

Research Article

Life Partner Expectations: Young Female Engineering Students

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24321/2349.2880.202310>

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How to cite this article:

Bhave SY, Itkarkar S, Shibu SS, Mane S, Kariya P, Sovani A. Life Partner Expectations: Young Female Engineering Students. Ind J Youth Adol Health. 2023;10(4):1-7.

Date of Submission: 2023-09-13

Date of Acceptance: 2023-11-29

A B S T R A C T

Introduction: This is a part of a multicentric study of youth behaviour in various colleges across India. This article was a survey to investigate life partner expectations in college students.

Method: The sample included first-year students from an all-women engineering college in Pune (N = 78). A self-designed questionnaire made by AACCI was used to assess these expectations.

Results: Perceptions affirmed by the participants included valuation of education, wishing to pursue a career after marriage ($\chi^2 = 59.9$, $p < 0.001$), catering to parents financially even after marriage ($\chi^2 = 55.84$, $p < 0.001$), not wanting the potential partner to expect financial aid from their family (100%), wanting acceptance for continuing with their social life including their male friends after marriage ($\chi^2 = 52.5$, $p < 0.001$), and not wanting a partner to be very fond of religious rituals ($\chi^2 = 10.05$, $p < 0.01$). It was also reflected in the fact that most of them did not like their husband smoking or drinking ($\chi^2 = 18.5$, $p < 0.01$) even socially ($\chi^2 = 4.15$, $p < 0.05$). Analysis of this data was utilised to decide the contents of a workshop on "choosing your life partner" which was subsequently conducted by researchers in the college.

Conclusion: It was interesting to analyse the mindset of these young college girls about their life partner expectations. We found the analysis of this data very useful in planning the contents of a workshop on "choosing your life partner" which was subsequently conducted by us in the college.

Keywords: Life-partner Expectations, Marriage, Engineering College Girls, Young Adults

Introduction

With the notion of independence and autonomy in the air, wanting to make active choices with regard to various aspects of one's life becomes crucial, more so, in the case of women, who hail from and belong to a patriarchal weaving of society. The 21st-century Indian woman has a lot at stake when making major life decisions. Since time immemorial, marriage as a social institution is highly encouraged. For an Indian woman, conventionally, marriage is postulated to be a mandatory end goal. In a scenario like this, knowing and being aware of one's expectations, with regard to their life partner, becomes pivotal.

Conventionally, the male breadwinner model within the purview of gender relations, in a single-handed manner governs marital expectations within Western societies. The view is built on the premise that men are viewed as torchbearers of household finances, whilst women are confined to domesticity and associated roles. While times are changing, the deep-rooted weaving of a society, where women are still viewed as the inferior gender meant to be involved in domestic responsibilities, is rampant. Hence, accounting for culture-specific and country-specific relativity with regard to life-partner expectations, the disparity prevalent between time spent on domestic chores between men and women is distinctly high. This is precisely why, women usually find themselves amidst living and delivering on a duality of roles which further places them in a volatile state, when it comes to handling their personal as well as professional lives.¹

Broadly discoursing on expectations from a life partner, monetary orientation and attraction, intellectual and psychological support, and care and respect have emerged as three distinct cycles, where the first stage usually occurs during the age of 25–45 years, the second stage during the age of 46 to 66 years and the final stage stretching past 66 years of age. Compartmentalising these as three distinct stages is not accurate as the structure of these stages is profoundly dynamic.² Women go on to contend, as the mentioned stages progress, love has to be stolen, to being shared to having demanded.²

It is only fitting to have certain expectations from one's life partner; be it personal, social, financial, physical or emotional; compatibility on all levels is what ensures the long-term sustenance of the said relationship. Hiller and Philliber in their article investigated marital role perceptions and expectations with regard to earning income, domestic chores, and childcare and finance management with 489 married couples. A congruence was drawn between how compatible the expectations and perceptions were of both spouses. Results depicted that – a) Compromising on contemporary gender roles is not an option, while a partner may be willing to participate and contribute to the

traditional roles of the opposite sex, b) More than half the time, spouses correctly perceive the expectations of their partner; husbands are more accurate in doing the same as compared to their wives, c) In comparison to their partners, women are under the impression that they carry greater responsibility for domestic chores and duties, d) One's perception of their partner's expectations can crucially influence spouse's performance and delivery of those roles, and e) Even with regards to expectations, husband's expectations were found to be a powerful indicator as well as a predictor of performance, which highlights the hold of patriarchy as well as the dominance of male prerogatives in the narrative of marital roles.³

Another study looked at the expectations of middle-aged women towards their spouses. Thirty-nine middle-aged women were recruited for the study, across various social settings like work, religious organisations, and acquaintances. The results highlighted four types of expectations that were usually held. The first one was "Collaborative and self-development type", which implied a collaborative effort between partners, and in which the woman of the family has a completely developed sense of self. The second one was "Maintain their own life", which looked at women's recognition and maintenance of their expertise without any interference from their spouses. The third one, "Respect for the inner value", focused on women's precedence and continued respect for their inner values, and lastly, "Realistic acceptance", depicted that women chose to continue in the same situation without implementing or imbibing a new self-development type.⁴

The current study looked at a multi-centric study regarding expectations from life partners among college girls. A prestigious (all-women) engineering college affiliated to Pune University, Pune, Maharashtra was selected for the pilot study. Most of the girl students came from a rural background from surrounding districts. Researchers felt that the perceptions of such young women regarding their future life partner would be very interesting in the scenario of the traditional upbringing in their rural background and the current exposure to a modern city culture in Pune. Analysis of this data was utilised to decide the contents of a workshop on "choosing your life partner" which was subsequently conducted by the organisation.

Methodology

Study Design

This study is a part of our multi-centric youth behaviour research studies on school and college students. This was a cross-sectional observational study conducted in June 2018 at an engineering all-women college in Pune.

The sample included 78 first-year female engineering students aged 17–19 years who attended a workshop on adolescent issues conducted by the researchers.

Tool Used

A self-report questionnaire was designed that comprised 17 items with the option of yes or no. The primary rationale was to gauge the perception of young girls regarding their preferred qualities in their potential life partner, i.e. spousal perceptions. A qualitative analysis was conducted. Data were collected in a single session in June 2018.

Criteria of Sample Selection

AACCI, Association of Adolescent and Child Care in India, has an MOU with a college of engineering for girls in Pune. This is an all-women engineering college where the students come from Pune and also from surrounding districts. The parents of these students are farmers and cultivators who are conservative and prefer to send their daughters to a women's college rather than a coed engineering college. This college was specially founded to meet this need. The study was conducted on a convenience sample that included all the first-year students of the college who were present in the workshop conducted on the day of the study and were willing to be a part of the study. There were no exclusion criteria.

Ethical Clearance

The study got ethical clearance for the study project design protocol from the Association of Adolescent and Child

Care in India – Institutional Ethics Committee (AACCI–IEC). Permission was taken from the college administration. Consent/ assent of the participants was recorded by inserting the following text at the beginning of the questionnaire: “I am voluntarily filling this form. Filling the form implies my assent/ consent for participation in the study” (for students below 18 years of age, it was assent and for those above 18 years, it was consent).

Background of the College

Many traditional families from rural and semi-rural areas have inhibitions in sending their girls to a coed engineering college in the city and are happy to enrol them in an all-women college.

Since most of the female students came from a rural background from surrounding districts, the need was pronounced to understand the perceptions of such young women regarding their future life partner, especially in the scenario of their traditional upbringing in their rural background and the current exposure to a modern city culture in Pune. Analysis of the associated data helped researchers decide the contents of a workshop on “choosing your life partner”, which was subsequently conducted for these girls.

Results and Discussion

Table I. Demographic Details of the Subjects

(N = 78)

Item	Data Distribution					Details Known by Participants n (%)	Details Not Known by Participants n (%)
	Gr A 40–50	Gr B 51–60	-	-	-		
Father's age (years)	Gr A 40–50	Gr B 51–60	-	-	-	35 (45.0)	43 (55.0)
n (%)	17 (49.0)	18 (51.0)	-	-	-	-	-
Father's education	Not completed school	Completed school	Graduate	Post-graduate	-	37 (47.0)	41 (53.0)
n (%)	4 (10.0)	13 (35.0)	12 (33.0)	8 (22.0)	-	-	-
Father's occupation	Government service	Business (mainly farmers)	Private service	Labourer	Retired	36 (46.0)	42 (54.0)
n (%)	7 (19.0)	14 (39.0)	7 (19.0)	7 (19.0)	1 (3.0)	78 (100.0)	0 (0.0)
Mother's age (years)	35–50	51–60	-	-	-	-	-

n (%)	63 (81)	15 (19.0)	-	-	-	-	-
Mother's education	Not completed school	Completed school	Graduate	Post-graduate	-	37 (47.0)	41 (53.0)
n (%)	6 (16.0)	11 (30.0)	16 (43.0)	4 (11.0)	-	-	-
Mother's occupation	Government service	Business (mainly farmer)	Private service	Labourer	Home maker	37 (47.0)	41 (53.0)
n (%)	7 (19.0)	2 (6.0)	6 (16.0)	0 (0.0)	22 (59.0)	-	-
Parents staying together	Yes	Single father	Single mother	-	-	78 (100.0)	0 (0.0)
n (%)	74 (95.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (5.0)	-	-	-	-

Table 2. Perception of subjects about Marriage and Life partners about

(N = 78)

S. No.	Questionnaire Item	Number (%)		Chi-Square Test (x ²) (At df = 1)	p Value
		No	Yes		
1	I would prefer a love marriage only.	58 (74)	20 (26)	x ² = 18.5	p < 0.01**
2	My husband must be more educated/ more qualified than me.	33 (42)	45 (58)	x ² = 1.84	p, NS
3	My husband should earn more than me.	38 (49)	40 (51)	x ² = 0.21	p, NS
4	My husband should be older than me.	35 (45)	43 (55)	x ² = 0.82	p, NS
5	I care a lot for good looks and my husband should be smart and handsome.	43 (55)	35 (45)	x ² = 1.28	p, NS
6	I want a husband who has a salaried job.	32 (41)	46 (59)	x ² = 2.51	p, NS
7	I want to marry a man who will stay in a city only.	30 (39)	48 (61)	x ² = 4.15	p < 0.05*
8	I will not marry a man who has a transferable job.	24 (31)	54 (69)	x ² = 11.53	p < 0.01**
9	I will not marry a man who smokes or drinks.	20 (26)	58 (74)	x ² = 18.5	p < 0.01**
10	If a man smokes or drinks only socially, I will accept.	48 (61)	30 (39)	x ² = 4.15	p < 0.05*
11	I will only marry a man who believes in fitness and exercises regularly.	33 (42)	45 (58)	x ² = 0.82	p, NS

12	I will marry a man only if he accepts that I will continue my career after marriage.	5 (6)	73 (94)	$\chi^2 = 59.9$	$p < 0.001^{***}$
13	I will not marry a man who expects financial benefits from my parents.	0 (0)	78 (100)	-	-
14	I will marry a man only if he allows me to continue helping my parents after marriage.	6 (8)	72 (92)	$\chi^2 = 55.8$	$p < 0.001^{***}$
15	I will only marry a man who will accept to stay away from his parents.	66 (85)	12 (15)	$\chi^2 = 37.4$	$p < 0.001^{***}$
16	I will not marry a man who believes in religious rituals like puja.	25 (32)	53 (68)	$\chi^2 = 10.05$	$p < 0.01^{**}$
17	I will only marry a man who will accept all my male friends and colleagues after marriage.	7 (9)	71 (91)	$\chi^2 = 52.5$	$p < 0.001^{***}$

*, $p < 0.05$, **, $p < 0.01$, ***, $p < 0.001$, NS: p value not significant

Table 1 shows the demographic details of the participants. The father's as well as the mother's educational level and occupation can have a holistic bearing on the child's own academic achievement and career-related aspirations. The majority of the sample seemed to hail from a middle-class background with parents adequately educated as well as employed in good professions (government service, business and private sector with a slight minority working as labourers) slightly more so for fathers as compared to mothers.

What was also interesting to note was that engineering students who were clearly first-generation learners in terms of technical education (there were only 20 graduate and postgraduate mothers and fathers) knew their mother's age but not their father's age and both parents' educational level. This might also shed insight into the kind of relationship they shared with their mothers as compared to their fathers. A noteworthy mention is to be made with regard to these parents being empowered to break the shackles of orthodoxy and being able to educate their daughters.

Table 2 shows the perception of the participants about marriage and life partners. The findings showed that about 58 (74%) of the participants had exhibited a preference for arranged marriage ($p < 0.01$), which implied openness to suggestibility from parents with regard to their life-partner choices, which corroborates with other research where approval of parents was postulated to be an important factor in the case of mate selection.^{5,6} Among the participants, 73 (94%) expressed that they will not give up on their career and would like to pursue the same even after marriage highlighting how academic and professional autonomy in today's generation is highly endorsed ($p < 0.001$) which is similar to a previous study conducted by Sim.⁴ This again shows an inclination to prioritise their education.

Along similar lines, all 78 (100%) participants were very clear that they would not marry a man who expected financial benefits from their parents highlighting the need for financial independence. This was also seen in a study by Henry and Parthasarathy.⁶ Seventy-two (92%) of the girls also voiced that they would like to continue helping their parental family even after marriage ($p < 0.001$). This also draws a sharp contrast from traditional societal roles, which places men as possible candidates for parental responsibility and supports the claim that even women want to bear responsibilities of their family, thereby shattering the male purview of womanhood, which is confined to domesticity and lack of active role in financial matters. Another aspect that needs to be remembered while looking at these results is that these girls hail from a smaller society. Hence, 66 (85%) showed a preference to continue living in joint families after marriage ($p < 0.001$), thereby portraying their adherence to the Indian value systems. This corroborates with a study conducted by Henry and Parthasarathy.⁵

Among all participants, 53 (68%) did not want a partner who was extremely pious and inclined to religious rituals ($p < 0.01$). It was also observed that 48 (62%) of the participants wanted to be settled in one city ($p < 0.05$). This implies that girls prefer to have a sense of permanence and stability rather than volatility in terms of impermanence of settlement. This aligns with another follow-up question, where 54 (69%) girls did not want a husband with a transferable job ($p < 0.01$). This again highlights the need to stray away from a frequent change of residences as well as periods of separation.

We found that 45 (58%) girls showed a preference for partners who exhibited interest in maintaining one's physical fitness. It was also seen that 58 (74%) girls preferred a partner who didn't smoke, drink or indulge in the consumption of other substances ($p < 0.01$). This

depicts a preference for partners who exhibit healthy life choices. Within this too, 30 (38%) girls were found to be disapproving of even social drinking/ smoking habits ($p < 0.05$). The study showed that 71 (91%) girls wanted a partner who would show and express acceptance towards her previous social and personal life including affiliations with male friends even after marriage ($p < 0.001$).

While not a statistically significant observation, descriptively 45 (58%) girls preferred to have an educated or qualified husband. In terms of wanting to have a partner who earns more than them, 45 (58%) girls wanted it vs 35 (45%) who did not want which was not statistically significant. 43 (55%) girls preferred to have a partner who was older than them, indicative of a preference for qualities towards maturity. It was also seen that 43 (55%) participants were not inclined to have physical appearance as a criterion for prospective partners. Among the participants, 46 (59%) preferred to have a husband with a salaried job.

While it was a pilot study, the majority of the results were statistically significant. The study also shed light on how women hailing from relatively smaller cities or towns can be clear about their needs and priorities when charting out expectations with regard to their life partner. A need to break away from conventional traditions and incorporate a modern outlook to life and various aspects of life such as maintaining financial security towards the family after marriage ($\chi^2 = 55.84$, $p < 0.001$), not wanting her husband to expect financial aid from her family (100.0%), precedence to pursuing a career after marriage ($\chi^2 = 59.9$, $p < 0.001$), wanting to continue the social life she built post marriage too ($\chi^2 = 52.5$, $p < 0.001$), as well as an aversion to over-reliance on religious practices, was observed ($\chi^2 = 10.05$, $p < 0.01$). These results align with the results of a previous study by Sim.⁴

Paradoxically, some results were still found to be ingrained in the traditional Indian weaving of values, thoughts, and morals such as a preference for a traditional joint family system, being comfortable with arranged marriages, and the active role of parents in life-partner selection. On the other hand, while independence as a value was highlighted, these women showed an inclination, where they would want their husbands to be accepting, towards their want of fending for their families. Hence, from an Indian cultural context, family relations are postulated to be governing bodies for all the other relationships that are built and followed.

Delimitations

A few delimitations of the study are as follows:

1. Since this was a pilot study, the sample was small.
2. It included students from a single class and college.

Recommendations

The current sample was from a semi-rural background, hence incorporating an urban sample and drawing comparisons between the same can bring out interesting findings.

Conclusion

1. Majority of the participants preferred arranged marriage and wanted a partner who would be staying and working in cities. They also wanted stability with non-transferable jobs.
2. The girls wanted their partners to have a healthy lifestyle. The majority wanted partners who believed in working for physical fitness and also did not like smoking and drinking even on social occasions. This was a positive finding as nowadays smoking has increased in girls also.
3. Looks were not important to the majority in this group which is a welcome finding as this shows that they are not affected by media pressure.
4. They were quite emancipated and did not want a partner who would not allow them to continue their career after marriage or not have communication with their previous peer group of boys.
5. They were open to staying with their in-laws but wanted freedom to be able to continue helping their parents financially even after marriage.
6. All, i.e. 100% of the participants, did not want a partner that would expect financial benefits from parents. This is also a welcome finding as these educated girls will be able to resist the pressure of dowry on parents which is legally banned in our country.
7. The girls were not keen on partners who believed in religious rituals though they were coming from traditional families – which is consistent with the mindset of many youth today.

Thus, these young women, coming from smaller cities, reflect a deep understanding of their needs, requirements and expectations from their prospective groom. There is a very good mixture of traditional values and the impact of modern education on their empowerment. Moving forward, this is what can be encouraged and explored further.

Acknowledgements

The researchers thank the college administration for granting permission for this study and all the participants for actively participating in this study. They also thank Dr Surekha Joshi for her critical review of the final manuscript.

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: None

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