

# Learning from our Mothers: Examining the Role of Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer in Advancing Gender Equity among Sri Lankan Youth



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# Background

- Gender-Based Violence and Attitudes in Sri Lanka:
  - Gender-Based Violence (GBV): 34-40%
  - Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) linked to GBV perpetration and victimization
  - High gender-inequitable attitudes (>50%)
- Rationale for the study:
  - Qualitative follow-up to quantitative research:
    - Understand the “why”
  - Public Health perspective:
    - Develop youth interventions to prevent GBV

# Methods

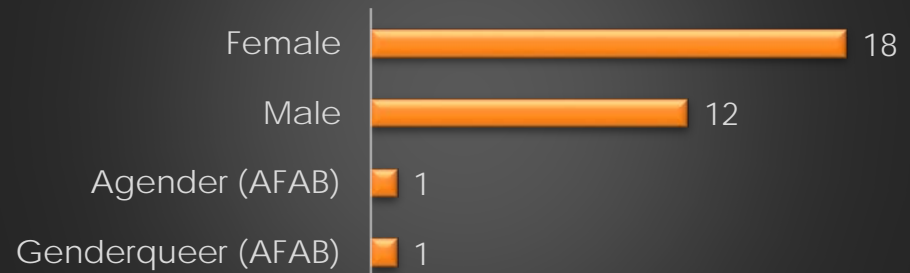
- Sampling
  - Urban: Social media recruitment to study email
  - Rural: Youth alumni and staff of development center
  - Requirements: 18-30, fluent in English, Sri Lankan
- Data Collection: Narrative Interviews:
  - 30 minutes to 1 hour
  - Semi-structured – set of questions with follow-ups
- Analysis
  - Systematic transcript review for major themes
  - Directed content analysis for "family influence"

# Participant Information (n=32)

## Location



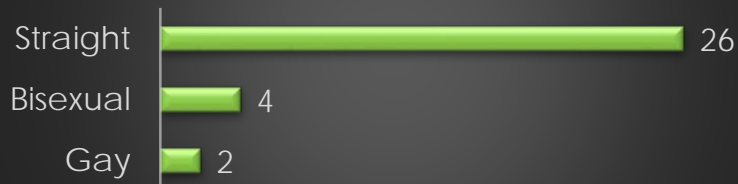
## Self-described Gender



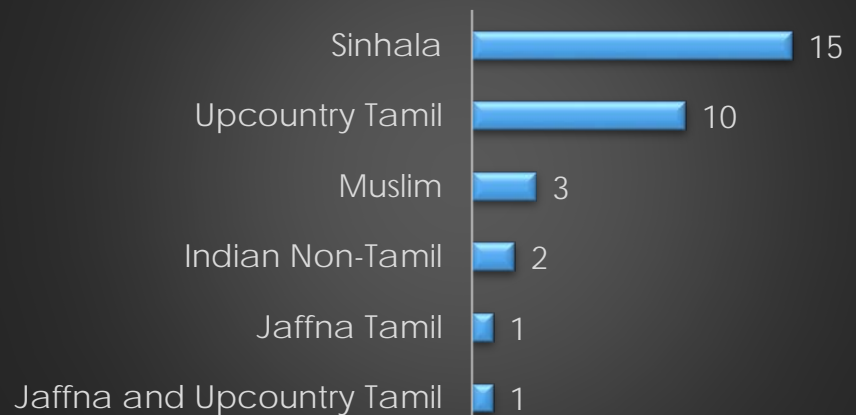
## Age



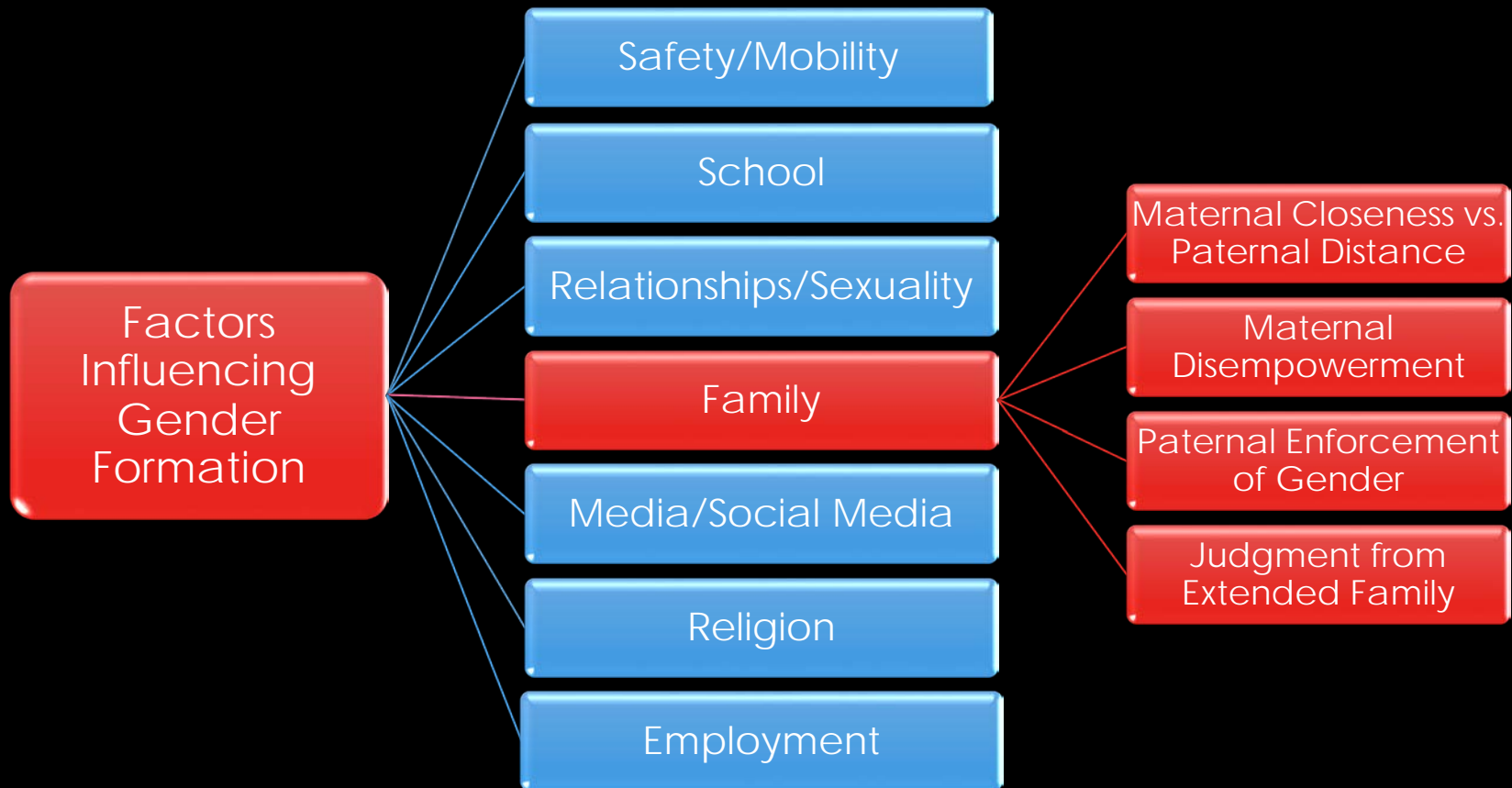
## Sexuality



## Ethnicity



# Themes and Subthemes



# Maternal Closeness/ Paternal Distance

- “I am **very open to my mother**. Whatever happened during the day, I share with her, even my personal relationships. I’m **not very close to my father**.” (Female, rural, 18-25)
- I am very distant from my family, I am **only close to my mom**. Maybe I can talk to you even though my father died a couple of weeks ago because I am **very distant from my father**. (Female, urban, 18-25)
- “if you say ‘if you don’t eat, I won’t let your mother see you,’ that child is more responsive. They can actually live **a distance from their fathers**, rather than from their mother.” (Male, urban, 26-30)

# Maternal Disempowerment

- "Only my father makes decisions, and he doesn't discuss with my mother. She might make better decisions, but **she doesn't get the chance**. She doesn't oppose my father. Whatever he says, she agrees."  
(Male, rural, 26-30)
- "[My mother] regrets having no career as a woman, she always told us '**be financially free**.' That was her biggest regret, that she wasn't financially independent."  
(Agender, AFAB, urban, 18-25)
- "In my mother's case, for example, she left the job when my father married her. Although she had acumen as an accountant, **it was wasted** in my view."  
(male, urban, 26-30)

# Paternal Enforcement of Gender

- “**My father gave me the responsibility** in grade 9. He started to give me money” (Male, rural, 18-25)
- “My sister wanted to join the airline as cabin crew. My father did not agree. His reason was that cabin crew had a **not-so-good reputation.**” (Male, urban, 26-30)
- “I will tolerate these qualities [belief his word is final] in my dad, because I love him and I can't change him, but **I would never accept them in a partner.**” (Female, urban, 26-30)



# Extended Family Judgment

- “I was making a lot of friends who were both male and female, and they [my relatives] would try to make it sound really weird. Once we had a meeting and I was walking back with a friend. And we were walking and talking and apparently one of my relatives had driven past– and **she called my mother**, and said ‘I saw her walking out with a boy.’ I think **my mother laughed**. She said ‘she had a meeting,’ but she repeated it to me. ”  
(Female, urban, 26-30)
- “She [my aunt] just told me “why are you [dancing like a girl]? It’s not the way boys are supposed to behave. You have to do this, you have to like cars.” And they used to mock, and **still they are mocking me** in a serious way, like “you used to do this when you were that age.” **My parents are so cool** and just laugh it off. (Male, urban, 18-25)

# Discussion

- Findings:
  - Gender inequitable behaviors modeled by mothers and fathers in Sri Lanka serve to both limit and instigate gender expression among Sri Lankan youth
  - Extended family attempt to enforce gender norms, but parental support can mitigate these efforts
- Implications:
  - Interventions fostering gender equity in parenting could impact young people's gender attitudes and expression
- Additional research:
  - Role of educational settings, other themes
  - More diverse populations
    - Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking populations
    - Geographic variety

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## Questions/Comments?