



How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society

Originally Published: Pew Research Center

India is a complex country. It was one of the first countries to elect a woman as its prime minister. Today most Indians place women as equally abled and good candidates in the political sphere, but the same attitude is reversed in the domestic sphere, with the majority having the opinion that women should obey their husbands. The research paper intends to decipher this complexity by exploring gender norms in families and societies.

Key Highlights:

- Even when a slim majority of 54% says that both men and women are responsible for earning for the family, there are clear indications of prominence of men in the economic sphere in the survey findings. As majority opined those men should be given job preference when jobs were in short supply.
- Even when the majority of Indians surveyed favoured having sons and daughters. Sons were given preference in taking care of ageing parents and performing their last rites.
- The son-preference results in the prevalence of sex-selective abortions. A substantial majority of 40% considers the process acceptable. 55% of adults want abortion to be declared completely illegal.
- As for the family structure, 99% of Indians wants a balanced family with at least one son and daughter. A deviation to this was found in the states of West Bengal and Telangana, with a preference level of 93% and 90% given respectively for a male child.
- It was found that women face more discrimination (23%) than religious minorities.
- About three-quarters of the adults perceive violence against women as the biggest issue in the country. Police cases registered doubled between 2010 and 2019 and a similar increase in rape and murder of women. There has been a downward trend in employers' confidence to find the right candidate for the job from the past three years. It has fallen from 95% in 2020 to 91% in 2022
- When surveyed on the best way to improve women's safety, 51% of the population favoured teaching the boys to respect women as the best option, while 26% insisted on teaching the girls to behave. It was also found that Indians who considered religion as an integral part of their lives opted for teaching the boys to respect all the women option.
- The survey found that Indians fit with the global median of 70% that claims for equal rights for men and women. However, India was behind North America (92%), South America (82%) and Europe (90%).
- At the same time, Indians were found to be more conservative than any other population, when it comes to gender dynamics in the family and in the economy
- Male job preference plus the conservative attitude against gender was cited as the reasons why India had one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world (21% vs. 53% global median).
- Indians with a college degree were less likely to support conservative gender views than those without a degree. However, even a majority of the educated population supported the view that wives should always obey their husbands.
- There were disparities within religious groups also. While 74% of Muslims were seen supporting traditional gender roles, only 13% of Punjab Hindus and Sikhs supported the conservative views.
- Though a slight majority, Indian men (51%) were more conservative than women. On further analysis, the older populations were more conservative than their younger counterparts. A point to be noted is that it is the older women population who are more conservative than the younger.

- Starting from the early 2000s, there is a shift in attitudes on gender towards more of an egalitarian view. The shift was evident through analysis of three consecutive National Family Health Survey (NHFS) conducted between 1998 and 2006.
- The survey found that of S-I population favoured men taking economic decisions and perceived women as primary care-takers, compared to the northern belt. The alignment to traditional gender norms was more prevalent in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- Despite the regional and religious disparities, the majority of Indians (81%) shared an egalitarian vision of society.
- Nearly, two-thirds of Indians (64%) express complete agreement with the idea that women are always obligated to obey their husbands. This differs region-wise, with the northern belt state population more in alignment to the viewpoint than the southern states.
- The viewpoint that wives must obey their husbands, is prevalent in Other Backward Classes (OBC), rural areas and amongst sections of the population who are illiterate or do not have a college degree.
- Most Indians say that both women and men should be responsible for earning money (54%), caring for children and making family decisions (73%).

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