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## Learning from our Mothers: Examining the Role of Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer in Advancing Gender Equity among Sri Lankan Youth

Ruvani Fonseka

*UC San Diego*, [ruvani.fonseka@sjsu.edu](mailto:ruvani.fonseka@sjsu.edu)

Samantha Hurst

*UC San Diego*

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# Learning from our Mothers: Examining the Role of Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer in Advancing Gender Equity among Sri Lankan Youth

Ruvani Fonseka, MPH, MSW (Predoctoral Fellow at UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health)

Samantha Hurst, PhD (Project Scientist at UC San Diego)

Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) Conference

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# Background

- Gender-Based Violence and Attitudes in Sri Lanka:
  - Gender-Based Violence (GBV): 34-40%
  - Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) linked to GBV perpetration and victimization
  - High gender-inequitable attitudes (>50%)
- Rationale for the study:
  - Qualitative follow-up to quantitative research:
    - Understand the “why”
  - Public Health perspective:
    - Develop youth interventions to prevent GBV

# Methods

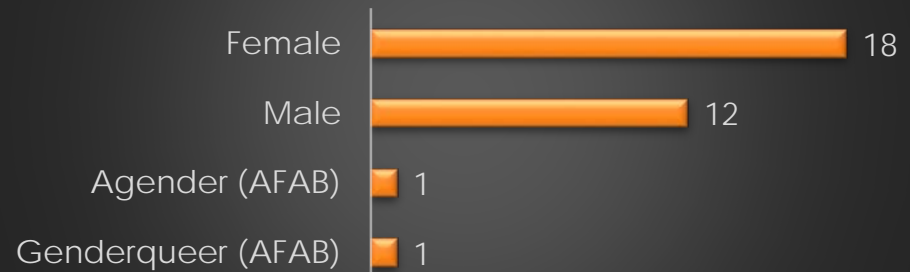
- Sampling
  - Urban: Social media recruitment to study email
  - Rural: Youth alumni and staff of development center
  - Requirements: 18-30, fluent in English, Sri Lankan
- Data Collection: Narrative Interviews:
  - 30 minutes to 1 hour
  - Semi-structured – set of questions with follow-ups
- Analysis
  - Systematic transcript review for major themes
  - Directed content analysis for "family influence"

# Participant Information (n=32)

## Location



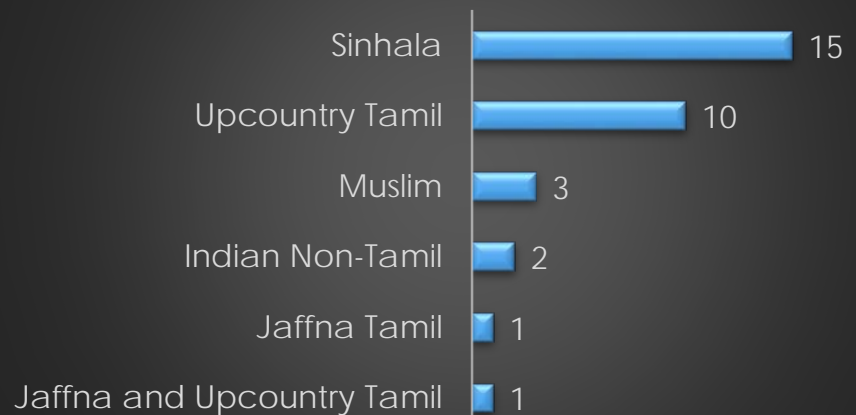
## Self-described Gender



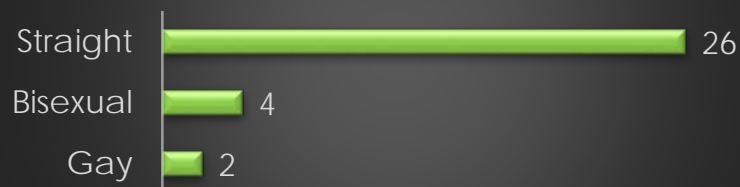
## Age



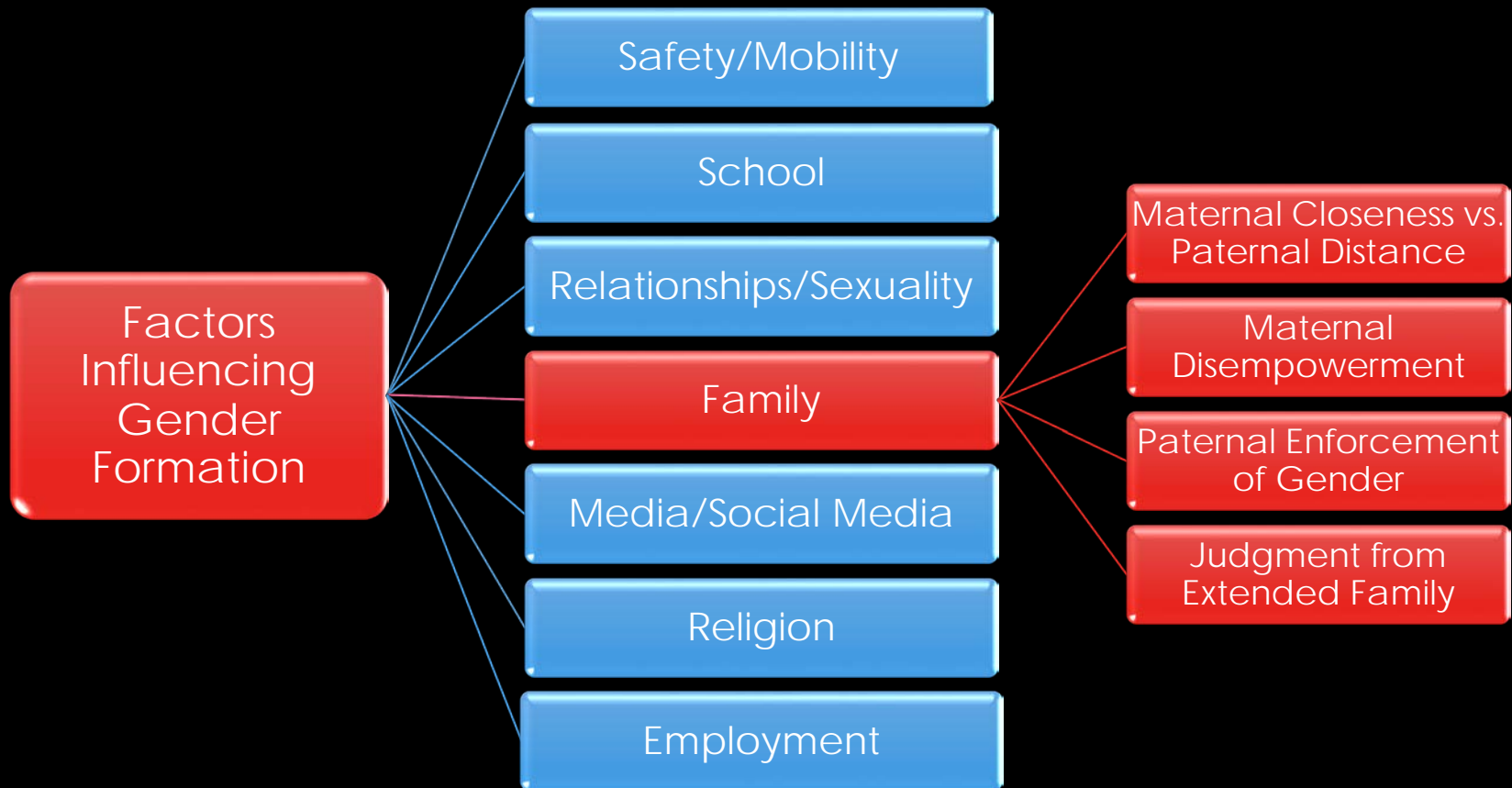
## Ethnicity



## Sexuality



# Themes and Subthemes



# Maternal Closeness/ Paternal Distance

- “I am **very open to my mother**. Whatever happened during the day, I share with her, even my personal relationships. I’m **not very close to my father**.” (Female, rural, 18-25)
- I am very distant from my family, I am **only close to my mom**. Maybe I can talk to you even though my father died a couple of weeks ago because I am **very distant from my father**. (Female, urban, 18-25)
- “if you say ‘if you don’t eat, I won’t let your mother see you,’ that child is more responsive. They can actually live **a distance from their fathers**, rather than from their mother.” (Male, urban, 26-30)

# Maternal Disempowerment

- "Only my father makes decisions, and he doesn't discuss with my mother. She might make better decisions, but **she doesn't get the chance**. She doesn't oppose my father. Whatever he says, she agrees."  
(Male, rural, 26-30)
- "[My mother] regrets having no career as a woman, she always told us '**be financially free**.' That was her biggest regret, that she wasn't financially independent."  
(Agender, AFAB, urban, 18-25)
- "In my mother's case, for example, she left the job when my father married her. Although she had acumen as an accountant, **it was wasted** in my view."  
(male, urban, 26-30)



# Paternal Enforcement of Gender

- “**My father gave me the responsibility** in grade 9. He started to give me money” (Male, rural, 18-25)
- “My sister wanted to join the airline as cabin crew. My father did not agree. His reason was that cabin crew had a **not-so-good reputation.**” (Male, urban, 26-30)
- “I will tolerate these qualities [belief his word is final] in my dad, because I love him and I can't change him, but **I would never accept them in a partner.**” (Female, urban, 26-30)

# Extended Family Judgment

- “I was making a lot of friends who were both male and female, and they [my relatives] would try to make it sound really weird. Once we had a meeting and I was walking back with a friend. And we were walking and talking and apparently one of my relatives had driven past– and **she called my mother**, and said ‘I saw her walking out with a boy.’ I think **my mother laughed**. She said ‘she had a meeting,’ but she repeated it to me. ”  
(Female, urban, 26-30)
- “She [my aunt] just told me “why are you [dancing like a girl]? It’s not the way boys are supposed to behave. You have to do this, you have to like cars.” And they used to mock, and **still they are mocking me** in a serious way, like “you used to do this when you were that age.” **My parents are so cool** and just laugh it off. (Male, urban, 18-25)

# Discussion

- Findings:
  - Gender inequitable behaviors modeled by mothers and fathers in Sri Lanka serve to both limit and instigate gender expression among Sri Lankan youth
  - Extended family attempt to enforce gender norms, but parental support can mitigate these efforts
- Implications:
  - Interventions fostering gender equity in parenting could impact young people's gender attitudes and expression
- Additional research:
  - Role of educational settings, other themes
  - More diverse populations
    - Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking populations
    - Geographic variety

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## Questions/Comments?