

EXPLORING SENTIMENTS ACROSS AGE CATEGORIES ON SINGLEHOOD AND CHANGING IDENTITY NORMS IN A MARRIAGE-CENTRIC INDIA

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Abstract

This research explores the sentiments, attitudes, and perceptions of millennials in India toward the concept of being single and empowered. Despite India's traditionally marriage-centric culture, increasing numbers of individuals are choosing to remain single, a trend that aligns with global shifts. Examining singlehood as an identity offers new insights into attitudes, behaviors, and social interactions of single individuals.

The study employs sentiment analysis to examine social media data, surveys, and interviews, providing insights into the evolving dynamics of relationships and individual empowerment among this demographic. The findings of this research have implications for societal norms, marketing strategies, and policy formulations concerning the well-being and aspirations of the millennial population.

Keywords: millennials, singlehood, empowerment, sentiment analysis, societal norms, cultural influences, India.

INTRODUCTION

In India, marriage has long been considered a compulsory societal norm, particularly for women, who face significant pressure to marry by a certain age. However, the millennial generation is witnessing a significant shift in societal norms, with an increasing number of individuals embracing singlehood as a lifestyle choice.

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO) "Youth in India Report 2022," 23% of young people are not interested in marriage, compared to 17.2% in previous years. Early marriages in India have declined significantly, with only 1.7% of adolescent women marrying by the age of 15 during 2019-21, compared to 11.9% in 2005-06. Additionally, the proportion of women aged 25-29 who married before turning 20 has declined from 72.4% in 2005-06 to 52.8% in 2019-21. Notably, 8% of millennials in the study expressed a desire for children without an interest in marriage, showing minimal gender differences in these trends.

Millennials in India are prioritizing careers and personal goals over marriage, valuing financial stability and professional success before considering marriage. Many view marriage as an option rather than a necessity, influenced by changing societal norms and exposure to Western culture. Increased independence, particularly among women, has empowered many to delay or forgo marriage in favor of personal ambitions. Additionally, experiences of unhappy marriages in their families have made some millennials skeptical of marriage as an institution.

The prevalence of dating apps and online platforms has expanded millennials' dating options, making marriage seem less necessary. Socioeconomic factors, such as rising living costs, have also made starting a family or committing to marriage financially challenging. Concerns about maintaining individual identity and freedom within marriage have led some to remain single or cohabit without formalizing relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriage remains an entrenched societal expectation in India, often seen as a rite of passage for achieving adult status (Das, 2019). However, singlehood as an identity has gained recognition in global literature. Klinenberg (2012) documents the rise of single living due to urbanization and changing attitudes towards intimacy and autonomy. Kislev (2019) highlights singlehood as an avenue for personal fulfillment, challenging the traditional view of marriage as central to identity.

Studies have shown that economic independence, career ambitions, and personal experiences influence marital attitudes. Christensen (2014) found that parental conflict significantly impacts young adults' marital attitudes, with high parental conflict correlating with skepticism about marriage. Celik (2018) found that professional women remained unmarried due to the inability to find a suitable partner, a preference for equality in marriage, and the desire for a financially secure spouse. (Simon et al., 2020.) in the paper on a study to explore the reasons for stay with or away from elderly parents stated that youth now prefer to stay away from parents for want of independency.

This image is a **word cloud** generated from NVivo, summarizing responses to the question about **why youth are not interested in marriage**. The larger words appear more frequently in the responses, indicating key themes.

1. Most Prominent Words (Frequent Themes):

- **Personal** – Suggests that personal reasons play a significant role in the decision to avoid marriage.
- **Positive** – Implies that not wanting marriage might not always be seen as negative, but rather a personal or intentional choice.
- **Family** – Indicates that family-related factors, possibly expectations or experiences, influence this decision.
- **Traveling** – Suggests that freedom to explore and travel might be a priority over marriage.
- **Independence** – Strongly supports the idea that youth value autonomy and self-sufficiency over marriage.
- **Relationships** – Indicates that young people might prioritize relationships outside of traditional marriage.
- **Marriage** – Naturally appears as a focal point in responses.
- **Financial** – Suggests economic concerns may deter youth from marriage.

2. Additional Themes Noted:

- **Cause** – Youth might see specific causes or systemic issues behind their reluctance to marry.
- **Trust, Stability, Understanding** – These could relate to concerns about the long-term viability of marriage.
- **Parents, Societal, Beliefs** – Social and familial influences play a role in shaping attitudes.
- **Development, Content, Prepared** – Could reflect personal growth, readiness, or satisfaction without marriage.
- **Dominate, Issues, Challenges** – These words hint at perceived difficulties in marriage.

3. Interpretation:

Independence, personal growth, financial concerns, and freedom (e.g., traveling) appear to be key reasons why youth are not interested in marriage. Social and familial expectations, trust issues, and personal priorities also play significant roles. Marriage is not necessarily viewed negatively, but rather as an option that does not align with certain lifestyles or aspirations.

Despite the rise of singlehood, marriage remains a dominant expectation in Indian society. While some millennials view singlehood as a form of resistance against traditional norms, others experience social pressure and judgment for remaining unmarried (Chaudhary, 2020). Kislev (2019) asserts that singlehood fosters autonomy and self-reliance, aligning with findings from this study where respondents emphasized career ambitions and personal freedom as primary reasons for delaying or avoiding marriage. Economic considerations also play a critical role. Many millennials prioritize financial stability over marriage, especially given the high costs of weddings and living expenses. Additionally, the increasing use of dating apps has redefined relationships, offering alternative romantic structures beyond marriage.

Perspectives on Marriage



This word cloud from NVivo summarizes the perspectives of youth on marriage. The larger words represent the most frequently mentioned themes in the responses.

<https://www.gapinterdisciplinaries.org/>

Key Observations:

1. **Most Prominent Words (Frequent Themes):**

- **Changes** – Indicates that youth perceive marriage as something that brings significant life changes.
- **Relationships** – Highlights that marriage is closely tied to relationship dynamics.
- **Personal** – Suggests that personal views and individual circumstances shape perspectives on marriage.
- **Family** – Indicates that family plays a major role in shaping attitudes toward marriage.
- **Marriage** – Expectedly appears as a core topic in the discussion.
- **Positive** – Suggests that many youth have optimistic views about marriage.
- **Events** – Could refer to life events or societal changes that influence their perspectives.
- **Cause** – Suggests that youth recognize various factors influencing their stance on marriage.
- **Financial** – Indicates that economic concerns are a factor in how marriage is perceived.

2. **Additional Themes Noted:**

- **Stability, Understanding, Dependency** – Show concerns or expectations regarding the impact of marriage on stability and independence.
- **Parents, Societal, Beliefs** – Suggest that cultural and parental influences shape opinions on marriage.
- **Mental, Content, Prepared** – May indicate that youth consider mental readiness and emotional fulfillment important before committing to marriage.
- **Considering, Experiences, Perspective** – Suggest that youth reflect on their own experiences and perspectives when thinking about marriage.
- **Avoid, Hesitation, Burdensome** – Some youth may have concerns or doubts about marriage.
- **Support, Decision, Achieve** – These words indicate that marriage is viewed as a decision influenced by personal goals and life aspirations.

Interpretation:

- Marriage is seen as a life-changing event influenced by personal, family, and societal factors.
- While some youth view it positively, others express hesitation, often due to financial concerns, independence, and personal readiness.
- Family expectations, relationship dynamics, and personal experiences play a major role in shaping perspectives.
- There is a mix of optimism and caution, with an emphasis on stability, understanding, and mental preparedness.

Discussion

Reinforcement of Cultural Norms

Despite rising singlehood, marriage remains an entrenched social expectation in India. The pressure to conform can affect singles' mental health, with some expressing feelings of isolation or inadequacy (Chaudhary, 2020). Yet, as Bose (2019) observes, many singles find strength in their choice, viewing singlehood as a form of resistance against restrictive norms.

Singlehood as a Form of Social and Personal Identity

Considering singlehood as an identity has significant implications for how individuals navigate social and personal relationships. Kislev (2019) argues that single individuals often develop a unique sense of self, which is marked by autonomy and self-reliance. This aligns with the experiences shared by many interviewees, who describe singlehood as empowering, allowing them to prioritize personal growth and career ambitions.

Qualitative Insights

Interviews reveal that single individuals, especially women, often experience social pressure to marry but view singlehood as a deliberate choice reflecting personal values and priorities. This decision, however, frequently results in social challenges, such as judgment from family and limited support networks (Bose, 2019) the high cost of weddings and associated expenses in Indian culture is discouraging some millennials from getting married, as they prefer to invest their resources in other areas such as travel or education."

CONCLUSION

The rise of singlehood in India reflects evolving societal attitudes toward marriage and relationships. This research highlights how millennials perceive singlehood as a conscious, empowering choice rather than an imposed status. The findings suggest that economic factors, career aspirations, and shifting cultural influences are reshaping traditional expectations.

However, the deep-rooted cultural emphasis on marriage continues to exert pressure on individuals, particularly women. Future research should explore the long-term implications of these shifts, including how they impact family structures, social support systems, and economic policies in India.

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