

Research Paper

## Conformity to Masculinity and Its Effects on The Psychological Wellbeing of Young Adult Indian Men

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### ABSTRACT

Masculinity is a set of rituals and practices in which men are inserted in society through their upbringing, family, sub-cultural influences, area and work. The social identities of men uniquely contribute to shape how males perform and experience their masculinities. Such social identities include their diversity in race, culture, ethnicity, age, migration, ability, status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. It further contributes to their psychological, behavioural and relational outcomes of health in both negative and positive ways. Psychological wellbeing on the other hand involves notions of an individual's overall quality of life including their happiness, interests, welfare, advantages, utility and leisure. It is a broad category which involves a person's emotional responses to their conditions, global judgements of satisfaction in life and their satisfaction of domain. These constructs can be studied in their own right, but they substantially correlate with one another. The research is conducted with an effort to study the effect of conformity to masculinity on the psychological wellbeing of young adult Indian men. It emphasised on studying the relationship between conformity to non-traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing, conformity to traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing as well as the difference in the psychological well-being of men conforming to traditional and non-traditional masculinity of young adult Indian men. The sample was collected from 300 young adults out of which sample of 170 men was chosen (N=170; 85 males with traditional masculinity and 85 with non-traditional masculinity) through purposive sampling. The findings indicate that there is no significant relationship between conformity to non-traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing of young men. Similarly, there is no significant relationship between conformity to traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing of young men. However, the psychological wellbeing of men conforming to non-traditional masculinity is slightly better than men conforming to traditional masculinity.

**Keywords:** *Conformity, Masculinity, Psychological Wellbeing*

**M**asculinity involves behaviours, practices and languages that exist in specific organizational and cultural locations and is commonly related to men which are defined as non-feminine in a culture. Male behaviour and masculinity are not simply a product of biological disposition or genetic coding (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Whitehead

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& Barrett, 2001). The great deal of the study of inequalities in genders is focussed on women and how they are disadvantaged and subordinated to men in systematic and a structured society. However, it is noted by the scholars that inequality has two sides-privilege and disadvantage. Masculinity studies how men as a group are privileged and focus on the costs of these privileges along with ways by which not all men are provided with the same privileges in the society (Kimmel & Bridges, 2014). No identifiable group or person create masculinity and force others to follow it. Masculinity is far diffused, complicated and widespread for any single entity to create it. One cannot find its origin because it tends to infuse everything. A boy gets influenced by a lot of brands of masculinity making it difficult to isolate it's one single source. To say that masculinity is created by media, sports, a family or any other means oversimplifies its complexity (Reeser, 2010, p.13). The critical studies and researches into men and their masculinities have emerged as one of the developing areas of investigations in sociology and sociological aspects (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). The media has always come across 'crisis of masculinity' in the newspaper, talk shows and documentaries of western culture that have pondered upon the changing meaning of masculinity in the modern age. (Alsop et al, 2002).

The interest in the studies of men have not evoked by chance, it has a political and social background to its emergence and rising. The modern studies of masculinities of men owes much to social and academic advances brought by feminist writers and the concepts of feminism. The study of men has arisen due to the growing importance and recognition of gender relations in social sciences (Connell, 1978, 2002). Masculinity is an integral part of gender order and when separated from it or the femininity that accompany them, masculinity cannot be understood (Connell, 1995; Giddens, 2001). Masculinity has been and is regularly formed historically and socially and not physically or historically (Morgan, 1992; Sedgwick 1985; MacInnes 1998; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994). What is masculinity and femininity should be approached by what both the gender does or how they behave instead of what they are (Morgon, 1992). When gender is assumed as cultural, it means that both men and women can inhabit or step into the masculinity as a part of the 'cultural space' which has its own kind of behavioural set. And, with this both 'the feminine' and 'the masculine' indicates those range of characteristics that are defined by the culture and are assigned to both women and men (Beynon, 2002).

American psychological association set out various guidelines in August, 2018 for psychological practitioners while working with boys and men. There are ten guidelines with posit that males that conform to traditional masculinity due to socialization have negative affect more often in terms of physical and mental health. The social identities of men uniquely contribute to shape how males perform and experience their masculinities. Such social identities include their diversity in race, culture, ethnicity, age, migration, ability, status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. It further contributes to their psychological, behavioural and relational outcomes of health in both negative and positive ways (Arellano-Morales, et al, 2016). Although men tend to hold power and privilege as a group, they also receive disproportionate rate of harsh discipline, academic challenges, mental health issues, physical health problems, public health concerns and other 17 issues of quality of life (Levant & Richmond, 2007; Moore & Stuart, 2005; O'Neil, 2015). Boys have historically focussed as psychological practice and research as normative referent instead of gendered human beings (O'Neil & Renzulli, 3013; Smiler, 2004).

Men and boys are overrepresented in various social and psychological problems like boys are represented to have more prevalence of learning difficulties and behavioural problems

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like school suspensions, bullying, and aggression (Biederman et al., 2005; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Also, they are overrepresented in prisons, committing more violent crimes as compared to women and are at greater risk of becoming a victim to violent crimes like aggravated assaults, and homicide (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015). However, many boys and males do not get the help that they need (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Hammer, Vogel, & Heimerdinger-Edwards, 2013; Knopf, Park, & Maulye, 2008). Research indicates that men are socialized to not seek help and manage problems on their own at an early age (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Wong, Ho, Wang, & Miller, 2017). In addition to this, they receive gender bias while in the therapy (Mahalik et al, 2012), affecting their diagnosis and treatment (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000). Therefore, guidelines were formed for mental health professionals who provide their services to men and boys.

Men with testicular cancer and prostate cancer have restrictive emotionality and psychological distress due to social constraints. The men are found with depressive symptoms due to adherence to the masculine norms of emotionality and the perception of constraints (Darabos, 2016). Men associate breast cancer with femininity, have concerns about body image due to breast cancer and treatment, are reluctant to disclose about and go to the practitioners for treatment. They are reluctant to wear pink ribbon for breast cancer but proudly shows mastectomy scar as a war wound. The social and psychological hurdles in men diagnosed breast cancer stops them to refer to general practitioners (Rabee, 2016).

Men focused on three status preservation and enhancement, friendship enhancement and masculine norm enforcement during the policing of masculinity. In addition to this, their emotional responses involved being troubled-upset, ambivalent and unfazed (Reigeluth, 2016). Cultural perspective of masculinity influences husband-wife abuse. Husband's social anxieties, fear of being labelled as emasculated or weak and disappointment from unfulfilled concept of masculinity encourage conjugal violence (Adjei, 2015). Intimate partner violence is common among low-and middle-income countries along with other fights, inequitable gender attitude, lack of stepping up against violence that happens with women and older population. 31 percent of the population of eight countries have engaged in violence against their partners (Flemming, 2015).

### ***Rationale of the Study***

The research has been conducted in an attempt to explore if traditional and non-traditional masculinity has effects on the psychological well-being of Indian men. There are various researches that have been conducted to study the relationship between masculinity and psychological disorders that it may lead to and the interventions that can be used on them, However, there is hardly any research studying whether masculinity affects the psychological wellbeing of a male. In addition to this, the existing studies are based on the men of western population that follows individualism and has clearly defined boundaries between self and others. The current study is in an effort to determine if masculinity affects the psychological wellbeing of men pertaining to Indian population which believes in collectivistic approach and has shifting boundaries between self and the society. Masculinity is that concept of society which is not discussed quite often. There are various expectations from men, various roles and responsibilities that men have to perform and various kinds of social stigma associated with the image of an ideal man. Mental health among men is still considered a taboo and discussions related to their mental health hardly takes place. Thus, the current study tries to understand whether Indian men lying in their young adulthood

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believes in traditional notions of masculinity or the non-traditional ones and whether their belief in either one of them affects their psychological wellbeing.

### *Objective of the Present Study*

- To study the relationship between conformity to non-traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing among young adult Indian men.
- To study the relationship between conformity to traditional masculinity and psychological well-being among young adult Indian men.
- To study the difference in the psychological well-being of men conforming to traditional and non-traditional masculinity.

### *Hypotheses of the Study*

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between conformity to non-traditional masculinity and psychological well-being.

H2: There is a significant negative relationship between conformity to traditional masculinity and psychological well-being.

H3: There is a significant difference in the psychological wellbeing of men conforming to traditional and non-traditional masculinity.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Design*

Correlation design was established in the study to determine the relationship between conforming to non-traditional masculine norms and psychological wellbeing along with conforming to traditional norms of masculinity and psychological wellbeing. Data was collected from young adult Indian males who were in within the age range of 18-40 years. Data was collected using Male Role Norm Inventory- Short Form and Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale. All the ethical guidelines were followed while conducting the study.

### *Sample*

The research is conducted on a total sample of 300 Indian men who lie within the age range of 18 to 40 years. Out of 300 men, 85 followed traditional masculinity while the rest conformed to non-traditional masculinity. In order to compare the wellbeing of men following traditional and non-traditional masculinity, a sample size of 170 men was chosen with 85 men conforming to traditional masculinity and 85 conforming to non-traditional masculinity. The sample was collected through the process of purposive sampling from the population.

### *Measuring Instruments*

In this study the following instruments were administered for data collection:

**Male Role Norm Inventory- Short Form-** It is a 21-item questionnaire incorporating the structure of 7 factors while modelling the general ideology of traditional masculinity. It is a 7- point Likert scale measuring Avoidance of Femininity, Self-Reliance through Mechanical Skills, Negativity towards Sexual Minorities, Dominance, Toughness, Restrictive Emotionality and Importance of Sex as factors of masculinity. It is a shorter version of role norm inventory consisting 57 items.

**Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale-** It is an 18-item incorporating the structure of 6 factors while modelling the general psychological well-being scale. It is a 7- point Likert scale measuring autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, self-

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acceptance and positive relations with others as factors of psychological well-being. It is a shorter version of Ryff psychological well-being scale consisting 84 items. Option number 1 in the questionnaire depicts Strongly agree while 7 depicts strongly disagree. The alternative chosen by the subject was considered as the raw score for that particular item. Certain items like 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17 and 18 with positive meanings were reverse scored.

### **Procedure**

Prior permission was taken from the university for the study. The participants were asked to fill Male role norm inventory and Ryff Psychological wellbeing scale as a self-report measure. All the participants had participated in the research voluntarily. They were informed that the study will examine their feelings, thoughts and actions towards various situations. The participants were told that there would be no monetary benefits of filling out the questionnaire and that they were free to discontinue their participation at any point of time. All the ethical guidelines were followed. The participants were assured that their identities would be kept confidential and the study would only use their responses and not their demographic details. Participants were debriefed upon the completion of their test about the purpose of the study along with its nature. Scoring of the items were done manually upon the completion of the data collection. The scores of the subjects were recorded in an excel sheet and SPSS was conducted on it for data analyses. Results were provided to participants who expressed their interest in knowing their results after the scoring.

## RESULTS

**Table No. 1 Correlation between non-traditional masculinity and psychological well-being**

| Variables   | MRNI 1 | MRNI 2 | MRNI 3 | MRNI 4 | MRNI 5 | MRNI 6 | MRNI 7  | MRNI total |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|------------|
| RPWBS 1     | .080   | -.080  | .061   | -.171  | -.033  | -.010  | -.146   | -.112      |
| RPWBS 2     | .067   | .183   | .029   | -.151  | .056   | .176   | -.076   | .067       |
| RPWBS 3     | .009   | -.153  | .318** | .054   | -.073  | .155   | -.083   | .071       |
| RPWBS 4     | -.053  | .025   | .149   | -.136  | -.202  | .012   | -.223*  | -.107      |
| RPWBS 5     | .046   | -.006  | .396** | .143   | -.195  | -.053  | .017    | .139       |
| RPWBS 6     | .055   | -.150  | .016   | .017   | -.017  | .227*  | -.310** | -.060      |
| RPWBS total | .047   | -.035  | .247*  | -.062  | -.124  | .117   | -.199   | .001       |

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

### *\*Note*

MRNI 1 Avoidance of femininity

MRNI 2 Negativity towards sexual minority Mastery

MRNI 3 Self-Reliance through mechanical skills

MRNI 4 Toughness others

MRNI 5 Dominance

MRNI 6 Importance of sex

MRNI 7 Restrictive emotionality

MRNI TOTAL sum of masculinity

RPWBS 1 Autonomy

RPWBS 2 Environmental

RPWBS 3 Personal Growth

RPWBS 4 Positive relations with

RPWBS 5 Purpose in Life

RPWBS 6 Self-acceptance

RPWBS TOTAL sum of wellbeing

The above table shows the correlation between the variables of the study. A bivariate Pearson correlation was calculated between non-traditional masculinity, its dimensions including avoidance of femininity, negativity towards sexual minority, self-reliance through mechanical skills, toughness, dominance, importance of sex, and restrictive emotionality and psychological wellbeing and its dimensions including autonomy, environmental mastery,

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personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The results showed that there is no significant relationship between traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing  $r=.001$ ,  $p < .05$ . However, there is a positive significant relationship between the dimension of self-reliance through mechanical skills (MRNI 3) and the dimension of personal growth (RPWBS 3)  $r = .318$ ,  $p < .01$ . It indicates that as the dimension of self-reliance through mechanical skills (MRNI 3) increases, the dimension of personal growth (RPWBS 3) also increases. There is a positive significant relationship between the dimension of self-reliance through mechanical skills (MRNI 3) and the dimension of purpose in life (RPWBS 5)  $r = .396$ ,  $p < .01$ .

**Table No. 2 Correlation between traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing**

| Variables   | MRNI 1 | MRNI 2 | MRNI 3 | MRNI 4 | MRNI 5 | MRNI 6 | MRNI 7 | MRNI total |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------------|
| RPWBS 1     | -.012  | -.103  | .189   | .087   | -.010  | -.132  | .038   | -.019      |
| RPWBS 2     | .079   | -.087  | .300** | .152   | .050   | -.059  | .110   | .155       |
| RPWBS 3     | -.067  | -.094  | .013   | .143   | -.207  | .111   | -.013  | -.098      |
| RPWBS 4     | .139   | -.042  | .130   | .130   | -.127  | .168   | .022   | .083       |
| RPWBS 5     | .119   | .006   | .006   | .122   | -.100  | .031   | -.113  | .031       |
| RPWBS 6     | .142   | .005   | .027   | .025   | .050   | .046   | -.128  | .043       |
| RPWBS total | .106   | -.098  | .203   | .178   | -.094  | .029   | -.026  | .040       |

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

\*Note

MRNI 1 Avoidance of femininity  
 MRNI 2 Negativity towards sexual minority  
 MRNI 3 Self-Reliance through mechanical skills  
 MRNI 4 Toughness  
 MRNI 5 Dominance  
 MRNI 6 Importance of sex  
 MRNI 7 Restrictive emotionality  
 MRNI TOTAL Sum of masculinity

RPWBS 1 Autonomy  
 RPWBS 2 Environmental Mastery  
 RPWBS 3 Personal Growth  
 RPWBS 4 Positive relations with others  
 RPWBS 5 Purpose in Life  
 RPWBS 6 Self-acceptance  
 RPWBS TOTAL sum of wellbeing

The above table shows the correlation between the variables of the study. A bivariate Pearson correlation was calculated between traditional masculinity, its dimensions including avoidance of femininity, negativity towards sexual minority, self-reliance through mechanical skills, toughness, dominance, importance of sex, and restrictive emotionality and psychological wellbeing and its dimensions including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The results showed that there is no significant relationship between traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing  $r=.040$ ,  $p < .05$ . However, there is a positive significant relationship between the dimension of self-reliance through mechanical skills (MRNI 3) and the

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dimension of environmental mastery (RPWBS 2)  $r = .300, p < .01$ . It indicates that as the dimension of self-reliance through mechanical skills (MRNI 3) increases, the dimension of environmental mastery (RPWBS 2) also increases.

**Table No.3 Mean, SD and t scores of psychological wellbeing with traditional & non-traditional masculinity**

| Variables | Masculinity     | N  | Mean   | SD     | t-test |
|-----------|-----------------|----|--------|--------|--------|
| RPWBS 1   | Non-Traditional | 85 | 15.212 | 3.0748 | 2.097* |
|           | Traditional     | 85 | 14.188 | 3.2860 |        |
| RPWBS 2   | Non-Traditional | 85 | 14.588 | 3.3177 | .369   |
|           | Traditional     | 85 | 14.388 | 3.7324 |        |
| RPWBS 3   | Non-Traditional | 85 | 17.035 | 2.9978 | 1.859  |
|           | Traditional     | 85 | 16.141 | 3.2665 |        |
| RPWBS 4   | Non-Traditional | 85 | 13.788 | 3.7420 | .763   |
|           | Traditional     | 85 | 13.365 | 3.4910 |        |
| RPWBS 5   | Non-Traditional | 85 | 14.541 | 3.5676 | 1.396  |
|           | Traditional     | 85 | 13.776 | 3.5736 |        |

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

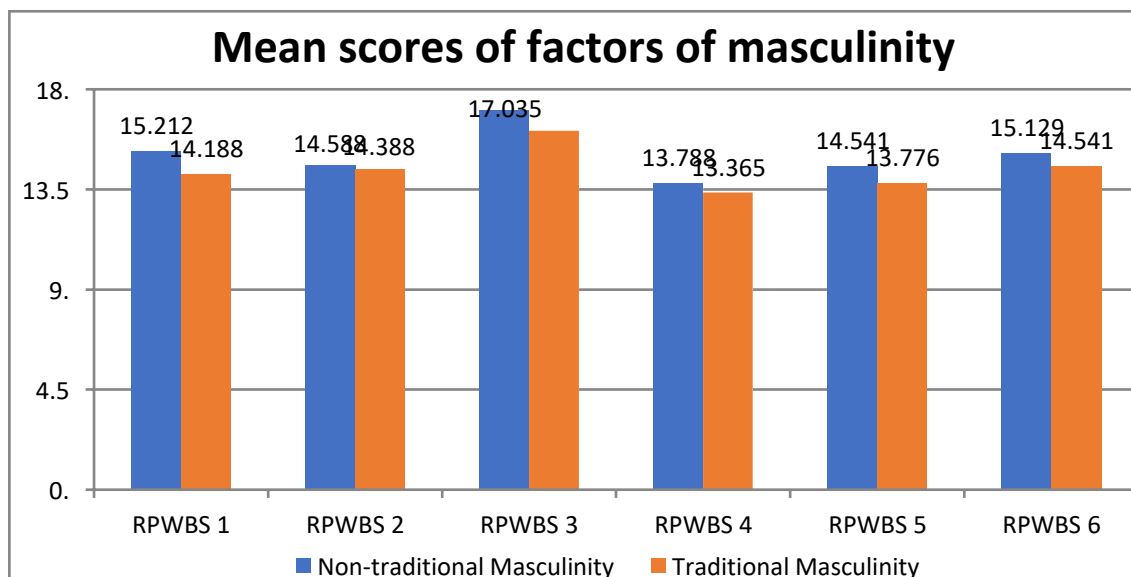
\*Note

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| MRNI 1 Avoidance of femininity                 | RPWBS 1 Autonomy                       |
| MRNI 2 Negativity towards sexual minority      | RPWBS 2 Environmental Mastery          |
| MRNI 3 Self-Reliance through mechanical skills | RPWBS 3 Personal Growth                |
| MRNI 4 Toughness                               | RPWBS 4 Positive relations with others |
| MRNI 5 Dominance                               | RPWBS 5 Purpose in Life                |
| MRNI 6 Importance of sex                       | RPWBS 6 Self-acceptance                |
| MRNI 7 Restrictive emotionality                | RPWBS TOTAL sum of wellbeing           |
| MRNI TOTAL sum of masculinity                  |  |

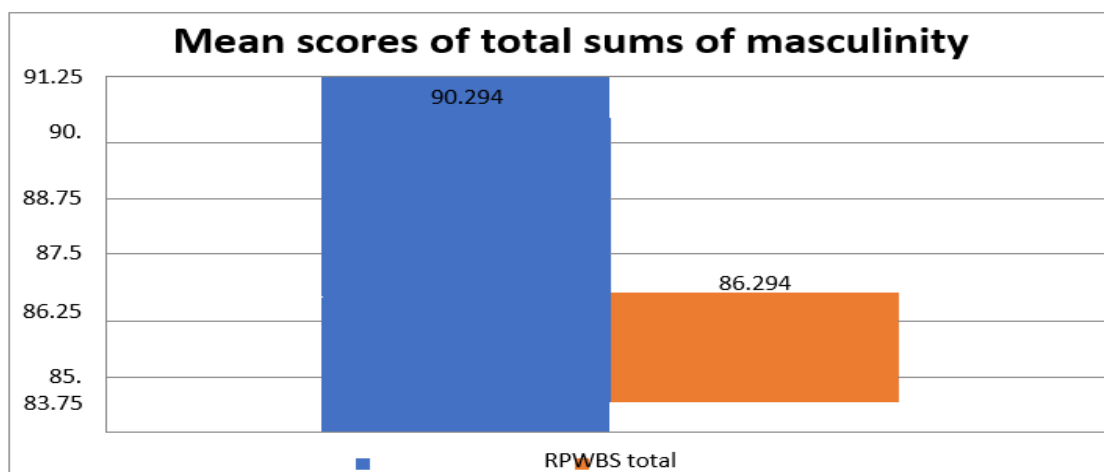
The above table shows the Mean and SD scores of psychological wellbeing among young adults conforming to non-traditional masculinity (90.294, 13.1998) and young adults conforming to traditional masculinity (86.294, 12.0137). It indicates that the psychological wellbeing of young adults conforming to non-traditional masculinity is higher as compared to that of young adults conforming to traditional masculinity. It also represents the Mean and SD scores of the autonomy dimension of psychological wellbeing (RPWBS 1) among young adults conforming to non-traditional masculinity (15.212, 3.0748) and young adults conforming to traditional masculinity (14.188, 3.2860). This indicates that the autonomy dimension of psychological wellbeing of young adults conforming to traditional masculinity is higher as compared to that of young adults conforming to non-traditional masculinity. It

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indicates that although there is no significant difference, there is a slight mean difference between these dimensions of psychological wellbeing and traditional and non-traditional masculinity such that the psychological wellbeing of young adults conforming to non-traditional masculinity is more than the psychological wellbeing of young adults conforming to traditional masculinity.



**Figure 1:** Graph showing the mean scores of dimensions of psychological wellbeing among men conforming to non-traditional masculinity and dimensions of psychological wellbeing among men conforming to traditional masculinity.



**Figure 2:** Graph showing the mean scores of total psychological wellbeing among men conforming to non-traditional masculinity and total psychological wellbeing among men conforming to traditional masculinity.

The above table shows the correlation between the variables of the study. A bivariate Pearson correlation was calculated between non-traditional masculinity, its dimensions including avoidance of femininity, negativity towards sexual minority, self-reliance through mechanical skills, toughness, dominance, importance of sex, and restrictive emotionality and psychological wellbeing and its dimensions including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. There is



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a positive significant relationship between the dimension of importance of sex (MRNI 6) and the dimension of self-acceptance (RPWBS 6)  $r = .227, p < .05$ . It indicates that as the dimension of importance of sex (MRNI 6) increases, the dimension of self-acceptance (RPWBS 6) also increases. There is a negative significant relationship between the dimension of restrictive emotionality (MRNI 7) and the dimension of positive relation with others (RPWBS 4)  $r = -.223, p < .05$ . It indicates that as the dimension of restrictive emotionality (MRNI 7) increases, the dimension of positive relation with other (RPWBS 4) decreases. There is a negative significant relationship between the dimension of restrictive emotionality (MRNI 7) and the dimension of self-acceptance (RPWBS 6)  $r = .310, p < .01$ . It indicates that as the dimension of restrictive emotionality (MRNI 7) increases, the dimension of self-acceptance (RPWBS 6) also decreases.

### DISCUSSION

The aim of the research is to study the effect of conformity to masculinity on the psychological wellbeing of young adult Indian men. The established studies on masculinity helped in forming the hypothesis that conforming to traditional and non-traditional type of masculinity has different effect on psychological wellbeing of men namely, non-traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing would positively correlate with each other. Conversely, traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing would negatively correlate with each other. Data was collected from 300 young adult Indian men and those who believe in traditional and non-traditional masculinity were identified after manual scoring of the results. Since only 85 men believed in traditional notions of masculinity, a total sample of 170 was taken for data analysis with 85 men each for both the dimensions. Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were tested through establishing correlations using Pearson's rho.

The reason of no significant relationship between both traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing in the current study could be that the study was conducted on a limited sample and within a specific demographic area. Majority of the sample involved urban population college going students who believed in non-traditional masculinity. Only a limited number of people following traditional masculinity could be covered in the sample.

The results as indicated in Table no. 3 showed that there was only a significant difference between traditional and non-traditional masculinity in Autonomy factor of psychological wellbeing along with their total psychological wellbeing. However, the mean differences in traditional and non-traditional masculinity indicated that psychological wellbeing of men conforming to non-traditional masculinity is slightly better than the psychological wellbeing of men conforming to traditional masculinity as shown in figure 1 and figure 2. Thus, the hypothesis that there is a significant difference in the psychological wellbeing of men conforming to traditional and non-traditional masculinity is accepted. It could be evident from the research conducted by Krumm, et al., (2017) who concluded that traditional values of masculinity serve as barriers to coping strategies. The research also stated that Depression among men is majorly undiagnosed and untreated due to the symptom and coping based differences among genders. Men perceive depression as a sign of weakness and their strategies to cope with it include denial and closing up.

#### *Limitations and Further Direction of the Study*

The time for completion of the research was limited. The sample size was small. Limited number of people who believe in traditional masculinity were included in the sample. The data was collected majorly from a specific demographic area. The sample size largely included college going students.

## CONCLUSION

The study is conducted in an effort to determine the effect of conformity to masculine norms on the psychological wellbeing of young adult Indian males. It was believed that there would be a significant difference in the wellbeing of men conforming to traditional and non-traditional ideologies of masculinity. Data was assessed using t-test and correlation and its analyses led to the conclusion that there is a mean difference in the psychological wellbeing of men conforming to traditional and non-traditional norms of masculinity. Further, it was also concluded that there are certain relationships formed between the dimensions and factors of masculinity and psychological wellbeing respectively. For instance, the most significant relationship was found between restrictive emotionality and positive relation with others and self-acceptance in men conforming to non-traditional masculinity and self-reliance through mechanical skills and environmental mastery in men conforming to traditional norms of masculinity.

However, there is no significant relationship established between conformity to traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing and conformity to non-traditional masculinity and psychological wellbeing of young adult Indian men.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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