

**DRAFT**

**Sex against her will: Experiences of young married women in India**

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### **Background**

Sexual activity among adolescent females in India takes place overwhelmingly within the context of marriage. As many as 34% of adolescent girls aged 15-19 are already married and presumably sexually active, while fewer than 10% of unmarried girls are reported to be sexually experienced (IIPS and ORC Macro, 2000; Jejeebhoy, 2000). Even though sexual activity occurs within the socially sanctioned institution of marriage, marriage does not inherently make the sex safe, voluntary, consensual or pleasurable. Indeed, a recent review of studies in India suggests that it would appear that large proportions of marriages initiated in adolescence are consummated with force and without the consent of the young bride (Santhya and Jejeebhoy, 2005).

Coerced sex is a human rights concern in and of itself, violating a person's bodily integrity and potentially causing physical or psychological harm. Moreover, an expanding and persuasive body of evidence from diverse settings documents the connection between sexual coercion and reproductive health risk (Koenig et al, 2005; Kishor & Johnson 2004; Parish et al, 2004; Martin et al 1999; Caceres et al, 1997; among others). For example, some have found that girls and/or young women who had experienced sexual coercion are significantly more likely to report genital tract infection symptoms (Koenig et al 2005; Parish et al., 2004) or to report sexually transmitted infections (Martin et al, 1999, Kishor and Johnson 2004) even after controlling for other factors. Unintended pregnancy and decreased likelihood of condom use has also been independently associated with sexual coercion (Koenig et al, 2005).

Though there is a growing indication that forced sex within marriage among young women is quite widespread in India, evidence remains sparse on the patterns and dynamics of sexual coercion within marriage. Most of the evidence on non-consensual sexual experiences within marriage currently available in India comes from unrepresentative small-scale and largely qualitative studies. While large-scale surveys such as National Family and Health Survey (2000) among women of reproductive age have asked about physical abuse, typically they have not explored sexual violence, nor have they looked particularly at adolescent girls/young women.

Similarly, evidence on the factors that place young married women at risk of or protect them from such experiences remains limited. Evidence available from limited data suggest that early age at marriage, unbalanced gender norms and power relations, lack of preparedness for sex, and lack of family and social support may comprise some of the major factors underlying sexual coercion within marriage in India (Santhya and Jejeebhoy, 2005). These findings are tentative, based on a few studies conducted among small populations. There is clearly a need for further research to gain a better understanding of the prevalence, forms and context of forced sexual relations among married young women, to identify the factors that may heighten young women's vulnerability to such experiences within marriage and, to suggest ways to address non-consensual sexual relations especially among young women during the early stages of married life.

In this paper, we present evidence from a cross-sectional survey on the extent of unwanted sexual experiences among married adolescent girls/ young women in rural settings in two states in India – Gujarat and West Bengal. We also explore the various factors that are associated with married girls/young women's experience of sex against their will.

## **Study setting**

The study was conducted in two rural settings in India -- Vadodara Block in the state of Gujarat and Diamond Harbour Block in the state of West Bengal. Gujarat (with a population of 50 million), situated on the west coast of India, represents 6 percent of the total area of India and accounts for 5 percent of the total population of the country. West Bengal (with a population of 80 million), situated on the eastern part of the country, represents 3 percent of the total area of India and accounts for 8 percent of the total population. While the population of Gujarat is less than two-thirds of the population of West Bengal, its population is growing at a relatively faster pace than the latter. The sex ratio -- skewed in favour of males over females as elsewhere in India -- is more dramatic in Gujarat than West Bengal. Gujarat is comparatively more urbanized than West Bengal (38% vs. 28%).

Findings from the National Family and Health Survey on the situation of adolescent girls (15-19 year olds) in these two states suggest that many continue to be illiterate – 27% in Gujarat and 28% in West Bengal (32% nationally). A substantial proportion of girls are already married- 27% in Gujarat and 37% in West Bengal (34% nationally). In rural areas, the proportion of ever-married adolescent girls is 33% and 43% in Gujarat and West Bengal respectively (40% nationally). Nearly one-half of married adolescent girls are already mothers in both states as well as nationally.

## **Data**

The findings presented in this paper draw from a study comprised of both survey and in-depth interviews conducted during August 2002 - October 2003. The respondents were young women who were married two years prior to the survey, young women who were pregnant for the first time, or first-time mothers up to 18 months postpartum. The study area included 24 villages in Gujarat (with a population of about 46,000) and 25 villages in West Bengal (with a population of 42,000). The respondents were identified through a rapid household listing in the study area and all eligible women identified at the time of the house listing were invited to participate in the survey. A total of 1079 women in Gujarat and 1036 women in West Bengal were interviewed. The refusal rate was marginal in both the sites. A structured bilingual questionnaire was used to explore a wide range of issues including young women's transition to marriage, livelihood experience, access to and control over resources, mobility, social connections, spousal communication and support, and reproductive health knowledge and practice. In order to gather additional insights about young women's transition to marriage, partner relationships, exercise of sexual rights and level of agency/ autonomy in reproductive health matters, in-depth interviews were also carried out among 69 women (30 in Gujarat and 39 in West Bengal) who had participated in the survey.

To understand the nature of young brides' relationships and the control they have over their bodies and sexual lives, questions were asked about a range of topics, including, the experience of first intercourse, physical abuse, decision making, and the degree to which married girls can express – and achieve – their will. In order to explore experiences of unwanted/ wanted sex, respondents were asked whether they tell their husbands when sex is not (and is) wanted and whether their husbands 'always', 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never' do what the girls/women wish. In this paper, we examine the prevalence, experience and correlates of unwanted sex. This is sex that the respondent did not necessarily perceive as forced, but did categorize as against her will. Two variables are constructed and considered: "routine unwanted sex," i.e., women who report that their husbands rarely or never respect their wish when they deny their husbands' sexual demands; and "occasional or routine unwanted sex," i.e., women who report that their husbands

sometimes, rarely or never respect their wish when they deny their husbands sexual demands. In this paper, we explore the issue of unwanted sexual experiences only among the subsample of respondents who articulated their preference about when sex is not wanted to their husbands. These girls constitute 70% of the total sample in Gujarat and 89% in West Bengal. We acknowledge that many women who never expressed their sexual preference may also have experienced unwanted sexual experiences.

In order to identify factors associated with the experience of unwanted sex, we consider a variety of factors operating at the individual, couple and household levels. At the individual level, apart from typical background characteristic (i.e., age, current life stage, schooling and current work status), we assume that variables reflecting young women's agency, autonomy and exposure to modern influences including role in household decision making, freedom to visit different destinations unescorted, ability to express disagreement with one's husband, gender role attitudes and regular exposure to any mass-media may be associated with the experience of sex against will. Also considered in the model are variables reflecting young women's transition to marriage and sexual life indicated by age at marriage, type of marriage, familiarity with husband at the time of marriage, payment of dowry, first source of information on sex, and feelings before and after first sexual experience. At the couple level, we include variables reflecting the nature of the couple relationship including how frequently the couple spends time together and the extent to which husbands support their young wives when she is in conflict with a family member, as well as spousal age difference and years of schooling completed by husbands. At the family level, variables such as religion, standard of living of the marital family, relative difference in the standard of living between the girls'/young women's natal and marital family and the type of family are included (see Appendix 1 for operational definitions of these variables).

## **Findings**

The socio-demographic characteristics of respondents summarized in Table 1 indicate similarities in most of the individual level characteristics between the two study sites. For example, the respondents in this survey are mostly adolescents (i.e. age 19 or younger) in both the sites. The proportions of recently married, first time pregnant, and first time mothers are roughly similar. There are, however, substantial differences between the two sites in terms of other characteristics. For example, while the study participants are predominantly Hindus in Vadodara, a significant proportion of them are Muslims in Diamond Harbour. Also, while almost all respondents in Gujarat live in extended families, nearly one-third in West Bengal live in nuclear families. Although the majority of women live in households with a low to medium standard of living index (SLI) in both the sites, the proportion is substantially larger in West Bengal. The background characteristics of the women who articulated their preference about when sex is not wanted to their husbands were similar to that of the total sample.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of respondents**

Socio-demographic characteristics	Gujarat		West Bengal	
	Women who articulated their preference (N = 749)	Total <sup>1</sup> (N=1079)	Women who articulated their preference (N = 917)	Total <sup>1</sup> (N=1036)
<u>Age</u>				
Lt/eq 17	20.7	21.1	19.0	19.6
18-19	34.2	35.2	39.3	39.6
20 +	45.1	43.7	41.8	40.8
<u>Current status</u>				
Recently married	33.4	37.0	30.8	31.8
First time pregnant	11.6	11.2	13.5	13.8
First time mothers	55.0	51.8	55.7	54.4
<u>Education</u>				
None	11.5	13.4	20.9	20.9
1-5 years	28.2	30.1	34.2	35.3
6-9 years	40.4	38.6	27.9	27.3
10+ years	19.9	17.9	17.0	16.5
<u>Current work status</u>				
Working	19.8	19.4	4.8	4.4
Not working	80.2	80.6	95.2	95.6
<u>Family type</u>				
Nuclear	7.8	8.6	30.9	29.5
Extended	92.2	91.4	69.1	70.5
<u>Religion</u>				
Hindu	99.5	99.4	47.0	45.5
Muslim	0.5	0.5	53.0	54.5
Others	--	0.1	--	--
<u>Standard of living of household</u>				
Low	8.3	10.5	43.9	44.0
Medium	58.2	59.6	46.7	46.7
High	33.6	29.9	9.4	9.3

<sup>1</sup> Total includes women who articulated and who did not articulate their preference when sex is not wanted.

### ***Expressing ‘no’ when sex is unwanted***

Of the total sample, more than two in three girls/young women (69.7%) in Gujarat and more than four in five (88.6%) in West Bengal report saying ‘no’ to their husbands’ sexual demands when she does not want to have sex. Insights from the in-depth interviews indicate that women in Gujarat typically express their desire not to have sex when they are tired or feeling sick, or during their menstrual period. Only a few women report that they say no without giving any such physical reason.

“Sometime when I feel body pain, I say no” [First time pregnant woman]

“I work the whole day and feel tired. I want to go to sleep. Then I don’t allow him to do it at night” [First time pregnant woman]

“I say no for 5-6-7 days after my period starts. At that time only” [Recently married woman]

In West Bengal, most of the girls/young women typically say ‘no’ not only when they are feeling sick or having their menstrual period, but also whenever they do not feel like having sex. In in-depth interviews, 20 out of 39 women cite ‘not feeling like having sex’ as one of the circumstances in which they deny their husbands’ sexual demands:

“When I have my period, when I don’t feel like having sex, and when I feel ill, I say ‘no’ to him” [Recently married woman]

“Whenever I don’t feel like having sex, I say ‘no’ to my husband” [First time pregnant woman]

“When I have my menstrual period. Sometimes I don’t feel like doing it, then also I say ‘no’” [First time mother]

### ***Experience of unwanted sex***

Among the girls/young women who articulate their preference when they do not want to have sex, findings indicate that their husband always accepted their refusal to have sex in the case of a larger proportion of young women in Gujarat than in West Bengal – 73% vs. 42%. However, a substantial proportion of young women experience sex that is unwanted and against their will. Such unwanted sex lies on a continuum of coercion. Using the routine unwanted sex definition, we found that nine percent of women in Gujarat and 14 percent in West Bengal experienced unwanted sex. When the broader definition – i.e., occasional *or* routine unwanted sex -- is considered, as many as 27 percent in Gujarat and 58 percent in West Bengal have experienced sex against their will.

**Table 2: Husbands’ reaction to young women’s denial of their husband’s sexual demands**

	Gujarat (N=749)	West Bengal (N=917)
Respects always	73.0	42.2
Respects sometimes	18.3	43.8
Respects rarely	4.0	7.2
Respects never	4.7	6.8

In the in-depth interviews conducted post-survey among some of the survey participants, 9 out of 30 participants in Gujarat and 16 out of 39 participants in West Bengal report unwanted sexual experiences occurring at varying degrees of frequency. What is also interesting in the following testimonies is the differences in girls’ feelings about what constitutes ‘rare’ or ‘frequent’ and whether they expressly identify it as forced sex.

“Nothing happens [when I say no], he keeps ignoring whatever I say. He will listen to me only one or two days” [Recently married woman, Gujarat]

“He listens sometimes and he doesn’t listen sometimes” [First time mother, Gujarat]

“My husband sometimes listens to me when I say ‘no’ to him for sex and sometimes, he doesn’t listen. Very rare, once or twice in a month, he does sex forcefully” [Recently married woman, West Bengal]

“Not always, but rarely, once in 4-5 months he does that” [First time pregnant woman, West Bengal]

“He forces me often for sex. We have sex 3-4 days a week. In one month, he has coerced sex 4-5 days. I do not feel like having sex, it becomes painful, but he does not stop ” [First time mother, West Bengal]

Findings from the in-depth interviews in Gujarat also allude to the circumstances in which women have sex even when they do not wish to, but did not articulate their wish to their husbands for fear of abandonment or quarrel and in some cases, because of affection for their husbands.

“I don’t like it ...If I tell, then he won’t listen. My *bhabhi* [sister-in-law] didn’t allow her husband to touch her. He divorced her. I feel that if I don’t allow my husband to touch me, he may divorce me. That’s why I allow him” [First time pregnant woman, Gujarat]

“If he is interested and if I say no, how will he feel? He will think that my wife told me like this... I do feel scared because men these days are like that. They have sex with other women. That’s why I don’t say no [even when I don’t want to have sex]” [First time mother, Gujarat]

“[I do not say ‘no’ to my husband’s sexual demands]. What will I get after giving pain to his heart? If he likes it, then let him be happy and it does not matter even if I am not willing for it -- if he is happy, then I am also happy” [First time mother, Gujarat]

In addition to these fears and sentiments, there is also an element of passive or resigned acceptance of unwanted sex in both sites (10 out of 39 women in West Bengal and 3 out of 30 women in Vadodara). While some of the girls/young women also describe this sex as coerced, many are unlikely to call it “forced” though it clearly is unwanted, and often coerced.

“He does not force me during my menstruation. When I don’t feel good or don’t feel like having sex, I say no to him. That time, he doesn’t listen to me. My husband comes home twice every month and if I say no, he does not listen to me. I accept whatever he says. I don’t get angry and I never tried to make him understand” [First time mother, West Bengal]

“I feel bad [when he forces me]. Sometimes I turn around other side and lie down. Sometimes I think he is asking for it, so let me allow him to have it.” [Recently married woman, West Bengal]

“But he does not want to listen to me. He threatens me that he would not come to me anymore. Truly speaking, I love him very much and I feel very bad whenever he is not here. So, when he threatens me, I allow him to have sex, as I am scared that he will not come to me anymore” [Recently married woman, West Bengal]

“I feel bad [when he forces me], I cannot resist him always as he scolds me very much. When I feel too bad, I cry” [First time pregnant woman, West Bengal]

### ***Unwanted sex and other forms of violence within marriage***

Evidence suggests that experience of non-consensual penetrative sex within marriage or formal unions is often accompanied by physical violence (Jejeebhoy and Bott, 2005). Findings from the present study show that 14% of girls/women in Gujarat and 30% in West Bengal who routinely experience unwanted sex, and 11.4% in Gujarat and 17% in West Bengal who occasionally or routinely experience unwanted sex also experienced physical harassment during the one year preceding the survey. While, it is not clear from the survey data whether the reported physical abuse preceded or took place as a consequence of young women's articulation of their preference not to have sex, there is a higher prevalence of physical abuse among women whose will is frequently or always ignored. Insights from the in-depth interviews, especially from West Bengal, suggest that young women's denials of their husbands' sexual demands are accompanied in some cases (3 out of 30 cases in Gujarat and 10 out of 39 cases in West Bengal) not only by forced sex but also by physical and emotional harassment including beating and threats of leaving.

"If I say no at night, he will do it in the morning, I can't say no anytime. He will not say anything at night, he goes to sleep turning his back. But, when he asks for something in the morning and I say no, he beats me" [First time pregnant woman, Gujarat]

"I work the whole day and feel tired. I want to go to sleep. Then I don't allow him to do it at night. He listens some days. He doesn't some other days. He doesn't quarrel with me, but he becomes angry. If he becomes angry, he doesn't talk to me" [Recently married woman, Gujarat]

"If he is interested, then I have to do. [If I don't allow him] he quarrels with me." [First time mother, Gujarat]

"When I say 'no' for sex, he scolds me. He gets angry with me" [Recently married woman, West Bengal]

"Sometimes when I don't feel like having sex and when I feel sick, I say no to him. But he does not listen to me. He forcefully has sex with me. [For example] one day, I did not feel like having sex. I was sick. He asked me but I said no. ...As a result, he became angry. Then he did not talk with me, he told me that he will go to Murshidabad without me. The next day he didn't come home" [First time mother, West Bengal]

"He says, 'I don't stay here most of the time and if you don't allow me to have sex with you, why do I come here?' He comes here after 1-2 weeks and stays here for 2-3 days. Those days, we have sex during the daytime as well as night. He says...whenever I want to have sex, you be ready for that..."[First time mother, West Bengal]

### ***Correlates of unwanted sexual experiences***

Explorations into the correlates of unwanted sexual experience show some interesting associations, operating at the individual, couple and family levels. Not surprisingly, several of the correlates are not found to be valid consistently across both the sites or across the two definitions used in the present study to define unwanted sexual experiences.



### Routine experience of unwanted sex – Bivariate Analysis

In the bi-variate analysis, shown in Table 3, in Gujarat, not many variables are found to be significantly associated with the routine experience of unwanted sex (i.e. the husband rarely or never respects his wife's desire not to have sex). Only three variables are correlated. The life stage of the women is significantly associated with unwanted sex, i.e., recently married girls/young women are more likely than pregnant/postpartum girls/women to experience unwanted sex routinely. Girls/young women who felt negatively after their first sexual experience (compared to having felt positively or without any special feelings), and girls/women who have husbands who sometimes support them in the event of conflict with a family member (compared to girls/women who have husbands who always support them), are significantly more likely to experience unwanted sex. Several of the expected correlates, for example, respondent's age, age at marriage, measures of autonomy, gender role attitudes and payment of dowry are not significantly associated with the routine experience of unwanted sex.

In West Bengal, several factors, including years of schooling completed by the girls/young women, regular exposure to any mass-media, ability to express disagreement with one's husband, egalitarian gender attitudes, love marriage, familiarity with husband at the time of the marriage, payment of dowry, years of schooling completed by husbands, and standard of living of one's marital family, are found to be inversely associated with the experience of unwanted sex. Factors such as having felt negatively after the first sexual experience compared to having felt positively or without any special feelings, having husbands who rarely/never support them in the event of conflict with a family member compared to having husbands who always support them, belonging to the Muslim religion and having been married into households with a standard of living similar to that of the natal family are found to be directly associated with the routine experience of unwanted sex. Intriguingly, girls/ women who first learned about sex from natal family members or husbands have higher odds of experiencing unwanted sex compared to those who first learnt about sex from friends. As in Gujarat, several expected correlates such as age or age at marriage are not found significant.

**Table 3: Correlates of unwanted sexual experiences: Findings from bi-variate analysis**

Variables	Gujarat		West Bengal	
	Routine	Occasional or routine	Routine	Occasional or routine
<b>Background factors</b>				
<u>Age</u>	.943	.970	.963	.942*
<u>Current life stage</u>				
Recently married(r)				
First time pregnant/ postpartum	.423***	.825	.859	.939
<u>Years of schooling</u>				
None(r)				
Up to 5 years	.956	1.053	.591*	.834
6-8 years	.874	.956	.247***	.476***
9 and above	.423	.590	.116***	.345***
<u>Work status</u>				
Currently not working(r)				
Working	1.123	1.560*	1.394	1.058
<b>Agency/ autonomy/ exposure</b>				
<u>Role in HH decision making</u>	.947	.944	.965	.947*
<u>Mobility</u>	.880	.918*	1.031	1.003
<u>Mass media exposure</u>				
No regular exposure(r)				
Regular exposure	.842	.863	.523***	.437***
<u>Expressing disagreement to husbands</u>				
No(r)				
Yes	.686	.648*	.423***	.507***
<u>Egalitarian gender role attitudes</u>	.894	.888	.855*	.839***
<b>Marriage/ sexual transition related factors</b>				
<u>Age at marriage</u>	.945	.982	.966	.930**
<u>Type of marriage</u>				
Arranged(r)				
Love	.651	.827	.372**	.802
<u>Familiar with husband</u>				
No(r)				
Yes	.472	.481**	.351**	.556***
<u>Payment of dowry</u>				
No(r)				
Yes	.804	1.046	.683*	1.357
<u>First source of information on sex</u>				
Friends(r)				
Natal family members	1.142	1.364	2.056**	1.410
Husband	1.397	1.158	1.842*	1.048
Others (school, media etc)	.354	.733	1.263	.850
<u>Feelings before first sexual experience</u>				
Positive(r)				
Negative	1.661	1.554	1.736	2.151***
<u>Feelings after first sexual experience</u>				
Positive(r)				
Negative	2.611***	1.160	1.829**	2.243***

Variables	Gujarat		West Bengal	
	Routine	Occasional or routine	Routine	Occasional or routine
<b>Relationship factors</b>				
<u>Spending time together</u>				
Always(r)				
Sometimes	2.233	1.197	1.130	1.369
Rarely/ never	2.072	1.432	1.567	1.549*
Only at night	2.146	1.205	1.340	.798
<u>Husbands' support in the event of conflict with a family member</u>				
<u>Always (r)</u>				
Sometimes	2.830*	1.995	1.696	3.325***
Rarely/ never	1.221	1.343	2.358***	2.151***
<b>Husbands' characteristic</b>				
<u>Spousal age difference</u>	.992	.992	.997	.967
<u>Years of schooling (H)</u>				
None(r)				
Up to 5 years	1.026	.533	.761	.896
6-8 years	1.257	.578	.361***	.518***
9 and above	.510	.421*	.252***	.272***
<b>Household characteristic</b>				
<u>Religion</u>				
Hindu(r)				
Muslim	.021	.899	2.800**	2.353***
<u>Standard of living (marital)</u>				
Low(r)				
Medium	3.754	.945	.543**	3.611***
High	1.743	.578	.208**	1.522
<u>Relative status of natal family</u>				
Worse than marital family(r)				
Similar	.728	.808	1.094*	1.043
Better than marital family	1.507	.978	.918	1.761**
<u>Type of family</u>				
Nuclear(r)				
Extended	1.313	1.062	.766	.765

\* sig </.05; \*\* sig</.01; \*\*\* sig </.001

#### Occasional or routine experience of unwanted sex – Bivariate analysis

A different set of factors are found to be associated with unwanted sex when we use the broader definition – i.e. girls/young women whose husbands sometimes, rarely or never respect their wish not to have sex. In Gujarat, none of the background factors, except the current working status of young women, emerged as significant in the bi-variate analysis (see Table 3). Among indicators used to assess young women's agency and autonomy, mobility and ability to express disagreement with one's husband are found to be inversely associated with unwanted sexual experience. Girls/young women who were familiar with their husband at the time of marriage and girls whose husbands are more educated are less likely to have experienced unwanted sex. None of the variables used to reflect the nature of the couple relationship or household characteristics is significant.

In West Bengal, on the other hand, several factors are found to be significantly associated with occasional or routine experience of unwanted sex in the bi-variate analysis. Not surprisingly, age and years of schooling completed are found to be significant background factors associated with decreased likelihood of girls/young women experiencing unwanted sex. Except mobility, all the indicators used to indicate young women's agency, autonomy and egalitarian gender role attitudes show a protective effect in relation to unwanted sexual experience. Girls/women who marry at later ages and those familiar with their husband at the time of marriage are significantly less likely to experience unwanted sex. Fears and apprehensions before first sex, negative and painful first sexual experience and a non-supportive couple relationship are directly associated with unwanted sexual experience. The more educated young women's husbands are, the less likely the chances of the young women experiencing unwanted sex. Girls/ young women who belong to the Muslim religion, girls/young women living in marital households with a medium standard of living and women who were married into families with a standard of living worse than their natal families are more likely to experience unwanted sex.

#### Multivariate analysis

In the multivariate analysis (see Table 4), in Gujarat, first time pregnant/ postpartum women compared to recently married women, and women whose husbands had nine or more years of schooling compared to women whose husbands have no schooling are significantly less likely to have experienced routine unwanted sex. Girls/women who report negative feelings after their first sexual experience compared to those who report positive or neutral feelings are more likely to have experienced unwanted sex. In West Bengal, girls/women who are more educated compared to those without any schooling and girls/women who tell their husband when they disagree with him are less likely to experience unwanted sex. Muslim girls/women compared to Hindu girls/women and women whose husbands rarely or never supported them in a conflict with a family member compared to those whose husbands always supported them are more likely to experience unwanted sex.

**Table 4: Correlates of unwanted sexual experiences: Findings from multi-variate analysis**

Variables	Gujarat		West Bengal	
	Routine (N=714)	Occasional or routine (N=707)	Routine (N=832)	Occasional or routine (N=829)
<b>Background factors</b>				
<u>Current life stage</u>		--	--	--
Recently married(r)				
First time pregnant/ postpartum	.410***			
<u>Years of schooling</u>	--	--		--
None(r)				
Up to 5 years			.604*	
6-8 years			.314***	
9 and above			.185***	
<u>Work status</u>	--		--	--
Currently not working(r)				
Working		1.805**		
<b>Agency/ autonomy/ exposure</b>				
<u>Mobility</u>	--	.915*	--	--
<u>Expressing disagreement to husband</u>	--			
No(r)				
Yes		.634*	.562**	.649**
<b>Marriage/ sexual transition related factors</b>				
<u>Familiar with husband</u>	--			
No(r)				
Yes		.547*	.533	.608**
<u>First source of information on sex</u>	--	--	--	
Friends(r)				
Natal family members				.802
Husband				.639
Others (school, media etc)				.479**
<u>Feelings before first sexual experience</u>	--		--	--
Positive(r)				
Negative		1.787*		
<u>Feelings after first sexual experience</u>		--	--	
Positive(r)				
Negative	2.491***			1.945***
<b>Relationship factors</b>				
<u>Husbands' support in the event of conflict with a family member</u>	--	--		
Always(r)				
Sometimes			1.486	3.115***
Rarely/ never			1.817*	1.675**
<b>Husbands' characteristics</b>				
<u>Years of schooling (H)</u>		--	--	
None(r)				
Up to 5 years	.988			.981
6-8 years	1.026			.826
9 and above	.452			.478**

Variables	Gujarat		West Bengal	
	Routine (N=714)	Occasional or routine (N=707)	Routine (N=832)	Occasional or routine (N=829)
<b>Household characteristics</b>				
<u>Religion</u>	--	--		
Hindu(r)				
Muslim			2.240***	1.541**
<u>Standard of living (marital)</u>			--	
Low(r)				
Medium	3.651	1.076		.516***
High	2.037	.699		.532
<u>Relative status of natal family</u>	--	--	--	
Worse than marital family				
Similar				.943
Better than marital family				.531*
Nagelkerke R square	.118	.067	.160	.224

Note: -- variables not entered in the model because they were not found significant in bi-variate analysis or removed in the analysis by Backward likelihood ratio method

\* sig  $\leq .05$ ; \*\* sig  $\leq .01$ ; \*\*\* sig  $\leq .001$

Considering “occasional or routine” unwanted sex, in the multi-variate analysis (Table 4), in Gujarat, girls/young women with more agency/ autonomy as measured by their mobility and ability to express disagreement with their husbands have lesser odds of experiencing unwanted sex, as do girls/women who were familiar with their husband at the time of marriage. The odds of experiencing unwanted sex is higher for girls/women who were apprehensive and fearful about sex before having their first sexual experience and girls/women who are currently working.

In West Bengal, as in Gujarat, girls/women who express themselves when they disagree with their husbands are significantly less likely to experience unwanted sex, compared to girls/young women who do not do so. Similarly, girls/women who were familiar with their husbands at the time of marriage, whose husbands are better educated, who live in households with a medium standard of living, and who are from relatively better-off natal families than marital families have a lesser chance of experiencing unwanted sex, compared to their respective counterparts. On the other hand, Muslim girls/women, women who had a painful and/or frightening first sexual experience, and women whose husbands sometimes and never/ rarely (compared to always) support their wives in conflicts with a family member have higher odds of experiencing unwanted sex. Intriguingly, findings also show that girls/young women who received information on sex for the first time from friends are more likely to experience unwanted sex when compared to women who received such information from media, school and other sources.

## Discussion

Findings presented in this paper clearly indicate that sexual experience within marriage among young married women is not always consensual or wanted. Indeed, depending on the site and how having sex against one's will is defined, from nine to 27 percent of girls/young women in Gujarat and 14 to 58 percent in West Bengal experience unwanted sex with some frequency. That this coercion is experienced in many instances without physical abuse, or not ‘named’ as coercive by the girls/young women, or, for the same “number” of coerced incidents variously perceived as ‘frequent’ or ‘rare’, speaks to the urgency of broadening the range of questions used

to assess sexual coercion in quantitative surveys. Sexual coercion operates on a continuum (Kelly, 1988; Jejeebhoy and Bott 2005) and until this nuance is better documented, the prevalence of sexual coercion will be underestimated. In this study, depending on how we defined unwanted sex, there was a striking increase in prevalence of 18 percentage points in Gujarat and 44 percentage points in West Bengal.

Not surprisingly, the correlates of unwanted sexual experience vary by site as well as how unwanted sex was defined. However, some factors, though not consistently valid across both the definitions used in the study, are found to be significant correlates of unwanted sexual experience in both the sites. For example, young women's ability to express disagreement to one's husband is protective. This clearly concurs with findings from studies elsewhere that inability to communicate or negotiate is a factor underlying non-consensual sex (Jejeebhoy and Bott, 2005). Similarly, familiarity with the husband at the time of marriage is protective in both the sites, as is years of schooling completed by husbands. In both the sites, a negative first sexual experience is associated with higher odds of experiencing sex against one's will. This confirms the findings of other studies suggesting that for a significant number of women, sexual experience subsequent to forced early sexual relations continue to be marked by unwantedness, though passive acceptance often replaces fear and trauma (Khan et al., 2001; Joshi et al., 2001; George, 2002). This passive acceptance is echoed in the qualitative data from this study.

Findings also indicate some site-specific correlates of unwanted sex. After controlling for confounding variables, in Gujarat, when we consider only those girls/young women whose husbands rarely or never respect their saying 'no' to sex, it is the recently married girls who are most vulnerable to coerced sex. These results corroborate the findings from other studies conducted in India and elsewhere that forced sexual experiences are common early in marriage (George and Jaswal, 1995; Sharma, Sujay and Sharma, 1998; Ellsberg et al., 2000, Joshi et al., 2001; George, 2002; Khan, Townsend and D'Costa, 2002; Puri, Cleland and Mathews, 2003; Sodhi and Verma, 2003; Maitra and Schensul, 2004). When a broader definition of unwanted sex is considered, working is a risk in Gujarat. Findings from studies from settings as diverse as Bangladesh, South Africa, Thailand, Zimbabwe and the United States also suggest that women may experience greater levels of sexual and/ or physical violence as they begin to earn (Jejeebhoy and Bott, 2005; Im-em, Kanchanachitra and Archavanitkul, 2005, Kishor and Johnson, 2004). Negative feelings before the first sexual encounter is also a risk in rural settings in Gujarat.

In West Bengal, where more conventional 'traditional' patterns of women's power and autonomy are seen, a broader range of expected correlates to unwanted sex are found. For example, findings suggest, not surprisingly, the importance of partner relations. Irrespective of whether routine or occasional experience of unwanted sex is considered, girls/women who report that their husband always support them in conflict with a family member are less likely to experience sex against their will compared to women whose husbands support them sometimes or rarely or never. Similarly, religion is found to be a significant correlate, regardless of the definition used to measure unwanted sexual experience. Though evidence from other settings indicate that the odds of sexual violence increase with higher levels of education (Jejeebhoy and Bott, 2005), findings from West Bengal show that schooling is protective of routine unwanted sexual experience. Higher education has been found to be protective of domestic violence generally in some settings, including India, though not in others (Kishor and Johnson, 2004). So is the standard of living of the marital family, when the broader definition of unwanted sex is considered. Interestingly, the first source of information on sex becomes significant, with friends as a source a risk. This may be because peers are as misinformed as the study participants and may contribute to inadequate preparedness of young women to sexual transitions or it may be that these interactions with

friends are proxies for more socially connected girls who may be better able to articulate their own desires and identify coerced sex when they experience it.

These findings underscore that while some elements of vulnerability are not actionable – such as religion, or the relative socio economic status of girls’ natal vs. marital home – others are. They point to the need for programmes to consider the likely vulnerability of recently married girls in some settings – particularly if she has not yet proven her fertility. The fairly consistent, significant and large difference between girls/women who knew and did not know their husband at marriage, and the negative feelings at first intercourse associated with coercion suggest that there may be patterns that can be positively redirected with programmatic attention to the transition to marriage/sexual activity. Efforts to improve girls/women’s negotiating power and ability to act in their own interest, including voicing disagreements with their husbands are indicated. Regardless, however, the onus should not lie solely with girls/young women, husbands of young brides require programmatic attention to change the norms and scripts that give them the sense of entitlement to have sex with their wives, regardless of her desire.



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## Variables and operational definition used in logistic regression

Variables	Definition
<b>Dependant variable</b>	
Unwanted sexual experience	Dichotomous 0=no; 1=yes
<b>Independent variables</b>	
Age	In years
Current life stage	Dichotomous 1= recently married; 2= first time pregnant/ postpartum
Years of schooling	Multiple categories 0=None; 1= up to 5 years; 2= 6-8 years; 3= 9 and above
Work status	Dichotomous 0=not currently working; 1= working
Role in household decision making	Index with values ranging from 0 to 12 indicating the extent to which women have say in decisions related to various household purchases
Mobility	Index with values ranging from 0 to 14 indicating the different degree of freedom that women have in going unescorted to different destinations
Mass-media exposure	Dichotomous 0= not regularly exposed to any mass-media; 1= regularly exposed to ant mass-media
Expressing disagreement with husband	Dichotomous 0= did not tell disagreement to husband when they disagree; 1= yes
Egalitarian gender role attitude	Index with values ranging from 0 to 7, with higher value implying gender egalitarian attitudes
Spousal age difference	In years
Schooling (H)	Years of schooling completed by husbands. Multiple categories 0=None; 1= up to 5 years; 2= 6-8 years; 3= 9 and above
Respondent's age at marriage	In years
Type of marriage	Dichotomous 1=Arranged; 2=Love

Payment of dowry	Dichotomous 0=no; 1=yes
Familiarity with husband at the time of marriage	Dichotomous 0= not familiar; 1= familiar
First source of information on sex	Multiple categories 1= friends; 2= natal family members; 3= husband; 4= other (ie.,school, media and other sources)
Feelings before first sexual experience	Dichotomous 0= positive feelings; 1= negative feelings
Feelings after first sexual experience	Dichotomous 0= positive feelings; 1= negative feelings
Spending time together with husband	Multiple categories 1=Frequently; 2=Sometimes; 3=Rarely/ never; 4= Only at night
Husband supporting wife in the event of a conflict with a family member	Multiple categories 1= Always; 2=Sometimes; 3= Rarely/ never
Religion	Dichotomous 1= Hindu; 2=Muslim
Standard of living (marital family)	Index, multiple categories 0=low, 1=medium; 2=high
Difference in standard of living of natal & marital family	Multiple categories 0=natal family worse of than marital family; 1= both similar; 2= natal family better of than marital family
Type of family	Dichotomous 1=nuclear; 2=extended