



# Learning to be gendered: Gender socialization process and forces in early adolescence in Delhi, India and Shanghai, China

Adolescence, Youth and Gender: Building Knowledge for Change  
Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford,  
Thursday 8 September to Friday 9 September 2016

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# Background and Rationale

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- Gender norms formed during early adolescence influence health and sexuality in later adolescence
- Gender inequalities are associated with negative health outcomes, gender-based violence and economic vulnerability
- Gender socialization teaches girls to be prepared for the roles of wife and mother, restricts their mobility and trains boys to shoulder the roles of provider and protector
- There is a paucity of empirical evidence on early adolescents
  - Factors that influence their gender attitudes
  - Beliefs and subsequent behaviors
  - Processes of intergenerational transmission

# Study Sites

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- India: East Delhi slum bordering Haryana
- China: Less developed sub-district in Putuo District
- Delhi and Shanghai selected for comparison due to gender disparities and son preference
- China and India's skewed sex ratio at 118 and 110 respectively (2011)
- 10-14 year olds number about 350 million, eight percent of Asia's population; 58% of whom reside in China and India



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Ideas. Evidence. Impact.

# Study Questions

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- What gender norms are transmitted to boys and girls and by whom?
- How are these norms transmitted? Does this process differ by sex?
- What differences and similarities in gender socialization are manifested in two diverse urban settings in Asia?

# Methodology

## Adolescents:

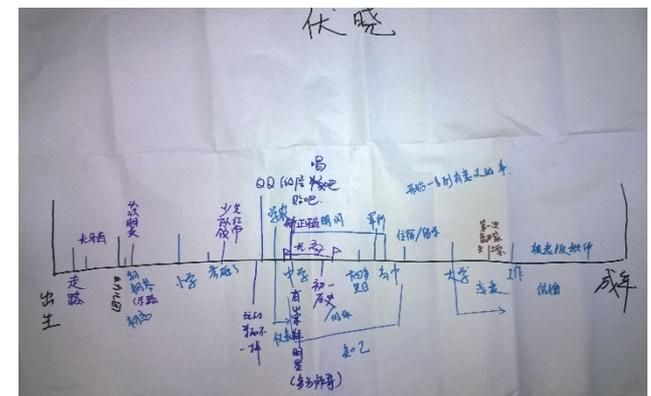
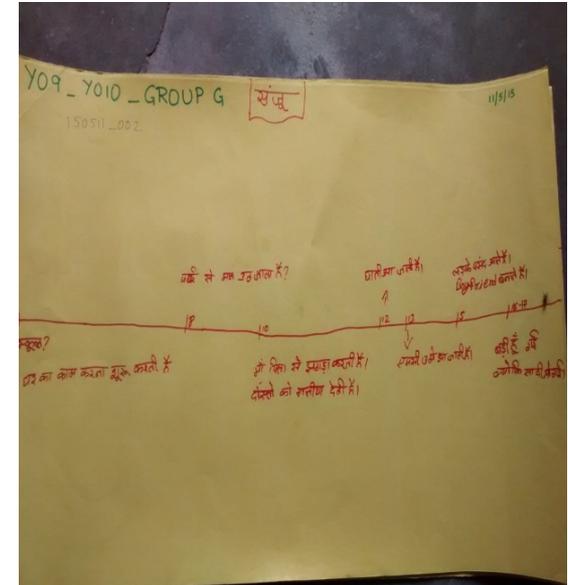
- 16 group-based timeline exercises
- 65 narrative interviews

## Parents:

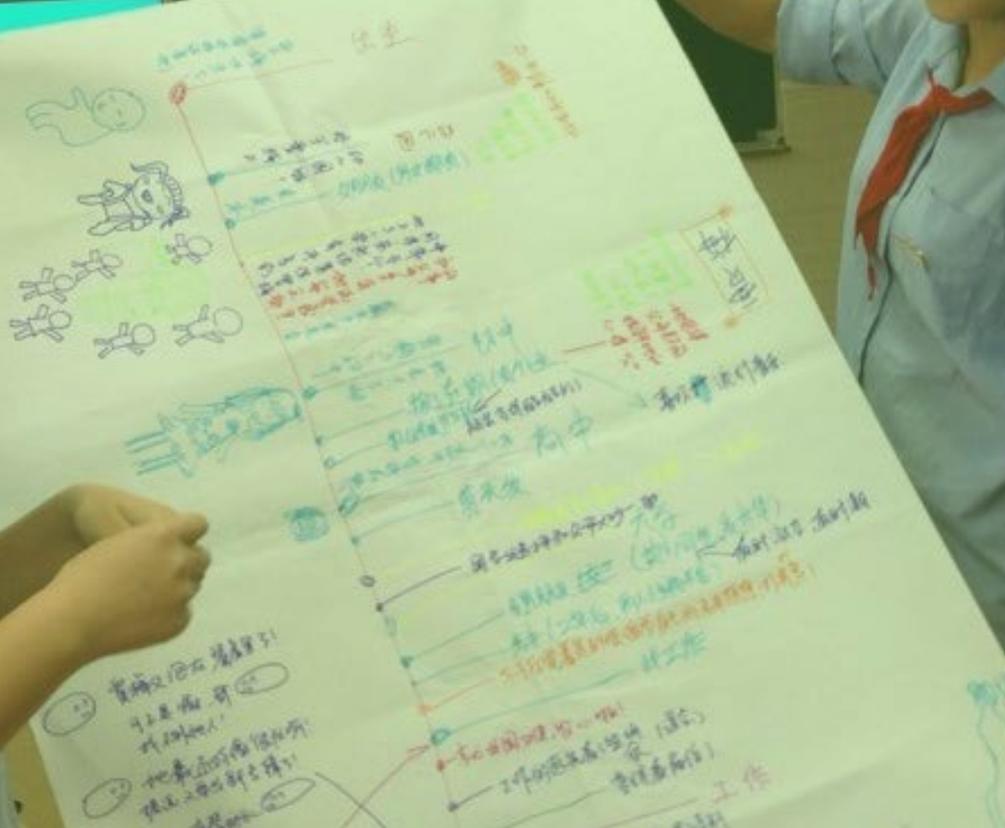
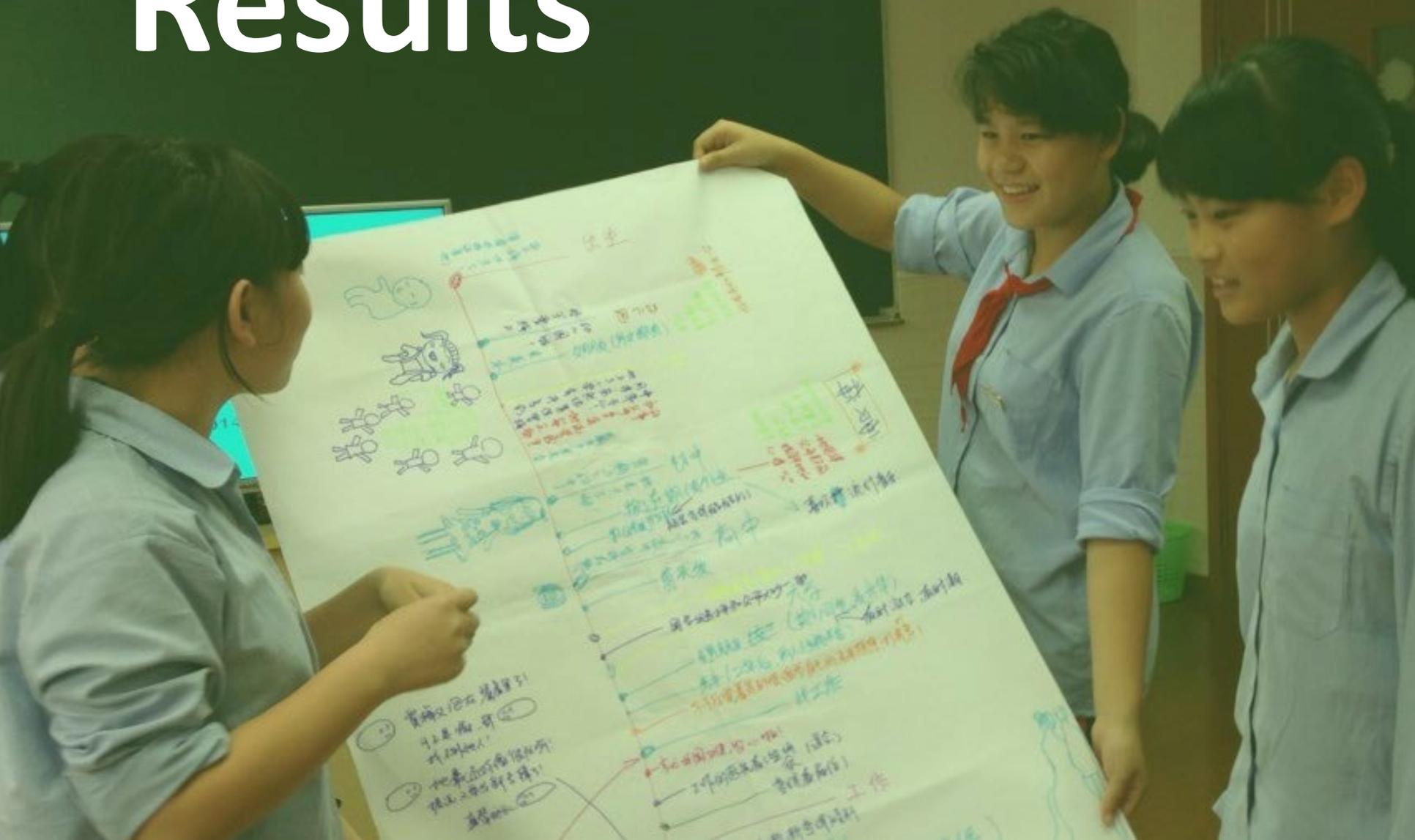
- 58 In-depth interviews

## Analysis:

- Interviews recorded, transcribed, translated and uploaded into Atlas.ti for coding and thematic analysis



# Results



# Background Characteristics : Adolescents

Characteristics		Delhi	Shanghai
<b>SEX</b>	Male	16	17
	Female	15	17
<b>AGES</b>	11	10	10
	12	10	15
	13	11	9
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>	Hindu	27	
	Muslim	1	
	Christian	3	
	Ethnic Han Minority (Mongol)		33 1
<b>FAMILY STRUCTURE</b>	Two-parent	31	29
	Single parent		3
	Other (living with grand parents)		2
<b>EDUCATION LEVEL</b>	Class 3-5	12	
	Class 6-8	19	
	Grade 4-5		11
	Grade 6-7		23

# Background Characteristics: Parents

Characteristics		Delhi	Shanghai
<b>AGES</b>	18-24	0	0
	25-34	10	2
	35-44	12	20
	45-54	1	9
	55+	-	3
	NA	1	
<b>RELATIONSHIP TO ADOLESCENT</b>	Mother	14	18
	Father	10	13
	Grandparent	-	3
<b>EDUCATION LEVEL</b>	No formal education	10	
	Class 1-5	3	
	Class 6-8	2	
	Class 10	7	
	Class 12	1	
	NA	1	
	<HS		12
	Completed HS		10
	Trade/vocational		3
	Some college		4 (3-year college)
Completed college		5 (4-year University)	
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>	Married	31	29
	Single		0
	Divorced/widowed/separated		5

**What norms are transmitted?**



**Who transmits them?**

# Girls should dress appropriately, while boys have more freedom in their attire

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In Delhi, norms related to gender identities for girls were focused on dressing ‘appropriately’, but this was not salient in Shanghai

“ Girls are not supposed to fight with their parents...They should wear proper clothes like the salwar kameej (traditional Indian dress) which cover their body well. When they (girls) are small they can wear any clothes, but as girls grow up they have to wear covered clothes, talk in a certain manner.”

[Girl in Delhi, age 12]

# Girls should behave like 'ladies' and boys should be brave and tough

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In Shanghai adolescent girls were expected to display lady-like demeanour, while boys were taught to be brave, strong and tough “like a hero”

“ I always cross my legs when having dinner. Then my dad patted on my leg and said I mustn't do it outside. It's not the thing a good girl should do. I asked him why he and my elder brother can do it but I can't. He replied “because you are a girl”

[Girl in Shanghai, age 11yrs]

# Girls should prepare for the roles of wife and mother, while boys concentrate on their careers

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In Delhi, girls were prepared for the roles of wife and mother by learning household chores as early as eight years of age. Boys, on the other hand, were prepared to take up jobs and provide and protect their families

“*Parents also tell her (girls) not to go out alone. She will not be allowed to do a job. I really don't understand why girls are not allowed to go out of the house. The girls are also not educated.*”

[Girl in Delhi , age 11]

“*Yes, my mother and father ask me to do some work such as cleaning the house, washing dishes and also washing clothes. Father also says that I should learn cooking, as it will benefit me later.*”

[Girl in Delhi, age 12]

In contrast, many parents in Shanghai expected both their sons and daughters to do well in school and prepare for a career.

# Girls and boys should not interact

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In **Delhi** and **Shanghai**, boy/girl relationships were restricted.

“ I don't make friends with boys as my parents asked me not to, they [boys] are dirty. They [boys] start teasing and doing certain things.

[Girl in Delhi, age 12]

“ While my son plays, I see him playing with young and old girls. I often tell him not to play, but he reassures me that he will not do anything wrong.”

[Mother of 12-year boy, Delhi, age 40]

“ So did your teacher ever talk to you about relationships?  
Yes, she says boys and girls better not stay together often as they are different now.”

[Girl in Shanghai, age 11]

# Gender Socialization: *Who?*

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In Delhi and Shanghai, adolescents and parents identified **mothers as most important.**

**Fathers** mentioned as well – especially **in relationship to boys.**

**Teachers, siblings, extended family and peers** also influential.

# Gender Socialization: *How?*

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**The primary socialization processes were instruction, encouragement and positive reinforcement.**

“ *I think guidance is still the most important thing. If nobody reminds him, he doesn't know what is right and what is wrong. So parents should guide them. Also their friends, relatives and teachers should guide them.*”

[Father in Shanghai, 32ys, primary school, daughter of 13ys]

**According to teachers and parents, imitation of others was instrumental.**

“ *Kids nowadays begin to watch Korean drama from early age, right? Talking about romantic drama, bluntly speaking, we had no exposure to kissing at all when we were young. We didn't even know how it works at that time. The present kids, no matter girls or boys, they watch these things a lot more and much earlier than us. Thus, I think kids nowadays are more mature comparing to our old time.*”

[Father in Shanghai, 53ys, high school, son of 12 ys]

# Gender Socialization: *Harsh Discipline*

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**In both settings, beating and scolding enforced norms, especially those related to boy/girl relationships.**

“*Mother and father beat me if I talk too much with girls. I have heard that if a boy talks with a girl in our neighbourhood the girl’s father may lodge a police complaint against the boy.*”

[Boy in Delhi, age 11]

# Conclusions

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- Boys and girls in the same community are socialized differently
- Gender norms are transmitted by instruction, beating, scolding, positive reinforcement and mitigation
- Results consistent with early cross-cultural research demonstrating roles of parents, siblings, peers and gendered task assignment in gender role socialization

# Reflections

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- Parents teach patriarchal privilege in both sites, differences demonstrate **dynamic, evolving role of culture**
- Gender norms **rooted in culture as well as macro level** factors such as economic and political systems
- **In Shanghai**
  - **Confucian doctrine** dictates expected behaviors, including women's subordination
  - **Norms evolving** as a result of filial piety, one-child policy and limited social security system
- **In India**
  - Women responsible for **family honor** requisite to marriage process
- Gender transformative programs must **engage caretakers and consider cultural, religious and economic systems**

# Thank you!

- Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS) led by the Johns Hopkins University, USA
- Collaborators from the following 15 countries are part of the initiative: Baltimore (USA), Nairobi (Kenya), New Delhi (India), Cape Town (South Africa), Assiut (Egypt), Ile-Ife (Nigeria), Ghent & Antwerp (Belgium), Shanghai (China), Blantyre (Malawi), Glasgow & Edinburgh (Scotland), Cochabamba (Bolivia), Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and Hanoi (Vietnam)
- Phase 1 supported by USAID, DFID, Packard Foundation, Ford Foundation and others

