

Research Paper

## Unveiling Motherhood: Exploring Traditional Attitudes towards Women, Self-Sacrifice, Self-Esteem, and Emotional Resilience among Mothers

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### ABSTRACT

Most Indian households follow a patriarchal system where women are expected to follow the conservative norms set up within the society. From their childhood watching these traditional norms, women form specific attitudes towards other women, affecting their self-esteem and emotional resilience over time. A major part of these traditional norms is the self-sacrifice women make after becoming mothers. The present study explores the impact that Traditional Attitudes Toward Women can have on Self-Sacrifice, Self-Esteem, and Emotional Resilience among Mothers. This exploratory, quantitative, cross-sectional study used purposive sampling and included 304 mothers aged 21-40 years, who completed the standardised Traditional Attitudes Toward Indian Women Scale, Self-Sacrifice Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Brief Resilience Scale. Regression and Correlation analyses conducted using SPSS software (version 25) revealed that traditional attitudes significantly predicted lower self-esteem and were positively correlated with self-sacrifice and negatively correlated with emotional resilience. This study aims to amplify the voices of countless mothers and act as the catalyst for change within society, encouraging communities to foster environments where mothers feel valued for their individuality and autonomy.

**Keywords:** *Self-Sacrifice, Mother, Self-Esteem, Emotional Resilience, Traditional Attitude*

### **Traditional Attitude Towards Women (TATW)**

In the present Indian society, Traditional Attitudes continue to exercise a powerful influence. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2025, India is on 131 place out of 146 countries in the world, which highlights the persistent inequalities in women's social and economic participation (The World Economic Forum, 2025). Traditional Attitudes Towards Women are the culturally embedded belief system that considers women as emotionally weak, frivolous, selfish, primarily responsible for domestic work, and less competent (Singh & Aggarwal, 2019). Traditional Gender role attitudes are the naturally held beliefs about how men and women should behave in society and adhere to a specific role (Priyashantha et al., 2022). According to our traditional norms, women are supposed to be nurturers and caregivers, which promotes self-sacrifice (Habibnejad et al., 2023). To understand these traditional gender attitudes we need to analyse where these attitudes actually come from.

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India is a country where patriarchal views are widespread and traditional gender roles are considered to be the norm regardless of the basis of any religion (Sinha & Ram, 2018). Many studies believe that the identity of a mother in her child rearing years has a major influence on her daughter's gender attitudes (Sinha and Ram, 2018). These traditional gender attitudes are formed by multiple complex influences including psychological aspects such as parental behaviours, personality traits, and experiences of sexual abuse and social aspects such as infertility, employment, gender, and ethnicity (Habibnejad et al., 2023). Additionally, it is also believed that traditional gender attitudes also stem from severe social crimes towards girls such as sex selection before birth (Singh & Aggarwal, 2020).

Social Role Theory concludes that gender roles are assigned to both men and women and they are expected to behave according to these prescribed roles. Women are idealized within the society and put on a pedestal where extreme expectations take a huge toll upon them (Eagly, 2017). The cultural roots of the concept of an "Ideal Woman" date way back to 5000 years, the time when the early societies were first established in India and a study found that most people within the country find Sita, wife of Hindu lord Ram to be the ideal of Indian women (Singh & Aggarwal, 2020). From the beginning of their lives women are taught how to behave, what to wear, what identity they are supposed to adopt etc (Ranjitha & Unnithan, 2018). Therefore, being compared to such ideals makes it more difficult for women to cope with the societal expectations that come along.

Gender Role Attitude significantly influences the self-esteem of married women which implies that women who have more Egalitarian Gender Roles tend to have higher self-esteem whereas women who have traditional gender roles have lower self-esteem (Ercan & Ercan, 2022). Gender differences show that there exists a higher resilience level among males (Gök & Koğar, 2021). Self-sacrifices in motherhood are pretty normalised culturally and dynamic disguises and perpetuates gender inequality within families (Cantillon & Hutton, 2020).

### ***Self-Esteem***

Self-esteem is the level of self-approval, self-acceptance, and self-worth an individual has (Parhiz et al., 2016). Self-esteem is the positive and negative evaluations an individual has about themselves (Ercan & Ercan, 2022). The concept of self-esteem has been around since 1890, first defined by William James in his book "Principles of Psychology". In 1960s, Morris Rosenberg worked upon the theory of self-esteem and even developed a working scale to measure it known as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSES). Other emerging trends include the role of physical appearance in controlling self-esteem and the development of self-esteem over the years within adolescents. A longitudinal study was conducted on 84,711 women to investigate the relationship between relationship satisfaction and self-esteem before and after childbirth. The findings suggest that self-esteem decreases during pregnancy, increases until the child turns 6 months old, and decreases over the subsequent years (Van Scheppingen, 2018). Additionally, a cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the relationship between self-esteem, attitude towards motherhood and pregnancy in 228 Iranian pregnant women and found that higher self-esteem is associated with favourable traditional attitude and positive body image (Zamiri-Miandoab, 2022).

James (1968) believed that self-esteem is determined by a person's success and their expectation of that said success. One of the more prominent theories that dealt with self-esteem was Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs where he included self-esteem as

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one of the essential needs of a human being to achieve self-actualisation. Maslow (1934) believed it to be the second highest stage of a person's road to self-actualisation. Once a person archives the need of self-esteem they move toward self-actualisation. Another widely known theory was Carl Rogers' humanistic theory. Rogers (1951) believed that his clients need to achieve a state of congruence between their ideal self and their real self. By doing so they can achieve higher levels of self-esteem and fulfill their needs more efficiently. This theory was worked upon and improved by Higgins when he developed his self-discrepancy theory. Higgins (1987) argued that discrepancies within the ideal self and real self is the result of lower self-esteem.

### ***Self-Sacrifice***

Self-sacrifice is defined as the psychological willingness to suffer and die for a cause (Bélanger et al., 2014). Giving away one's life for others or interests for the betterment of others or for a cause is known as self-sacrifice (Lyngdon, 2018). Originally, evolutionary psychology looked into self-sacrifice as a type of altruism, suggesting that the actions that benefited the group, even if at the price of oneself, maximized the survival chances. Later, Jean Piaget (1932) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1958) explored that self-sacrificial tendencies emerge in childhood as individuals transition from egocentrism to empathy through moral development and socialization (Huitt & Hummel, 2003) (Kohlberg, 1958). Further Cultural and anthropological studies highlight that common values and traditional rituals shape self-sacrificial behaviors in various societies. With the development of contemporary psychology, Jeffrey Young in 2010 introduced self-sacrifice schemas in schema therapy, to characterize individuals who habitually prioritize others' needs before their own. Mothers have to constantly balance between self-sacrifices and their self-interests which should not be the case as motherhood is a constantly changing experience rather than a stagnant one (Meyer, 2018). One should not look at the concept of self-sacrifice from a gendered lens but rather focus upon recognising a woman's often unquestioned traditional sacrifices (Lyngdoh, 2018).

Moral Development Theory (Kohlberg, 1958) focussed on six developmental stages of moral reasoning, categorized into three distinct phases: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional morality. He adapted these stages of Moral Development from Jean Piaget's theory of moral judgment for children. This theory explored how moral reasoning develops in children from self-centered thinking to high morality, including the emergence of self-sacrificial behavior. Another theory developed in regard to self-sacrifice is the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis. The term "Altruism" refers to the motivational state where the ultimate goal is to safeguard and promote the welfare of others rather than oneself (Batson, 1991). The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis proposes that altruistic motivation- a motivational state whose ultimate objective is to reduce that need, is produced by empathic concern- an other-oriented emotional response evoked by and corresponds with the perceived welfare of someone in need (Batson, 1991). People tend to engage in self-sacrificial behaviors when they empathize with the suffering of others.

### ***Emotional Resilience***

Psychological resilience is the ability of a person to adapt positively to challenging life situations and to preserve mental health despite bad life experiences (Gök & Koğar, 2021). Emotional Resilience refers to the ability of an individual to make positive adjustments despite facing difficult and adverse circumstances and exposure to risk factors (Athanasidiades et al., 2023). The early foundations of the concept of emotional resilience can be traced all

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the way back to the pre-20th century era when resilience was viewed from the lenses of philosophy and literature. The earliest official study about emotional resilience was Emmy Werner's Kauai Study. Werner (1993) conducted an experiment on children from the Kauai island region where she observed that children growing up in adverse conditions can develop resilient tendencies concluding that resilient individuals were ones who showed characteristics allowing them to be more successful than other non-resilient individuals. It is seen that resilience and self-compassion simultaneously have a significant positive effect on the psychological well-being of women and mothers (Welingan, 2023).

Richardson (2002) explained Resilience as a dynamic process rather than a fixed trait and described the resiliency model as a three-stage process- Biopsychospiritual Homeostasis, Disruption, and Resilient Reintegration. Biopsychospiritual Homeostasis is the stage of balance and stable stage of well-being. Disruption is the adversity that disturbs this balance and Resilient Reintegration is the response to this disruption. This Resilience theory talks about how resilience is a cycle and is applied in therapy, education and trauma recovery. Another theory which can be talked about with resilience is the Stress and Coping theory by Lazarus & Folkman (1984). Coping refers to the various methods and strategies taken up by an individual to tackle stressful situations and environments. Resilience is also defined to be the ability to be able to cope with stress. Lazarus and Folkman gave two types of coping strategies which are used by resilient individuals.

The objectives of the present study were To study the impact of TATW on Self-Sacrifice within mothers and to assess the impact of TATW on Emotional Resilience within mothers, also To understand the impact of TATW on Self-Esteem within mothers.

The conceptual framework of the study revolves around the idea that motherhood has always been shaped by tradition, with societal expectations. Their selflessness is often praised, but it can also affect their self-esteem and emotional resilience. In many cultures, especially conservative ones, mothers are both honored and bound by these expectations. Additionally, existing literature has focused upon the attitudes of men towards women and the difference within the attitudes of men of urban and rural areas (Meena et al., 2018). Thus this study aims to cover the attitudes women hold towards women and use that to understand their Self-Sacrifice, Self-Esteem and Emotional Resilience.

### **METHOD**

#### ***Sample:***

The present study includes 304 mothers from the age group of 21-40, who are fluent in the English language, have at least one child, and live within the Delhi-NCR region. The mean age for the sample was 36.1484375. A priori analysis was conducted using G\*Power software, which indicated 89 participants as the minimum required sample size to detect statistically significant effects. The analysis was based on a linear multiple regression model with effect size  $f^2 = 0.15$ , power  $(1 - \beta) = 0.95$ , significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and 1 predictor.

#### ***Research Design:***

The present study is exploratory, quantitative, cross-sectional, and uses purposive sampling to examine the impact of Traditional Attitudes Towards Women on self-sacrifice, self-esteem, and emotional resilience among mothers.

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**Table 1. Representing the measures used in the present study and their authors**

Measures	Authors and Years	Reliability	Validity
Traditional Attitudes Towards Women Scale	Sanjay Singh & Yogita Aggarwal. (2020).	( $\alpha = .90$ )	High construct Validity
Self-Sacrifice Scale	Jocelyn J. Belanger, Julie Caouette, Keren Sharvit & Michelle Dugas (2014)	( $\alpha = .90$ )	Discriminant and Construct Validity
Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale	Morris Rosenberg (1965)	( $\alpha = .92$ )	Concurrent, predictive and construct validity
Brief Resilience Scale	Bruce W. Smith, Jeanne Dalen, Kathryn Wiggins, Erin Tooley, Paulette Christopher, and Jennifer Bernard (2008)	( $\alpha = .91$ )	Convergent and predictive discriminant validity

Note.  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's Alpha (Measure of Internal Consistency/Reliability)

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Inclusion Criteria involved in this study were the mothers within the age range of 21-40 years, who were fluent in the English language. The Exclusion Criteria involved Women who didn't have any children, who scored above or below the age range of 21-40 years and were not fluent in the English language.

**Statistical Analysis:**

The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS Software (Version 25). Descriptive Statistics, Pearson Product Correlation, and Linear Regression were carried out to understand the relationship and Impact of Traditional Attitude Towards Women on Self-sacrifice, Self-esteem, and Emotional Resilience among Mothers.

**RESULTS**

**Table 2 Representing the Pearson Product Correlations and Descriptive Data of Relevant Variables**

Variable	M	SD	r with TATW	p (1-tailed)
Self-sacrifice	44.04	8.87	.117*	.021
Self-esteem	28.39	4.65	-.154**	.004
Emotional Resilience	18.65	3.26	-.026	.327
TATW	48.30	13.82	-	-

Note. N = 304; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation;  $r$  = Pearson correlation coefficient; Significant at \* $p < .05$  and \*\* $p < .01$ .

Traditional Attitude Towards Women (TATW) has a significant positive correlation with Self-Sacrifice, a significant negative correlation with self-esteem and a negative correlation with emotional resilience.

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**Table 3 Representing the Regression Analysis of TATW Predicting Self-Sacrifice, Self-Esteem, and Emotional Resilience.**

Dependent variable	Predictor	B	SEB	95% CI for B		$\beta$	t-value	p	R <sup>2</sup>
				LCI	UCI				
Self-Sacrifice	(Constant)	40.42	1.84	36.79	44.04	-	21.92	.000	-
	TATW	.075	.037	.003	.147	.117	2.04	.042*	.014
Self-Esteem	(Constant)	30.9	0.96	29.01	32.79	-	32.13	.000	-
	TATW	-.052	.02	-.09	-.014	-.15	-2.71	.007**	.024
Emotional Resilience	(Constant)	18.95	.68	17.64	20.29	-	27.8	.000	-
	TATW	-.006	.014	-.033	.021	-	-.448	.654	.001
						.026			

*Note.*  $N = 304$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ,  $B$  = unstandardized regression coefficient; LCI/UCI = lower & upper 95% confidence interval;  $SE B$  = standard error of  $B$ ;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient;  $R^2$  = proportion of variance.

Traditional Attitude Towards Women (TATW) is a significant positive predictor of self-sacrifice with a value of  $R^2 = .014$ , explaining 1.4 % variance in self-sacrifice. Additionally, TATW is a significant negative predictor of Self-Esteem, predicting 2.4 % of the variance in Self-esteem with a value of  $R^2 = .024$ .

## DISCUSSION

The present study aims to explore the impact of Traditional Attitudes Towards Women (TATW) on the Self-Sacrifice, Self-Esteem and Emotional Resilience within mothers. The findings of the study highlight the role that traditional attitudes can have in shaping the psychological well-being of mothers. Table 2, representing the Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Product Correlation Analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between TATW and Self-Sacrifice, suggesting that mothers who have traditional views tend to view themselves less than others and sacrifice more for others. A significant negative correlation exists between TATW and Self-Esteem, which explains that traditional attitudes tend to be associated with diminished self-worth among mothers. Additionally, a negative correlation was observed between TATW and Emotional resilience.

Table 3, Representing the Regression Analysis of TATW Predicting Self-Sacrifice, Self-Esteem, and Emotional Resilience, provided further insights into these correlations, showing that TATW is a significant positive predictor of Self-Sacrifice, suggesting that mothers with stronger traditional attitudes are more likely to engage in self-sacrificing behaviours. This result aligns with a study which talks about how mothers feel that their primary responsibilities in a family is to take care of their children and how it is normalised for mothers to make sacrifices to no end for the well-being of their children even if it means making sacrifices at the expense of their own wants and needs (Hutton and Cantillon, 2020). The result can also be explained by a cultural concept called Marianismo, which emphasizes women's primary responsibility for child rearing, household management, and self-sacrifice. It describes how women are expected to be nurturing, selfless, and should put the needs of others before their own (Morales and Rojas, 2020).

TATW was found to be a significant negative predictor of Self-Esteem. This significant negative impact can be explained due to the effect of various factors such as internalized

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guilt, shame, and feelings of inadequacy that come along with the societal expectation of being a mother and can arise from personal aspirations, lack of recognition and appreciation for personal accomplishments. The result is consistent with a study that found that women with more traditional gender role attitudes have significantly lower self-esteem (Erçan & Koçak, 2022). Research on feminine gender role discrepancy strain suggests that women who are pressured to conform and to fit into traditional norms can lower their self-esteem (Harrington and Overall, 2022). Additionally, Mahalingam and Jackson (2007) revealed that cultural beliefs about idealized womanhood contribute to diminished self-esteem and increased feelings of shame and depression among women.

At last, TATW was found to be a non-significant predictor of Emotional Resilience, indicating that a mother's ability to cope with life challenges and adapt to them is often influenced by factors like education, social support, financial independence and coping strategies. A recent study conducted on university female nursing students in Spain found that emotional resilience was more closely related to gender-role identity than traditional beliefs alone. Additionally, women who have non-traditional gender roles (masculine or androgynous) are more emotionally strong and resilient (Mayor-Silva, 2025).

These findings provide a picture of mothers and women caught between cultural expectations of sacrifice and modern desire for independence and self-worth. Many women still bear the weight of cultural expectations and these findings reveal the double reality faced by women today. On the surface, empowered and independent women and mothers are often celebrated by society, especially on social media platforms and campaigns that promote non-patriarchal ideals and equality. Beneath this progressive image, traditional attitudes continue to shape women's living experiences. On occasions like Mother's Day and Women's Day, women are often celebrated symbolically on social media, but the deeper reality of women's struggles often remains overlooked. This contrast reflects a significant gap between the traditional views or expectations upheld by society privately and how society publicly performs respect for women.

### ***Limitations***

The present study measures the impact of Traditional Attitudes Towards Women on Self-Sacrifice, Self-Esteem and Emotional Resilience among mothers, including mothers who are fluent in the English language. Thus, the current research is unable to take into account the same for mothers who are not as well educated and do not speak English. The study focused solely on a single independent variable (TATW), although psychological outcomes such as self-sacrifice, self-esteem and emotional resilience could have been influenced by a broader combination of economic, socio-cultural, and interpersonal factors.

### ***Implications and Recommendations***

The current study can help with developing mental health interventions which can help with finding new ways to help mothers tackle patriarchal norms. Additionally, it can play a vital role in contributing to feminist psychology, shedding light on how societal expectations shape women's self-perception. Other benefits include developing parenting styles, encouraging a healthy environment for women and challenging gender norms instilled within the society.

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***Conflict of Interest***

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