Research Paper

# Predictors of Hostile and Benevolent Sexism of Indian Males and Females Across Age Groups

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to determine the predictors of Benevolent and Hostile Sexism of Indian males and females across two age groups (18–27-year-old and 28–35-year-old) of Kolkata, India. The study has investigated the role of age and gender on hostile and benevolent sexism, social attitudes and gender-role beliefs. It is a cross-sectional survey design. Employing multistage stratified random sampling, data has been collected from 234 individuals, where 118 are students (49 males and 69 females) and 116 are working individuals (68 males and 48 females), using Attitudes Toward Women Scale – Short Version (Spence, Helmrich & Stapp, 1978), Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and Gender Role Belief Scale- Short Version (Brown & Gladstone, 2012).The results have shown that gender has a significant role on hostile and benevolent sexism, social attitudes and gender-role beliefs; age has a significant role on benevolent sexism. Social attitude is a significant predictor of hostile sexism and gender-role beliefs and social attitude are significant predictors of benevolent sexism. These results are crucial for developing effective interventions to combat sexism and promote gender equality in India.

***Keywords:*** *Sexism, Age, Gender, Social Attitudes, Gender-Role Belief*

In India, gender scripts lives. The roots of patriarchy are omnipresent and omnirelevant (Shashwati, Gupta & Kapur, 2023). Gender discrimination and inequality are a long-running, pervasive phenomenon in India, with the crime rates against women rising steadily, the matter has become of grave concern for the Indian government (Jain, Kaur & Jain, 2020). Therefore, reducing crimes against women has become the most essential agenda of Indian political parties (Jain, Kaur & Jain, 2020).

The concept of sexism is described as a practice that maintains gender inequality at an economic, social and individual level (Kishore, 2023). Sexism is a form of prejudice or discrimination based on sex or gender, especially against women and girls (Masequesmay, 2024). However, Glick and Fiske (1996) advanced that sexism is not just marked by antipathy as a straightforward prejudice would be, but it is also marked by benevolent thoughts including the need to protect women. Using this ideology, Glick and Fiske (1996) proposed the Ambivalent Sexism theory, which states that same sexist attitudes towards

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women as inferior can be expressed in two different ways namely, Hostile Sexism (traditional, negative form of sexism, supporting men's superiority and hostility against women) and Benevolent Sexism (positive form of sexism, promoting traditional roles of women, focusing on their need for protection and weakness and emphasising men's role as a protector) (Curun, Taysi, & Orcan, 2017). According to Glick and Fiske 1996, 2001, there are three interrelated subcomponents of benevolent sexism, they are: protective paternalism (attitudes and actions that justify patriarchy by viewing women as incompetent adults and legitimising their need for a superordinate male figure that acts as a protector), complementary gender differentiation (ideology supporting that men and women have traits that harmonise with each other and which further justifies the traditional social role where women work inside the home and men work outside the home) and heterosexual intimacy (men's desire for sexual reproduction and intimacy with women).

Social attitude is a broad terminology which includes predisposed feelings, beliefs and actions of an individual or group of individuals toward other individuals, objects and philosophies in a social context (Vinod, 2022). Social attitudes are generally learned through various social experiences and can vary along a continuum from very favourable to very unfavourable (Vinod, 2022). For the present study, social attitudes towards women are considered. Social attitudes toward women vary among both genders and it also impact how each gender interpret gender roles, stereotypes and discrimination. Similarly, gender-role beliefs refer to the widely held beliefs regarding what roles are deemed appropriate for men and women respectively (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This belief system consists of stereotypical ideologies about men and women and attitudes toward appropriate gender roles which assumes that what is not feminine is necessarily masculine, and vice versa, and that a person who is either masculine or feminine in one aspect of behaviour is similarly masculine or feminine in other aspects of behaviour as well (Mencarini, 2014).

Moreover, sexism by itself is dysfunctional and is a significant determinant of mental health disorders and distress. Hostile sexist beliefs are positively related depression, anxiety, and stress in both men and women (Borgogna & Aita, 2020). Benevolent sexist beliefs also lead to anxiety and stress in men, while only being positively related to anxiety in women (Borgogna & Aita, 2020). For men, retaining hostile sexist beliefs is associated with rape myth acceptance, intimate partner violence and cyberbullying (Borgogna & Aita, 2020), while those retaining benevolent sexist attitudes are more accountable to blame acquaintance-rape victims and devalue their partners' capabilities in romantic relationships (Hammond & Overall, 2015). For women, harbouring benevolent sexist beliefs leads to decreased intention to engage in collective social action, diminished sexual and personal self-efficacy, heightened cosmetic product use, increased self-doubt about their competence (Becker & Wright, 2011), chronic psychological distress and cognitive dissonance (Borgogna & Aita, 2020). Yet, existing counselling services in India, apart from few, are gender blind in nature (Joshi, 2015).

Therefore, it can be understood that cognizing sexism is crucial for optimizing and enhancing the mental and holistic wellbeing of individuals. In the present study, we aimed to identify the predictors of hostile and benevolent sexism and also to understand the role of age and gender on both forms of sexism along with social attitude and gender-role beliefs, in order to develop effective intervention strategies to promote gender equality across age and gender. Furthermore, understanding this concept in the field of psychology is significant as it would lay steps towards tackling this manifestation of systemic oppression and help women who face challenges due to patriarchy (Kishore, 2023). Finally, research in this area

has been found to be sparse in the Indian setting especially considering the unmarried population of Kolkata. It is due to such research gaps that an objective to explore this pervasive form of sexism; which limits identities of women to fixed, stereotyped boxes, was formed.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Objectives*

The following were the research objectives of the present study:

- To determine the role of age and gender on hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, social attitudes and gender role beliefs.
- To determine the relationship of hostile sexism with social attitudes and gender-role beliefs for male, female and total samples.
- To determine the relationship of benevolent sexism with social attitudes and gender-role beliefs for male, female and total samples.
- To determine the significant predictors of hostile and benevolent sexism for the total sample.

### *Procedure*

The present study was a cross-sectional survey design employed to collect data from a representative sample of unmarried Indian males and females across different age groups. Two particular age groups had been selected namely lower age group with the age range of 18–27-year-olds which comprised students pursuing higher education (Tsuji et al., 2010) and the higher age group of 28-35-year-olds which comprised individuals working in public and private sector offices (Montgomery & Arnett, 2020) of Kolkata.

### *Sample*

The original sample size (n) for the present study was kept 240 out of which 120 respondents (60 males and 60 females) were belonging to the lower age group (18-27 years old) and 120 respondents (60 males and 60 females) were belonging to the higher age group (28-35 years old). The final sample size consisted of 234 respondents where 118 (49 males and 69 females) were students and 116 (68 males and 48 females) were working individuals.

### *Sampling technique*

Multistage stratified random sampling technique was used for the present study to ensure that the sample was representative of the Indian population in terms of age, gender, and education level. Respondents from middle socio-economic status were selected, keeping the socio-economic level of respondents constant. For selecting 120 students (60 males and 60 females), Kolkata was stratified in 3 geographical zones namely North, South and Central and from each zone, a list of co-educational public and private colleges and universities were made (Total 6 lists were made). From each zonal lists, 3 colleges and 1 university were selected randomly from which 10 students (5 male and 5 female) were randomly selected. Same method was used for selecting 120 working individuals (60 males and 60 females).

Total 6 lists consisting of public and private sector offices of each zone were made. From each zonal lists, 2 public and private sector offices were selected randomly. From each offices 10 employees (5 males and 5 females) were randomly selected. Data were considered based on the fulfilment of inclusion criteria and respondent's willingness to participate in the study.

*Inclusion criteria:*
The inclusion criteria of the sample are as follows.
- **Age:** 18-35 years old young adults, where, 18-27 years old refers to lower age group; 28-35 years old refers to higher age group
- **Gender:** Male and female
- **Residential area:** Urban areas of Kolkata
- **Nationality:** Indian
- **Religion:** Hinduism
- **City and State:** Kolkata, West Bengal
- **Educational Qualification of respondent:** Minimum level of education is Higher Secondary.
- **Socio-economic status:** Middle income group based on reports of NSO, Govt of India with household income INR 6 lakh-18 lakh per annum (R, 2023).
- **Occupational status:** Student or working in Public sector/ PSU /Govt. aided & Private (non-Govt.) sector
- **Marital status:** Unmarried

*Instruments*
Three measures were used in this study, namely:
1. **Attitudes Toward Women Scale – Short Version (Spence, Helmrich & Stapp, 1978):** It is a 25-item self-administrable questionnaire having 4-point Likert Scale ranging from "agree strongly" to "disagree strongly" indicating the level of agreement and disagreement. It has no time limits and has a possible score range of 0 to 75. A high score reflects more liberal attitudes (Spence and Helmreich, 1973). This scale is widely used as a measure of contemporary attitudes toward women.
2. **Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996):** it is a 22-item self-administrable questionnaire with a 6-point Likert Scale ranging from 0 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). 22 items are grouped into a single factor of Hostile sexism (HS), and a factor of Benevolent sexism (BS) which has three sub-factors: protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation and heterosexual intimacy. Possible score range for HS is 0 to 55 and for BS is 0 to 55. Higher score indicates higher endorsement in hostile and benevolent sexism.
3. **Gender Role Belief Scale- Short Version (Brown & Gladstone, 2012):** it is a 10-item self-report measure having 7-point Likert Scale where 1 equals "strongly agree," 4 equals "undecided," and 7 equals "strongly disagree." It measures individual perceptions about gender roles. Scores from all 10 items are added to create a total score that ranges from 10 (more traditional and conservative gender role beliefs) to 70 (more liberal gender role beliefs).

*Statistical analysis*
The data of the respondents were analysed using the 20.0 version of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, inferential statistics and step-wise linear regression analysis were done. The statistical level of significance (p-value) was set at 0.05.

# RESULTS

*Table No.1: Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD) of all the variables for male, female and total samples across age groups.*

| | Male | | | | | | Female | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Lower Age Group (n=49) | | Higher Age Group (n=68) | | Total (N=117) | | Lower Age Group (n=69) | | Higher Age Group (n=48) | | Total (N=117) | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Hostile Sexism | 29.24 | 9.554 | 29.35 | 11.290 | 29.31 | 10.554 | 21.88 | 9.405 | 23.87 | 9.090 | 22.70 | 9.290 |
| Benevolent Sexism | 27.98 | 7.851 | 29.47 | 7.905 | 28.85 | 7.883 | 28.87 | 6.726 | 22.40 | 9.236 | 26.21 | 8.444 |
| Social Attitude | 57.45 | 10.083 | 54.93 | 8.639 | 55.98 | 9.313 | 59.30 | 11.909 | 63.58 | 6.974 | 61.06 | 10.359 |
| Gender-Role Belief | 50.31 | 9.790 | 47.28 | 9.101 | 48.55 | 9.474 | 51.26 | 9.884 | 53.31 | 12.103 | 52.10 | 10.846 |

According to table no. 1, males across both age groups endorsed more in hostile sexism (M=29.31) and benevolent sexism (M=28.85) than females across both age groups. The participants of lower age group (M=56.85) endorsed more in benevolent sexism compared to the participants of higher age group (M=51.87). Females across both age groups endorsed more in liberal and egalitarian social attitudes (M=61.06) and gender-role beliefs (M=52.10) compared to males across both age groups.

*Table No. 2: Skewness and Kurtosis for total sample across age groups*

| DOMAIN | SKEWNESS | KURTOSIS |
|---|---|---|
| Hostile Sexism | -0.355 | -0.481 |
| Benevolent Sexism | -0.218 | -0.514 |
| Social Attitude | -0.550 | -0.376 |
| Gender-Role Beliefs | -0.679 | 0.562 |

According to Bryne (2010) and Hair et al. (2010) and, data is considered to be normal if skewness is between -2 to +2 and kurtosis is between -7 to +7. Therefore, as per table no. 2, upon considering the values of skewness and kurtosis for each research variable, it can be said that the variables follow a normal distribution and hence assumption of normality has been fulfilled.

*Table No. 3: Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances for Dependent Variables*

| DEPENDENT VARIABLES | F | Df1 | Df2 | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hostile Sexism | 1.851 | 3 | 230 | 0.139 |
| Benevolent Sexism | 1.839 | 3 | 230 | 0.141 |
| Social Attitude | 5.089 | 3 | 230 | 0.102 |
| Gender-Role Beliefs | 0.998 | 3 | 230 | 0.394 |

According to table no. 3, it can be observed that the dependent variables have fulfilled the criteria for Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. The significant values are greater than 0.05 level of significance, hence assumption of homoscedasticity or equal variances has been fulfilled.

Therefore, parametric statistic can be used for the present study as the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances have been fulfilled. The variables under study are also continuous in nature and a large sample size has been used.

The parametric statistics that have been used in the present study are 2-Way Analysis of Variance (2-way Anova), Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Step-wise Regression Analysis.

*Table No. 4: Two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine the role of age and gender on hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, social attitude, and gender-role beliefs*

| DEPENDENT VARIABLE | SOURCE | df | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hostile Sexism | AGE | 1 | 0.630 | 0.428 |
| | GENDER | 1 | 23.586 | 0.000 |
| | AGE*GENDER | 1 | 0.507 | 0.477 |
| Benevolent Sexism | AGE | 1 | 5.696 | 0.018 |
| | GENDER | 1 | 8.776 | 0.003 |
| | AGE*GENDER | 1 | 14.555 | 0.000 |
| Social Attitude | AGE | 1 | 0.462 | 0.497 |
| | GENDER | 1 | 16.543 | 0.000 |
| | AGE*GENDER | 1 | 6.925 | 0.009 |
| Gender-Role Beliefs | AGE | 1 | 0.131 | 0.718 |
| | GENDER | 1 | 6.734 | 0.010 |
| | AGE*GENDER | 1 | 3.556 | 0.061 |

*Significant at 0.05 level*

According to table no. 4, it can be inferred that gender has a significant role on hostile and benevolent sexism, social attitudes and gender-role beliefs; age has a significant role on benevolent sexism.

*Table No. 5: Correlation matrix of hostile and benevolent sexism with all the variables for total sample, female and male sample respectively.*

| | | SOCIAL ATTITUDE | GENDER-ROLE BELIEFS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Sample** | Hostile Sexism | -0.438** | -0.239** |
| | Benevolent Sexism | -0.230** | -0.239** |
| **Female Sample** | Hostile Sexism | -0.344** | -0.125 |
| | Benevolent Sexism | -0.216* | -0.150 |
| **Male Sample** | Hostile Sexism | -0.436** | -0.258** |
| | Benevolent Sexism | -0.168 | -0.284** |

*\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*
*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

According to table no. 5, hostile sexism has a significant negative relationship with social attitudes for all the three samples. Which implies that if level of endorsement of hostile sexism increases then endorsement of liberal social attitudes will decrease and vice versa. It has a significant negative relationship with gender-role beliefs for total sample and male sample. Which signifies that if an individual's level of hostile sexism increases then endorsement in egalitarian gender-role beliefs will decrease. Whereas benevolent sexism has a significant negative relationship with social attitudes for total sample and female sample. Which implies that if benevolent sexism increases then level of endorsement in liberal, non-conservative social attitudes will decrease and vice versa. It has a significant negative

relationship with gender-role beliefs for total sample and male sample. Which similarly signifies that if endorsement in benevolent sexism increases then endorsement in unorthodox and liberal gender-role beliefs will decrease.

*Table No. 6: Predictors of Hostile and Benevolent sexism for Total Sample*
*Table No. 6.1: Stepwise Regression Analysis for Hostile Sexism*

| Model | Variables | Beta | t | R | $R^2$ | Adj. $R^2$ | $R^2$ Change | F |
|-------|-----------|------|---|---|-------|-----------|-------------|---|
| 1 | Social Attitude | -0.451 | -7.414** | 0.438 | 0.191 | 0.188 | 0.191 | 54.936** |

*$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$*

*Table No. 6.2: Stepwise Regression Analysis for Benevolent Sexism*

| Model | Variables | Beta | t | R | $R^2$ | Adj. $R^2$ | $R^2$ Change | F |
|-------|-----------|------|---|---|-------|-----------|-------------|---|
| 1 | Gender-role beliefs | -0.191 | -3.750** | 0.239 | 0.057 | 0.053 | 0.057 | 14.065** |
| 2 | Gender-role beliefs | -0.132 | -2.245* | 0.270 | 0.073 | 0.065 | 0.016 | 3.976* |
|   | Social Attitude | -0.119 | -1.994* | | | | | |

*$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$*

Therefore, according to table no. 6.1 and 6.2, Social attitude is a significant predictor of Hostile sexism and Gender-role beliefs and social attitude are significant predictors of Benevolent sexism for total sample. Social attitude accounts for 19.1 % of variance in Hostile sexism. With the help of table no. 5, it can be further inferred that for total sample hostile sexism showed a stronger significant negative relationship with social attitude compared to gender-role beliefs. This could lead to the understanding that social attitude proved to be a significant predictor of hostile sexism.

Whereas gender-role beliefs account for 5.7 % of variance in Benevolent sexism followed by social attitude (1.6 %). Together they account for 7.3 % of variance in Benevolent sexism. Using table no. 5, it can be further explained that benevolent sexism had a moderate significant negative relationship with both social attitude and gender-role beliefs for total sample. Hence both gender-role belief and social attitude proved to be a significant predictor of benevolent sexism.

## DISCUSSION

The objectives of our study were to identify the predictors of hostile and benevolent sexism along with to investigate the role of age and gender on hostile and benevolent sexism, social attitude and gender-role beliefs.

For the two-way analysis of variance, in case of both forms of sexism, the present results obtained were supported by a study done by Jain, Kaur and Jain (2020) which observed that Indian men held high levels of hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes. There is a positive relation of Indian philosophy with benevolent sexism. The underlying rationale was that Indians had an inherent preference for paternalistic relationships which inculcated and propagated benevolent sexism in India (Jain, Kaur and Jain, 2020). Such inherent preference for protection could be due to the omnipresent and omnirelevant patriarchal nature of the

Indian society (Shashwati, Gupta & Kapur, 2023). Hence, such explanation can be used to describe the results of the present study which showed men to endorse more in benevolent sexism compare to women.

Results for hostile sexism can be further explained using the current socio-economic dynamics of Indian society. India being a developing country is burdened by resource scarcity which leads to shortage of career or social development opportunities (Chen et al., 2009). Such economic scarcity often leads to gender competition. According to the present socio-economic scenario, job crisis in Kolkata continues to exist, becoming a major concern for the city and its residents. With respect to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), 2023, the rate of unemployment in Kolkata grew steadily over the past few years, reaching a peak of 9.9% in December, 2020, with over 1.5 million unemployed people. Therefore, the struggle to secure a job in public sector or the problem of maintaining a private-sector job creates havoc competition among young adults of Kolkata. Such perception of relative poverty creates prejudice and hostility among individuals. Therefore, such economic and financial resource scarcity can lead to greater degrees of hostile sexism among men compared to women. Also, the paternalistic view of our country promotes the idea of men being the provider of the family (Wakankar & Chhabra, 2022). So, the pressure of gaining financial security and a stable career and decent job (Jagadeesh, 2022) is experienced more by middle class urban males than by females.

The present results were also supported by existing research which showed the existence of age-based differences in the attitudes towards benevolent sexism (Hammond et al., 2018). For the lower age group, endorsing benevolent sexist attitudes could be because of their nature of upbringing. In India masculinity is passed on generation after generation (Wakankar & Chhabra, 2022) via parental teachings and vicarious observations. Parents teaching their sons to be a "gentleman" can make them internalize the idea that they are responsible for protecting girls. This could explain for their higher levels of endorsement in benevolent sexism. The Indian study conducted by Kishore (2023) also explained how experiences of benevolent sexism were particularly unavoidable for all the women, hence indicating its pervasive nature. Thus, this could explain how lower-age group across gender endorsed more in benevolent sexism compared to higher-age group. Therefore, the change in attitudes and perceptions due to the transition of psychosocial events (leaving academia and entering work force) has been observed in the present study.

In case of social attitude, the results were also supported by a Turkish study conducted by Bugay et al. in 2019 which showed that sex was a significant predictor of attitudes toward women. Turkish males expressed more traditional views than females. Thus, India also being a patriarchal country and Kolkata being no exception to it could also influence men's social attitudes being more traditionalist and conservative in nature. The traditionalist viewpoint pushes women to fight for their freedom, independence and equality causing them to have more liberal social attitudes. Whereas among males, the same ideology rewards those who abide by the cultural hegemony.

In case of gender-role beliefs the results obtained supported an African study conducted by Akotia and Anum in 2012, where they observed that females endorsed more modern perceptions of gender roles and that males were less likely to change from socialisation practices that encouraged male hegemony. Education minimised females' perceptions of traditional roles but not of males. Indian society continues to practice the enforcement of traditional gender roles and due to its patriarchal history; males are given more privileges in

social domains. Therefore, they tend to prefer the traditionalist gender role differentiation that protects the male dominance and hierarchy. The collectivistic cultural orientation of Kolkata also acts as a moderator in this case. Hence, males tend to show more conservative gender-role beliefs compared to women. Women by history had to fight for their basic rights and against the prevailing discrimination. The prolonged crimes against women in India prove that their struggle has not yet ceased. Hence with the decreasing inequality in pursuing education, and rising awareness regarding the detrimental nature of traditional gender-role beliefs, women are slowly breaking free from the traditional hegemony.

From the correlation matrix, the results partially supported a previous British study done by Arne et al., 2012, which stated that sexism primarily stemmed from individual differences in motivated cognitive style which was related to people's perspective on the social world rather than from group differences between men and women. The study also proved that gender was a minor predictor of sexist attitudes compared to social attitudes. The obtained results supported the study done by Assche, Koc and Roets, 2019, where social attitudes were also used to explain a substantial portion of variance in sexism towards both the own and the other gender. Therefore, higher endorsement of hostile and benevolent sexism would lead to reduced endorsement in liberal and feminist social attitudes. Another study conducted by Agadullina et al., 2022, also observed that the relationship between hostile sexism and social attitudes and behaviours was stronger than for benevolent sexism. This result was also proven in the present study where hostile sexism showed stronger negative correlation with social attitudes compared to benevolent sexism for both total sample and female sample.

According to previous research, sexism was suggested to be deeply rooted in traditional gender roles (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). It was also proven that individuals who endorsed benevolence towards women tended to endorse more in traditional gender role attitudes and behaviours (Spence & Helmreich, 1978) hence supporting the results of the present study. In case of total sample and male sample, the results obtained were supported by a study conducted by Shnabel et al., 2015 on Israelian and Hungarian participants which stated that benevolent sexism encouraged engagement in cross-gender helping relations that perpetuated traditional gender roles.

As both hostile and benevolent sexism showed a significant negative relationship with social attitude and gender-role beliefs, the results of the step-wise regression analysis also observed social attitude and gender-role belief being a significant predictor of benevolent sexism and social attitude being a significant predictor of hostile sexism.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study proves that both hostile and benevolent sexism, continue to prevail in the current society among young adults. Despite the years of policy making, systematic progress and accessibility of the educational system along with a gradual trend towards promoting gender equality, the citizens of Kolkata, India continue to endorse in sexist beliefs and fail to recognise and interpret sexist instances. Therefore, using this study, proper interventions strategies, awareness programmes and policies can be constructed at both individual, educational, organisational and societal level which can help in identifying common expressions of ambivalent sexism in social settings, uprooting sexism and alleviating related factors that could contribute to development of sexist beliefs among individuals.

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*Conflict of Interest*

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

*How to cite this article:* Chaudhuri, A. & Dasgupta, S. (2024). Predictors of Hostile and Benevolent Sexism of Indian Males and Females Across Age Groups. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *12*(3)*, 2667-2678. DIP:18.01.257.20241203, DOI:10.25215/1203.257