

# How women marry in India

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Indian women may be shedding their clichéd demure image, but when it comes to matters of choosing life partners, they still opt for the traditional, conventional ways.

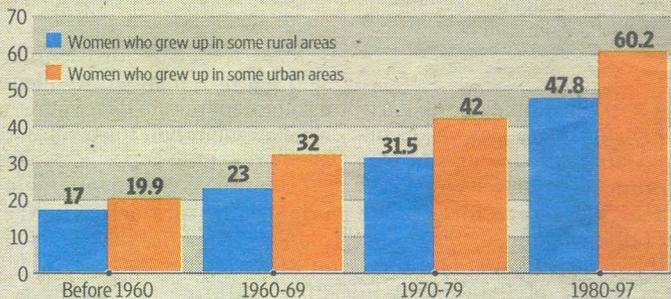
According to the India Human Development Survey (IHDS), 2011-12, a significant share of women in the country continue to get married without even the most basic forms of communication with their to-be spouses before their wedding day.

Consider this: only half of the women in the age group of 15-32 years, who were married as of 2011-12, had interacted with their spouses in person or over the phone or email, or had even seen a picture, reveals the survey.

The numbers were even worse in the case of women of the older generation. In some categories, only about one in six women had some form of interaction with their to-be spouses before wedding.

Expectedly, a higher share of urban women has interacted with their to-be husbands.

**CHART 1 INTERACTION BEFORE MARRIAGE**



Years along X-axis denote the year of birth; figures indicate % of women married as of 2011-12 who had any form of communication with their husbands before marriage.

Source: Desai, Sonalde, Reeve Vanneman and NCAER, New Delhi. India Human Development Survey-II (IHDS-II), 2011-12 and Mint calculations

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In rural India, less than half of the married women had any form of communication with their partners. (See *Chart 1*)

According to Ravinder Kaur, professor of sociology at Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, this may be because the idea of dating before marriage is still not accepted, especially in smaller towns and the rural areas, and arranged marriage continues to be more prevalent.

“Often it may be that people are hesitant to admit that the couple had a love marriage and so they instead answer that they had no communication prior to

the wedding. It becomes a question of the family’s honour...but now things are changing, especially when marriage is between two communities of the same class and stature,” said Kaur.

As can be seen in *Chart 1*, a higher share of the younger generation is now breaking this trend.

## Higher age of marriage

That there is more communication before marriage now could be also owing to women now getting married at an older age. As per United Nations statistics, the mean age of marriage in India as of 2011 was approximately 21 years. This is higher than the mean age of 19.3 years

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in 1991. IHDS data shows that while an increasing proportion of women are now delaying marriage, the mean age of marriage for women in the country continues to remain low.

As of 2011-12, almost 41% of the married women in the age group of 15-32 years, i.e. the generation born after 1980, were married between 16 and 18 years of age. More than 24% of women in this age group were married between 19 and 21 years of age, and only 11.5% were married between 22 and 25 years. (See Chart 2)

A research paper by UNICEF in 2011, titled *Delaying Marriage for Girls in India: A Formative Research to Design Interventions for Changing Norms*, conducted in Rajasthan, revealed fathers play a critical role in altering child marriage practices.

The survey also revealed that poverty was the biggest reason among fathers to push for early marriage of girls. Other reasons included social pressure/chastity, sibling marriage and school dropout, or the lack of inclination towards education.

## Changing attitudes

The good news is that there is a visible change in the attitude towards daughters in the society. According to the 2011-12 survey, 44.75% of women in urban areas, who have been married at least once, were open to receiving financial support from their daughters in old age, up from 32.87% in 2004-05.

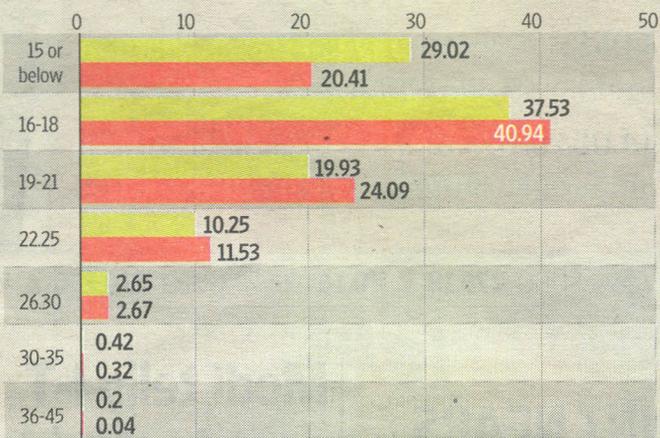
More women were also willing to live with their daughters in old age, a contradiction to the age-old tradition in India that parents should only live with their sons and not with their married daughters. The percentage of women willing to live with their daughters at later stages in life showed a 10 percentage-point increase between 2004-05 and 2011-12. Rural India proved to be slightly more conservative in this regard, although similar change in attitude was visible in rural areas as well. (See Chart 3)

Reassuringly, the younger generation of married women

## CHART 2

### AGE AT THE TIME OF MARRIAGE

■ for women born before 1970 ■ for women born between 1970-1997

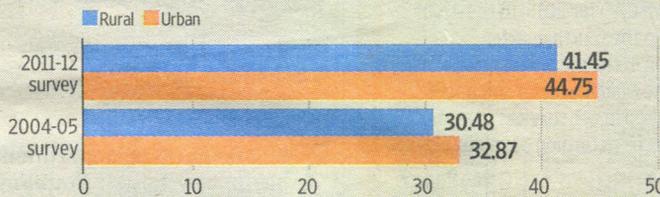


Figures indicate % of ever-married women, who were married in the specified age bracket.

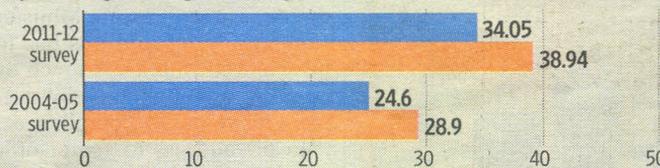
## CHART 3

### INCREASING WILLINGNESS TO RELY ON DAUGHTERS IN OLD AGE

Open to receiving financial support from daughter in old age



Open to living with daughter in old age

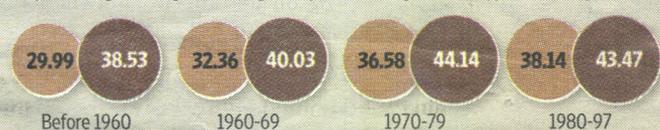


Figures indicate % of affirmative responses by ever-married women if they would rely on daughters in old age.

## CHART 4

### HOW ATTITUDES TOWARDS DAUGHTERS ARE CHANGING

■ Open to living with daughter in old age ■ Open to receiving financial support from daughter



Figures indicate % of affirmative responses of married women being asked if they would rely on daughters in old age.

Source: Desai, Sonalde, Reeve Vanneman and NCAER, New Delhi. India Human Development Survey-II (IHDS-II), 2011-12 and Mint calculations

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were more open to relying on their daughters in their old age. As per Kaur, one reason for this could be that more women are now educated and are earning.

"But of course it won't be uniform across regions. Maharash-

tra and other southern states would have more such women, while in states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, such a trend may not be as visible," said Kaur. (See Chart 4)

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