

Demographic study suggests trouble for college-educated Indian women seeking eligible partners

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Marriage is an almost universal institution for men and women in India today. But by 2050, women could find it more difficult to find an eligible partner, particularly if they have been educated at university or college level, according to new research published in the journal, *Demography*.

A significant proportion of men in India currently marry women less educated than themselves. The research theorises that if public attitudes do not change, whereby university-educated or college-educated men are more desirable [spouses](#) than women similarly educated, by 2050 there will be a 'mis-match' in numbers of 'suitable' men and women. Using this premise, researchers' model suggests the proportion of never-married women aged 45-49 will go up from 0.07% in 2010 to nearly 9% by 2050, with the most significant increase experienced by university-educated women. There would also be a rise in the percentage of unmarried men, particularly amongst those with little education.

Lead author Ridhi Kashyap said: 'This research is suggesting that in India, families might need to revise their views on the "suitability" of potential [marriage](#) partners. The fact that the number of women with higher education is growing is a success story for India.'

The study involved researchers from the University of Oxford; the Center for Demographic Studies, Barcelona; and Minnesota Population

Center, USA. They harmonised existing data on current marriage patterns by age and education and applied these to population projections on the likely age, sex and educational attainment of the population in India by 2050 to develop scenarios for future marriage patterns.

There is huge social pressure in India for men and women to get married. The researchers analysed data from the National Family Health Survey for India (2005-06) and the India Socio-Economic Survey (1999, 2004) that show less than one per cent (0.6%) of all women and 1.2% of all men remain unmarried by the age of 50. More than half (54.4%) of the marriages in which the groom went to university involved brides schooled to primary or secondary level. Just over one quarter (26.6%) of women who had completed university 'married down', choosing less educated spouses, with most female graduates (73.4%) having husbands of a similar educational background. The (mean) average age for getting married the first time was just under 25 for men and just under 20 for women, with men around four years older, on average, than their wives, according to the data.

Existing population projection data (from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis and Vienna Institute of Demography) shows that by 2050 there will be around 92 men for every 100 women aged 25-29 with a university education, as compared with 151 men for every 100 women from the same age group educated at university in 2010. The paper suggests that if projected marriage patterns were solely focused on the age-sex structure of the future population in India, men rather than women would have a problem finding suitable marriage partners by 2050. However, once education is factored in, the pool of suitable marriage partners for women shrinks — if current eligibility criteria apply to future populations. For men, the percentage unmarried at the age of 50 also rises from 1.4% in 2010 to 5% by the age of 50, with the least educated likely to have the most trouble finding a wife.

Previous academic literature has suggested that men in India could be short of potential wives mid-century due to the skewed sex ratios at birth in India's population. This is the first time that academic research has also taken into account the effect of education, as well as expected changes in the age-sex structure for future marriage patterns in India.

Ms Kashyap said: 'In contrast to the East and Southeast Asian experience where non-marriage has become much more common, marriage in India remains universal. Traditional roles and expectations for [women](#) and men in India persist despite the significant social and demographic changes witnessed in recent years. This research shows that the rigid social structure still experienced in India will need to adapt.'

Provided by Oxford University

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