

A Study on the Marital Expectations of Female College students in Chennai City

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ABSTRACT

This study was done to find out the level of marital expectations prevalent among the unmarried young women from a college in Chennai. Marital expectation is the expectation an individual has regarding all aspects that are related to marriage and the life in marriage. Estimating the level of marital expectations among unmarried young women was the main aim of this study. Data was collected through convenience sampling from 1000 female students ranging from 17 to 30 years of age. Marital Expectation Scale (MES) was the scale used to measure the variable. SPSS 19 was used to analyse the collected data.

Keywords: *Marital Expectations, Unmarried, Female, College Students*

Introduction

Marriage is a social frame or convention in which two people, out of their own free will, enter into a pact that is permitted by the law and adhere either to a religion or a custom (Nugent, 2013). According to this definition, marriage is a social procedure that marks the two individuals involved as "couple" officially, following a set of norms of a particular religion or a custom in their society. However, the types and traditions in marriages widely vary in accordance with the different regions, the cultures that prevail there and the beliefs that people follow.

Marriage proffers a close affinity, dedication, solidarity and a strong liking towards each other while meeting the sexual requirements, giving each other the space and chances for emotional growth, increased sources of identity and self-esteem (Gardiner et al., 1998; Myers, 2000). According to this definition, marriage is a bond benefitting both the individuals involved, in physical, emotional and also societal ways. It is seen as a bond that enhances both the personal and social lives of the individuals.

Unified Lawyers, a law firm in Australia, published an infographic that shows that the global divorce rates are constantly rising (Divorce Rate by Country, 2017). The research conducted by them shows that the reducing number of marriages is not restricted to one country but is trending over globally. The main reasons for reduced number of marriages could be because of cohabitation, individuals wanting to be settled down financially before entering into an important commitment.

According to the research conducted by Unified Lawyers, since 1960, the global divorce rate has been increased by 251.8%. India has the lowest divorce rate (1%) when compared to the other countries on the list. However, it does not prove that all couples in intact marriages are being happy and content. When reasons for divorce were looked upon, incompatibility is the highest contributor with 44%.

Gender equality also plays a major role (Pascale & Primavera, 2015). With women gaining more financial stability, they have more control over their life. They wait until they are financially secure to get married and they have the power to free themselves from a marriage if they are not satisfied. As the gender roles are more relaxed, the inter-dependency has gone down giving them the option of functioning just as well even out of marriage. A financially stable woman is highly likely to put an end to a bad marriage, and more than men, women are more likely to initiate a divorce (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Crane, Soderquist & Gardner, 1995). Nowadays, women easily earn the same as men or sometimes even more than men and so they need not depend on their husbands for financial needs. So, unlike the olden days where women stayed in bad marriages due to their lack of power economically, women these days quit their marriage. The passage of liberal laws like the 'No-fault' resulted in a great increase in divorce (Nakonenzky, Shull, & Rodgers, 1995). The No-fault law lets a person file for divorce without having to prove fault on their spouse. The person filing for divorce simply has to give reasons that their government considers rightful for a divorce. Individualistic cultures have greater number of divorces when compared to communal cultures (Triandis, 1994). Adults with parents who were divorced are more likely to go through divorce themselves than those whose parents stayed together (Shulman, Scharf, Lumer, & Maurer, 2001). When adults have parents who are divorced, they don't really see the stigma around divorce even if they live in communal

society. They see that divorcees can live just as well or even more, they can see divorce as an easier solution. Sharp observational learning of children plays a vital role in this aspect.

The expectations towards marriage have greatly changed nowadays. In previous years, the individuals expected only the most basic needs like food, clothing, shelter and safety from their spouses. But nowadays, individuals expect emotional support and personal growth from their spouses (Finkel, Hui, & Lumer, 2014). The self-expressive marriages add up expectations to the already existing ones. People expect their spouses not just to fulfill the duties that are common to both individuals but to support them emotionally, boost their self-esteem, self-assurance and to help in their personal growth. Marital expectations are beliefs about marriage, family roles and relationships that govern behaviour of oneself and the others and were acquired through the process of socialization. (Huston & Geis, 1993). According to this definition, marital expectations are pre-existing beliefs people have about their marriage, their relationship with their spouse and the family, the roles they have to play, the roles of their spouse and the spouse's family which are obtained through social interactions. These expectations will influence the behaviour of the individuals holding them and also that of the others involved eventually.

There are only a handful of studies done on marital expectations and even those studies are majorly non-Indian and are often to study the relationship between marital expectations and other characteristics like marital satisfaction or marital attitudes.

The following study exclusively focuses on the marital expectations of single young women and to see if their expectations are realistic or unrealistic.

Objective:

To estimate the level of marital expectations prevalent among young women from a college in Chennai city.

Research Design:

Survey research method was used. A questionnaire was given through which information was collected in a short period of time. It is ex post facto in nature.

Sampling

Data was collected through convenience sampling method from female individuals between the age group of 17-30 years studying in a college in Chennai. 1000 samples were collected totally and 899 samples were analyzed after excluding the 101 incomplete questionnaires.

Tools Used

Marital Expectation Scale (MES) by Dovina & Karunanidhi (2017)

Description of the Scale:

This questionnaire consists of 50 closed end statements regarding various aspects of expectations an individual has about marriage. This includes expectations about the relationship on the whole and the individual's role, financial decisions, day to day chores, childcare, their sexual life and also their relationship with other family members.

Reliability:

The scale has an inter item reliability of 0.89 which was established using Cronbach alpha. The test – retest reliability coefficient was 0.74.

Validity:

Content validity was established.

Scoring:

The MES scale has a 5 – point Likert scale that ranges from 1 to 5 with one being "never" and 5 being "always". As score goes higher, expectations are also interpreted to be high.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 indicating the level of marital expectations among young female college students

Marital Expectations	No. of individuals	Percentage
High	89	9.89
Medium	667	74.19
Low	143	15.90

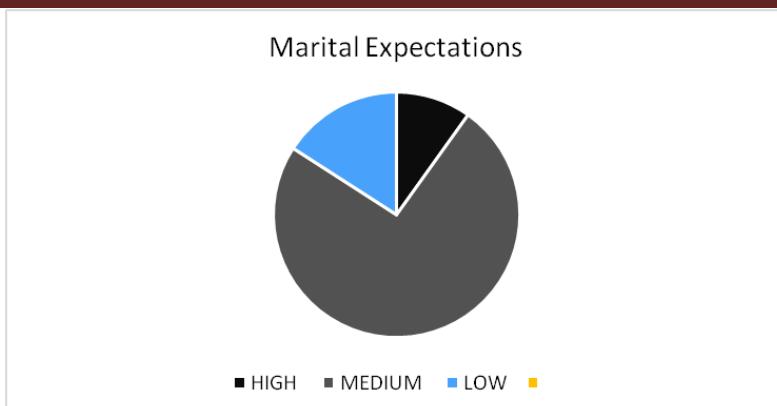


Figure 1 indicating the level of marital expectations among young female college students

In the present study, it was found that 74.19% of the population have medium level expectations, 15.90% have low level expectations and 9.89% have high level expectations based on the norms formulated by Dovina and Karunanidhi (2017). Marital expectations as measured in this study focuses on the expectations one has of their partner and also expectations which focuses on areas like, the relationship with one's own and partner's family, expectations about making financial decisions, emotional support, independence, habits and also about small day to day routines like decisions about daily household chores. As discussed in the introduction, the primary expectations evolved around basic needs that were to be met, but as years pass by, the expectations are morphed according to the changes in the circumstances. Individuals nowadays give great importance to emotional components in a marriage (Finkel, Hui, & Larson, 2014). The results of the present study could have been contributed by factors like the individual's socio-economic background, their social circle, priorities or goals, experiences that can shape their view about marriage and relationships, culture and so on.

Individuals coming from a low economic background have what could be referred to as a narrow lifestyle or narrow life choices. Their expectations are most often what may seem to be very practical or on par with their economic background which may result in less or weak expectations. But someone from a high economic background might have wider options to choose from and so may strongly expect certain things when compared to the individuals from the other end of the economic ladder. The sample of the present study had the greatest number of participants from the low or middle economic background rather than the high economic background. This is substantiated by the study done by Arocho and Kamp Dush (2018) which states that marital expectations can be curbed by poor socioeconomic background.

The past experiences of any individual will have a great impact on their life in almost every aspect. Someone who grew up in a family that had many successful marriages may have a really optimistic view about marriage and may have high expectations too. But for someone whose parent or someone close to them was in an abusive marriage, or went through a bad divorce might have a really pessimistic or nihilistic approach to marriage. They might become very narrow minded about the idea of marriage resulting in very low expectations of marriage. Earlier in the introduction, we saw that adults with divorced parents are more likely to go through divorce themselves (Shulman, Scharf, Lumer, & Maurer, 2001). This could be because of the experiences they had as a child which may have influenced their view on marriage leading to reduced expectations. In the current study it was not possible to associate the data with regard to the marital status of the parents as the number was not comparable. The findings of the present study indicated that majority of the individuals who had medium level expectations were single. However, this is in contrast to the study done by Sabatelli & Pearce (1986) which states that females who never married have higher marital expectations.

The peer group that individuals are in might also have an influence over the individual's expectations. Just like how it is considered that peer group has a lot of influence on the thinking and beliefs of the individuals, it is also true that the peer group does influence individuals in setting their priorities and in setting expectations. As mentioned earlier, a majority of the sample belong to a mediocre socio-economic status and those who study in the aided section of the college which receives aid from the government for their education. It could be that this group of students may be focused on their education at the current stage of their life and marriage may not really be in the focus of their attention. Also, the current generation of young women are in contrast to the yester generation, in the sense, they are very keen on getting educated and establishing themselves in their career. They may think about marriage, but they work

towards equipping themselves to take care of their needs as well as taking care of their parents' rather than depending on the man of their life to fend for them. In a study done by Rios (2010) among the newlyweds (married for 3 to 12 months), it was found that family-of-origin has a significant influence on expectations. The findings of the present study could also be explained in terms of how the situation that they come from and the difficulties with which their parents strive towards educating them act as an inspiration to these individuals. It could also be attributed to the fact that these individuals who are being educated in a reputed college which offers them holistic education are not naïve and dependent rather they have a clear awareness of who they are and what they need to be, thereby, focusing not on what they can get from their life partner and from marriage, rather on what they can offer to the marriage and how well they can equip themselves for it.

There could be a lot of other factors in play in influencing the marital expectations like the cultural background, their needs, etc. It is to be noted that not just one factor, but many factors together influence the marital expectations of the individual. As this study was done solely on a female population and hence the gender differences could not be studied.

This study is an empirical evidence and an eye opener against the opinion that the current generation is confused about marriage, has too many unachievable expectations about marriage and hence are unsatisfied leading to many dysfunctional marriages.

Conclusion

The current research indicates that majority of the sample have medium level marital expectations. It was also found that people with high marital expectations were lesser in number than those with low marital expectations.

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