. This cross-theme pattern shows how masculinity is collectively policed: boys regulate each other through ridicule, normalising suppression of vulnerability. The effect is to narrow acceptable masculinity to toughness, control, and heterosexual performance, leaving little room for empathy or difference.

6. Contradictions Between Equality Talk and Practice

Boys often voice support for girls' education and rights in abstract terms, but simultaneously reinforce restrictions in everyday life—expecting sisters to stay home, mocking peers who befriend girls, or imagining women as primarily homemakers. These contradictions reveal that equality is embraced rhetorically but undermined in practice, reflecting the partial internalisation of social change without corresponding transformation in daily behaviour.

7. Moral Double Standards

The "good woman" is defined by modesty, silence, and boundary-keeping, whereas the "bad man" is judged through active misconduct like drinking, fighting, or harassment. This unequal moral script reflects deeper asymmetries: men are evaluated by their actions, women by their restraint. Such moral double standards reinforce patriarchal hierarchies by holding women to stricter, more restrictive codes of respectability.

8. Strength as a Gendered Ideal

Strength is consistently tied to masculinity: physical dominance, courage, and endurance define what it means to be a "good man." For women, strength is rarely acknowledged; when it appears, it is reframed as sacrifice, patience, or self-control. This shows how the same value—strength—is gendered differently, reinforcing binaries where men embody physical power and women embody quiet endurance.

9. Technology as a Site of Gender Anxiety

Phones, social media, and online content represent freedom for boys but risk and corruption for girls. Families and peers describe technology as a space where girls' morality may be compromised, while boys' engagement is normalised as leisure or connection. This double standard reveals how new technologies reproduce older anxieties about female visibility and sexuality, becoming a contemporary site of control.

10. Family Honour as Gendered Burden

Across themes, women's behaviour is treated as carrying family reputation. Boys describe monitoring sisters or emphasise that women must preserve family dignity through modesty and obedience. This makes family honour a gendered burden, disproportionately placed on women's conduct, while men's reputations hinge more on achievement and public respect. The unequal distribution of honour reinforces male authority as guardians and female dependence as bearers of respectability.

11. Normalization of Violence and Aggression

Boys describe fighting, bullying, and anger as tolerable or even expected traits of masculinity. Aggression is read as strength, while its absence can be mocked as weakness. In contrast, when girls argue, shout, or even raise their voices, it is condemned as immoral or disrespectful. This cross-cutting pattern highlights how violence is gendered—accepted in men, forbidden in women—thereby legitimising male dominance and silencing female assertion.

Chapter 5:
Recommendations

5.1 Key Recommendations

The findings from this study make clear that gendered perceptions among adolescent boys are not abstract opinions but deeply embedded cultural scripts that shape daily life in homes, schools and communities. Left unaddressed, these norms risk hardening into adult behaviours that sustain inequality, restrict girls' opportunities and leave boys themselves confined within narrow and often damaging ideals of masculinity. Schools, as formative spaces where children spend a significant portion of their lives, hold both the responsibility and the opportunity to intervene in these processes.

It is critical to emphasise that gender equity should not be seen as interventions for girls alone. Boys too must be active recipients of gender-sensitive practices, exposed to positive male and female role models, and given spaces to reflect on masculinity, respect and equality from early childhood. Without this dual focus, equity risks being framed as "girls' issues" rather than a shared transformation of culture.

It is therefore urgent to design school policies, classroom practices and peer engagements that directly address the biases revealed in this research. Interventions must not remain tokenistic or limited to one-off sessions but should be integrated into everyday structures of schooling, right from budget plans and teacher training to the informal culture of classrooms and playgrounds. The following recommendations aim to provide a roadmap for actionable change at multiple levels, combining structural reforms with everyday nudges that can shift the culture of schooling toward greater gender equity.

Prioritise Gender in School Development and Budget Plans

Gender equity should be embedded as a priority within school improvement plans and budget allocations. This requires setting concrete, measurable targets that go beyond infrastructure and access such as safe transport, hygienic toilets and gender-sensitive facilities, but also to also include investments in building equitable school culture. Allocations must cover sustained gender-sensitisation of all stakeholders, from teachers and staff to students and parents. Without integrating both structural and cultural aspects into planning and resourcing, schools risk reducing equity work to piecemeal or ad-hoc initiatives.

Strengthen Teacher Capacity as Change Agents

Teachers play a central role in either reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes. Regular, practical training must be provided to help teachers identify everyday biases, facilitate open discussions about gender and model respectful relationships in their own conduct. Teachers need tools, not just theory, to handle sensitive topics such as emotions, harassment or gender roles in ways that are constructive and non-judgmental.

Nominate and Empower Gender Coordinators

Every school should appoint a designated gender focal teacher who is formally recognised, given dedicated time and supported with resources to lead gender initiatives. This role should include tracking issues, coordinating with colleagues and ensuring continuity rather than leaving gender work to individual enthusiasm or external projects.

Integrate Gender Reflection in Classroom Routine

Gender awareness should not be limited to occasional campaigns. Teachers can integrate short reflective exercises into daily pedagogy such as story discussions, emotional check-ins or reflective logs of chores shared at home, so that questions of fairness, empathy and shared responsibility become part of classroom culture.

Peer Leadership and Student Clubs

Creating mixed-gender student clubs on themes such as health, aspirations or community service provides boys and girls with opportunities to practice dialogue, cooperation and shared responsibility. These peer spaces encourage boys to see girls as equals and collaborators, rather than subjects of restriction or protection.

Curricular Integration

Gender issues must be woven into the formal curriculum rather than treated as extra-curricular. Literature can be used to analyse gender roles in stories, science to highlight women scientists, and social studies to examine family structures critically. Such integration ensures that gender equity is treated as an academic and civic issue, not just a behavioural one.

Safe Discussion Spaces

Adolescent boys need safe, structured forums such as circle time, debates or role plays, where they can talk openly about masculinity, emotions, peer pressure and relationships without ridicule. Guided by teachers, these discussions can reduce silence around difficult topics and provide healthier scripts for navigating adolescence.

Normalize Female Role Models

Inviting women professionals, alumni or respected community members into classrooms and assemblies expands boys' imagination of leadership, success and authority beyond men. Regular exposure to female role models challenges stereotypes and fosters respect for women in public and professional life.

Low-Resource Visual Nudges

Even small visual cues can shift school culture. Displaying classroom charts that show chores done by boys, aspirations of students across genders or qualities of a "good friend" help normalise equity in subtle, everyday ways. These nudges remind students that gender fairness is not abstract but lived daily.

Address Transgender Inclusion

Finally, inclusion must extend beyond the male-female binary. Awareness sessions, storytelling and zero-tolerance rules on harassment can help create safer environments for transgender peers and foster broader respect for diversity. Even in contexts where transgender students are few, such practices teach all students that dignity and humanity apply to everyone.

5.2 Practical Classroom Ideas for Gender Reflection

In many schools, teachers have limited time and resources, making it difficult to run large programmes on gender. Yet small, everyday practices can make a powerful difference. When woven into classroom routines, these activities encourage boys and girls to reflect on fairness, respect and shared responsibility in ways that are simple, practical and low-cost. Importantly, they do not require additional resources.

Below are some ready-to-use activities that teachers can adapt to their own contexts. Each is designed to spark reflection, make gender visible in daily life and give students a chance to practise respect and equality in small but meaningful ways.

Classroom Activities

- **Household Chores Log**

  Keep a rotating blackboard chart where boys record the chores they did at home each week, making domestic contributions visible.

- **Emotion of the Day**

  Begin class with a quick check-in where each student names one feeling they had and how they handled it, normalising emotional expression.

- **Role Model Wall**

  Invite students to add names or pictures of admired men and women, ensuring that female role models are equally represented.

- **Who Decides?**

  Run a quick tally about who makes different decisions at home (finances, meals, outings) and use it for a short discussion on authority.

- **Friendship Circle**

  Have boys and girls share one positive quality they value in each other, breaking down stereotypes.

- **Story/Lesson with a Gender Lens**

  Dedicate one class story or text each week to re-reading with questions like: *Who does the work? Who has authority? Who expresses emotions?* Discuss whether these are right or wrong.

- **Respect Pledge Board**

  Ask students to write one act of respect they practised that day and display it in class.

- **Shared Chores in Class**

Rotate small classroom tasks (like sweeping, distributing notebooks or arranging chairs) between boys and girls, especially during events, to model shared responsibility.

- **Strengths & Weaknesses Circle**

  Ask students to share one strength and one weakness each week in small groups of 3–4 of mixed genders, and ask them to support one another in holding themselves accountable for growth.

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Annexures

FORMATION OF GENDERED ASSUMPTIONS IN ADOLESCENT BOYS: A STUDY IN SELECT REGIONAL CONTEXTS OF TELANGANA

A research study to understand the 'Formation of Gendered Assumptions in Adolescent Boys' is being undertaken by Samagra Shiksha, Telangana in collaboration with the Centre for Women's Studies in the University of Hyderabad as well as the UNICEF Hyderabad Field Office. The research study proposes to understand how views of masculinity and femininity are formed among adolescent boys shaping their opinions on gender-based violence and on the gender order, and the role of family, community, school, society, tradition, language, region and history.

The research study will be conducted in the state of Telangana, in select districts and mandals. A total of 250 students will be the respondents of the study, through one-to-one questionnaires and focus group discussions, which will be recorded for analysis. The study will adopt a multi-stage stratified purposive/random (mixed methods) sampling methodology to narrow down the scope of the respondents, especially in terms of their geographical location, as well as diverse contexts such as caste, class, religion and family occupation.

The outcomes of the research study will be presented in the form of a final report as well as a policy brief with key findings as well as recommendations and will further be used to design gender education programs for students, trainings for teachers and orientations for parents. The research study will be carried out with financial support from UNICEF.

The data collected through the interviews as well as the voice recordings captured will be used only for the purpose of this study and the findings from the data collected will be shared with Samagra Shiksha first. All the details of the participants will be made anonymous and data confidentiality will be maintained at all stages of the data collection.

Informed Consent to take part in the research

- I agree to participate in this research study, after reading and understanding the background, purpose and nature of the study
- I understand that I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw my permission to use data from my interview in which case the material will be deleted.
- I understand that my participation in this study involves answering questions that I am asked as part of the interview.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded, and I understand it will only be used for purposes of analysis for this study.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidential and that my identity will remain anonymous in any reporting on the results of this research by changing my name and other specific personal details that could reveal my identity.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the final report, policy brief and articles.
- I understand that my interviews, audio recordings and signed consent form may be retained as part of conducting further analysis on this topic.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of participant Date:

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher Date:

QUESTIONNAIRE

I FILL THIS SECTION BY ASKING THE TEACHER:

NAME
CLASS
DATE OF BIRTH/AGE
PLACE OF BIRTH
SOCIAL IDENTITY (Caste, Religion)

II FILL THIS SECTION THROUGH OBSERVATION IN THE SCHOOL (DO NOT ASK ANYONE):

ARE BOY AND GIRL STUDENTS SITTING TOGETHER OR SEPARATELY IN CLASSROOMS?
ARE STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT GENDERS INTERACTING WITH EACH OTHER?

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

- NAME
- CLASS
- DATE OF BIRTH/AGE
- FAMILY MEMBERS
- HEAD OF THE FAMILY
- PRIMARY EARNER
- OCCUPATION
- EDUCATION OF PARENTS AND SIBLINGS
- LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME
- WHAT DO SIBLINGS CURRENTLY DO?
- DOES THE FAMILY HAVE A PRIVATE VEHICLE?
- DOES THE FAMILY HAVE ACCESS TO MOBILE/INTERNET/OTT PLATFORMS?

SECTION 2: FRIENDS, INTERACTIONS, GAMES AND HANGOUTS

- WHO ARE YOUR FRIENDS?
- WHERE DO YOU HANG OUT, WHEN AND WITH WHOM?
- GAMES YOU PLAY
- WHERE YOU PLAY THESE GAMES
- TIMING OF YOUR GAMES
- WHY DO YOU PLAY THESE GAMES
- WHO INSPIRED YOU OR WHO ARE YOUR MODELS TO PLAY THESE GAMES?
- WHAT DO YOU TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT?
- DO YOU SHARE YOUR FEELINGS OR SECRETS WITH FRIENDS? WHO DO YOU TRUST TO SHARE YOUR FEELINGS?

- WHAT DO YOU TEASE YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT? WHAT DO THEY TEASE YOU ABOUT?
- WHAT LEADS TO FIGHTS BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS? WHAT HAPPENS DURING THESE FIGHTS?

SECTION 3: SELF IDENTITY

- HOW DO YOU INTRODUCE YOURSELF?
- HOW DO YOU ADDRESS YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS?
- HOW DO THEY ADDRESS YOU?
- HOW DO THEY ADDRESS ONE ANOTHER?
- WHO DO YOU LIKE THE MOST IN YOUR FAMILY AND WHY?
- WHO DO YOU DISLIKE THE MOST IN YOUR FAMILY AND WHY?
- WHAT PRESSURES DO YOU FACE AS A RESULT OF GENDERED ROLES ASSIGNED TO YOU?
- HAVE YOU SEEN BULLYING HAPPEN AS A RESULT OF PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES?

SECTION 4: FAMILY

- WHO DOES THE HOUSEWORK?
- WHAT DO YOU DO AT HOME?
- WHAT DOES SHARING MEAN?
- WHO DOES CHILDCARE?
- WHO TAKES CARE OF THE SICK AND THE ELDERLY?
- HOW DO YOU SPEND TIME WITH YOUR MOTHER/SISTER? WHAT DO YOU TALK TO THEM MOSTLY ABOUT?
- DO YOU SPEND THE SAME AMOUNT OF TIME WITH YOUR MOTHER AND SISTER LIKE BEFORE/WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD?
- HOW DOES YOUR FATHER SHOW HIS ANGER? HOW DOES YOUR MOTHER SHOW HER ANGER?
- WHO COOKS AT HOME? WHO EATS FIRST? DO YOU SHARE EQUALLY AND EAT TOGETHER?
- WHO DOES MOST WORK AT HOME ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS LIKE FESTIVALS?
- WHO SCOLDS YOU WHEN YOU MAKE A MISTAKE? WHAT KIND OF PUNISHMENT DO YOU GET? HOW DO YOU FEEL?
- WHAT DO YOU GET SCOLDED MOST FOR?
- WHAT ACTIVITIES DO YOU ALL DO TOGETHER AS A FAMILY? WHAT KIND OF TV SHOWS DO YOU WATCH TOGETHER?
- WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY FAMILY HONOUR? WHEN DOES IT GET DISTURBED? WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR UPHOLDING IT?
- WHAT ARE YOUR PARENTS' OPINIONS ON YOUR SISTERS' EDUCATION?
- WHO HELPS YOU DO YOUR HOMEWORK? WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO ATTEND PTMS?
- WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DECISION MAKING IN YOUR FAMILY? WHAT DECISIONS DOES YOUR MOTHER MAKE? WHAT DECISIONS DOES YOUR FATHER MAKE?

- WHO TAKES CARE OF EXPENSES AND FINANCIAL MATTERS IN YOUR FAMILY?
- HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT MENSTRUATION? WHAT CUSTOMS ARE FOLLOWED DURING THAT TIME?

SECTION 5: UNDERSTANDING OF MAN AND WOMAN

- WHO IS A MAN? GIVE SOME EXAMPLES
- WHO IS A WOMAN? GIVE SOME EXAMPLES
- WHAT MAKES THEM GOOD AND BAD MEN AND WOMEN
- WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL AT HOME?
- WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL OUTSIDE?
- WHO DO YOU WANT TO BECOME OR NOT BECOME AND WHY?
- WHO COMES TO YOUR MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF STRENGTH? WHY ARE THEY STRONG? WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY 'STRONG'?

SECTION 6: EMOTIONS

- HOW OFTEN DO YOU GET ANGRY?
- WHAT MAKES YOU ANGRY? HOW DO YOU SHOW IT?
- WHAT ARE YOU SCARED OF? WHY? WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE SCARED?
- DO YOU CRY OR FEEL SAD? HOW OFTEN?
- DO YOU SHARE YOUR EMOTIONS? WITH WHOM?
- WHAT DO FRIENDS AND FAMILY SAY WHEN YOU SHARE EMOTIONS?
- IF YOU ARE ANGRY AT SOMEONE, DO YOU SCOLD THEM? WHAT LANGUAGE DO YOU USE? WHAT ELSE DO YOU DO?
- WHAT DO YOU FEEL LIKE DOING WHEN YOU ARE VERY HAPPY?

SECTION 7: SCHOOL

- HOW DO YOU TRAVEL TO SCHOOL? AND WITH WHOM?
- DURING ASSEMBLIES AND EVENTS IN SCHOOL, WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITIES DO YOU PARTAKE IN?
- WHAT SPORTS DO YOU PLAY? ARE YOU ENCOURAGED IN SCHOOL TO PLAY SPORTS?
- DO YOU ALSO RECEIVE ENCOURAGEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN CULTURAL PROGRAMMES LIKE SINGING AND DANCING?

SECTION 8: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, OTT PLATFORMS, INTERNET AND MOBILE

- DO YOU HAVE REGULAR ACCESS TO MOBILE AND INTERNET?
- WHAT DO YOU WATCH MOST ON THE INTERNET?
- DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA APPS? WHY? WHAT DO YOU DO ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

- ARE YOU ON ANY GAMING APPS? DO YOU GAME ON YOUR PHONE/USING INTERNET?
- DO YOU ACCESS OTT PLATFORMS? WHAT DO YOU WATCH?

SECTION 9: MOVIES AND POPULAR MEDIA

- WHAT MOVIES DO YOU LIKE THE MOST? WHY? WHAT DID YOU ENJOY THE MOST?
- WHAT KIND OF MOVIES DO YOU NOT LIKE? WHY?
- WHAT MOVIES DID YOU FIND PROBLEMATIC? WHY?
- CAN YOU NAME ANY MOVIES IN WHICH YOU FOUND STRONG WOMEN CHARACTERS?

SECTION 10: DISCUSSIONS ON MOVIES AND IMAGES

PUSHPA

ARJUN REDDY

FIDAA

QUESTIONNAIRE

I FILL THIS SECTION BY ASKING THE TEACHER:

NAME
CLASS
DATE OF BIRTH/AGE
PLACE OF BIRTH
SOCIAL IDENTITY (కులం, మతం)

II FILL THIS SECTION THROUGH OBSERVATION IN THE SCHOOL (DO NOT ASK ANYONE):

ARE BOY AND GIRL STUDENTS SITTING TOGETHER OR SEPARATELY IN CLASSROOMS? అమ్మాయిలు, అబ్బాయిలు కలిని కూర్చుంటున్నారా, లేదా విడివిడి గానా?

ARE STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT GENDERS INTERACTING WITH EACH OTHER? అమ్మాయిలు, అబ్బాయిలు ఒకరితో ఒకరు మాట్లాడుతున్నారా? కలిసి programsలో పాల్గొంటున్నారా?

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

- పేరు
- తరగతి
- DATE OF BIRTH / వయస్సు
- కుటుంబ సభ్యులు, వాళ్ళ పేర్లు, వివరాలు
- HEAD OF THE FAMILY / ఇంటి పెద్ద పేరు
- PRIMARY EARNER / కుటుంబంలో డబ్బులు సంపాదించేది ఎవరు
- OCCUPATION / చేసే పని / ఉద్యోగం
- EDUCATION OF PARENTS AND SIBLINGS
- LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME
- WHAT DO SIBLINGS CURRENTLY DO?
- DOES THE FAMILY HAVE A PRIVATE VEHICLE? సొంత బైకు / కారు / సైకిల్ ఉన్నాయా?
- DOES THE FAMILY HAVE ACCESS TO MOBILE/INTERNET/OTT PLATFORMS?

SECTION 2: FRIENDS, INTERACTIONS, GAMES AND HANGOUTS

- దోస్తులు ఎవరు? వాళ్ళ పేర్లు ఏంటి?
- దోస్తులందరు ఎక్కడ కలుస్తారు? ఎప్పుడెప్పుడు? ఎవరెవరు వస్తారు?

- మీరు ఆడే ఆటలు ఏంటి? ఎలా ఆడతారో చెప్పండి
- ఎక్కడ ఆడతారు?
- ఏ టైమ్ లో మీరు ఈ ఆటలు ఆడతారు?
- ఈ ఆటలే ఎందుకు ఆడతారు?
- ఈ ఆటలు ఆడటానికి మీకు ఎవరు inspiration? ఎవరిని చూసి మీకు ఈ ఆటలు ఇష్టం అయ్యాయి?
- మీ friends తో మీరు ఏ విషయాల గురించి మాట్లాడతారు?
- మీకేమయినా అనిపిస్తే మీరు దానికి గురించి మీ friends తో share చేస్కుంటారా? మీ secrets ఏమైనా ఉంటే వాళ్ళతో share చేస్కుంటారా? మీకు అనిపించింది share చేస్కోడానికి మీరు ఎవరిని నమ్ముతారు?
- మీ friends ని మీరు ఏ విషయాల గురించి ఏడిపిస్తారు / tease చేస్తారు? వాళ్ళు మిమ్మల్ని ఏ విషయాల గురించి ఆట పట్టిస్తారు?
- మీకు మీ friends కి ఏ విషయాల పైన గొడవలు అవుతాయి? గొడవ ఎలా పడతారు? గొడవ పడినప్పుడు ఏమి జరుగుతుంది?

SECTION 3: SELF IDENTITY

- మిమ్మల్ని మీరు ఎలా పరిచయం చేసుకుంటారు?
- మీ కుటుంబ సభ్యులని మీరు ఎలా పరిచయం చేస్తారు? వాళ్ళని మీరు ఎలా పిలుస్తారు?
- మీ కుటుంబ సభ్యులు మిమ్మల్ని ఎలా పిలుస్తారు?
- ఒకరినొకరు ఎలా పిలుచుకుంటారు?
- మీ కుటుంబంలో / ఇంట్లో అందరికంటే మీకు ఎవరు ఎక్కువ ఇష్టం? ఎందుకు?
- మీ కుటుంబంలో / ఇంట్లో అందరికంటే మీకు ఎవరు తక్కువ ఇష్టం? ఎందుకు?
- మీ gender (male gender అయినందు వల్ల) వల్ల మీరు ఎదుర్కొనే ఒత్తిడి / pressure ఎలాంటివి? ఈ ఒత్తిడి వల్ల మీకు ఏమనిపిస్తుంది?
- ఆకారం, ఎత్తు, రంగు లాంటి physical features కారణంగా ఎప్పుడైనా bullying (ఒకరిని అవమానించి తక్కువ చేయడం) జరగడం మీరు చూశారా?

SECTION 4: FAMILY

- ఇంట్లో పని ఎవరు చేస్తారు? (cooking, cleaning etc)
- మీరు ఇంట్లో ఏమి చేస్తారు?
- Sharing / పంచుకోవడం అంటే ఏమిటి మీ దృష్టిలో?
- మీ ఇంట్లో పిల్లలని (childcare) ఎవరు చూసుకుంటారు?
- ఒంట్లో బాలేని వారిని, ముసలి వారిని ఎవరు చూస్కుంటారు?

- మీరు మీ అమ్మతో, చెల్లి / అక్క తో సమయం గాడుపుతారా? వాళ్ళతో దేని గురించి / ఏ విషయాల గురించి మాట్లాడతారు?
- మీరు బాల్యంలో సమయం గడిపినట్టే, ఇప్పుడు కూడా మీ అమ్మ, అక్క / చెల్లి తో అంతే సమయం గడుపుతారా?
- మీ నాన్నకి కోపం వస్తే, ఏమంటారు? కోపాన్ని ఎలా చూపిస్తారు? మీ అమ్మకు కోపం వస్తే ఎలా చూపిస్తారు?
- ఇంట్లో వంట పని ఎవరు చేస్తారు? ఎవరు మొదట తింటారు? వండినది ఇంట్లో అందరూ సమానంగా పంచుకొని తింటారా? కలిసి తింటారా?
- పండుగలు / బంధువు వచ్చినప్పుడు ఇంట్లో పని ఎక్కువ అవుతుంది కదా. అప్పుడు ఇంట్లో పని ఎవరు చేస్తారు?
- మీరు ఏదైనా తప్పు చేసినప్పుడు మీ తల్లిదండ్రులు ఏమంటారు? ఎలాంటి punishment ఇస్తారు? మీకు ఏమనిపిస్తుంది?
- మీరు ఎక్కువగా ఎలాంటి విషయాలాకు తిట్లు తింటారు? మీ చెల్లి / అక్క అయితే దేనికి తిట్లు తింటారు?
- కుటుంబం అంతా కలిసి ఎలాంటి పనులు చేస్తారు? ఎలా సమయం గడుపుతారు?
- టీవీలో ఎలాంటి programs అందరూ కలిసి చూస్తారు?
- **కుటుంబ గౌరవం అంటే ఏమిటి? దానికి ఎప్పుడు భంగం కలుగుతుంది? దానిని కాపాడాల్సిన బాధ్యత ఎవరిది?**
- మీ చెల్లి / అక్క చదువు పైన మీ తల్లిదండ్రుల అభిప్రాయం ఏంటి?
- మీరు homework చేసేటప్పుడు మీకు ఎవరు సహాయపడతారు? School లో PTM సమయంలో teacher ను కలిసే బాధ్యత ఎవరిది?
- మీ ఇంట్లో నిర్ణయాలు ఎవరు తీసుకుంటారు? మీ అమ్మ ఎలాంటి విషయాలలో నిర్ణయాలు తీసుకుంటారు? మీ నాన్న ఎలాంటి విషయాలలో నిర్ణయాలు తీసుకుంటారు?
- మీ ఇంట్లో ఖర్చులు, డబ్బుకి సంబంధించిన అంశాలలో నిర్ణయాలు ఎవరు తీసుకుంటారు?
- మీరు నెలసరి / మేనస్తరుఅతివం గురించి విన్నారా? ఆ సమయంలో మీ ఇంట్లో ఎలాంటి ఆచారాలు పాటిస్తారు?

SECTION 5: UNDERSTANDING OF MAN AND WOMAN

- మీ దృష్టిలో మగవారు అంటే ఎవరు? ఎలా ఉండాలి? మగవారికి ఉండాల్సిన లక్షణాలు ఏమిటి? కొన్ని ఉదాహరణలు చెప్పండి.
- మీ దృష్టిలో ఆడవాళ్ళు అంటే ఎవరు? ఎలా ఉండాలి? ఆడవాళ్ళకి ఉండాల్సిన లక్షణాలు ఏమిటి? కొన్ని ఉదాహరణలు చెప్పండి.

- మగవాళ్ళని , ఆడవాళ్ళని మంచి, చెడ్డ అని చెప్పాలంటే ఎలా చెప్తాం? వాళ్ళల్లో ఉండాల్సిన లక్షణాలు ఏంటి?
- మీ ఇంట్లో మీ role model ఎవరు? అంటే ఎవరిని చూస్తే మీరు inspiration పొందుతారు? వాళ్ళ లాగా ఉండాలి అనుకుంటారు?
- ఇంటి బయట మీకు role model ఎవరు?
- మీరు ఎవరి లాగా అవ్వాలి అనుకుంటున్నారు? ఎందుకు? ఎవరిలాగా అవ్వకూడదు అనుకుంటున్నారు? ఎందుకు?
- Strength / బలం / శక్తి అన్నప్పుడు మీకు ఎవరు గుర్తొస్తారు? మీ పరంగా strong people అంటే ఎవరు?

SECTION 6: EMOTIONS

- మీకు ఎంత తరచుగా కోపం వస్తుంది?
- దేని వల్ల మీకు కోపం వస్తుంది? కోపాన్ని మీరు ఎలా చూపిస్తారు? కోపం వచ్చినప్పుడు ఏమి చేస్తారు?
- మీకు ఏమంటే భయం? భయం కలిగించే విషయాలు ఏంటి? మీకు భయం అనిపించినప్పుడు మీరు ఏమి చేస్తారు?
- మీకు బాధ కలుగుతుందా? మీరు ఏడుస్తారా? ఎంత తరచుగా?
- మీరు మీ feelings ని ఎవరితోనైనా పంచుకుంటారా? ఎవరితో?
- మీ feelings share చేసుకున్నప్పుడు, మీ friends, కుటుంబ సభ్యులు ఏమని అంటారు?
- మీకు ఎవరి మీదైన కోపం వచ్చినప్పుడు, వాళ్ళని మీరు తిడతారా? ఎలాంటి పదాలు ఉపయోగిస్తారు? ఇంకేం చేస్తారు / లేదా చేయాలనిపిస్తుంది?
- మీకు బాగా సంతోషం కలిగినప్పుడు మీకు ఏమి చేయాలనిపిస్తుంది? ఏమి చేస్తారు?

SECTION 7: SCHOOL

- మీరు ఇంటి నుంచి బడికి ఎలా వెళ్తారు? మీరు ఇంకెవరు వస్తారు?
- బడిలో assembly లేదా ఏదైనా event సమయంలో, ఎలాంటి activities లో మీరు పాల్గొంటారు?
- మీరు ఆడే sports ఏంటి? మీకు బడిలో sports ఆడటానికి ప్రోత్సాహం లభిస్తుందా?
- ఇంకే ఇతర programs లో మీరు పాల్గొంటారు? సంగీతం / పాటలు పాడటం / dance చేయడం లాంటి వాటిల్లో కూడా మీకు ప్రోత్సాహం లభిస్తుందా?

SECTION 8: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, OTT PLATFORMS, INTERNET AND MOBILE

- మీరు regular గా mobile phone, internet వాడుతారా?
- మీరు internet ని ఎక్కువ దేనికి వాడతారు? ఏమి చదువుతారు? ఏమి చూస్తారు?
- మీరు వాడే social media apps ఏంటి? Social media లో మీరు ఎక్కువగా ఏమి చేస్తారు?
- మీరు gaming apps వాడతారా ఫోన్ లో?
- మీరు ott platforms చూస్తారా? ఎక్కువగా ఏమి చూస్తారు?

SECTION 9: MOVIES AND POPULAR MEDIA

- మీకు ఏ సినిమాలు ఎక్కువగా ఇష్టం? ఎందుకు? వాటిలో మీకు ఎక్కువగా ఏమి నచ్చింది?
- మీకు ఎలాంటి సినిమాలు అంటే ఇష్టం ఉండదు? ఎందుకు?
- మీకు ఏదైనా సినిమా చూసి ఇబ్బందిగా / problematic గా అనిపించిందా? ఏది? ఎందుకు?
- మీకు ఏదైనా సినిమాలో strong female పాత్ర గుర్తొస్తుందా? లేదా మీకు నచ్చిన female పాత్ర? పేర్లు చెప్పండి.
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SECTION 10: DISCUSSIONS ON MOVIES AND IMAGES

PUSHPA

ARJUN REDDY

FIDAA

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