

# Assessment of Marital and Family Expectations of a Group of Urban Single Young Adults

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The lack of baseline understanding of what young adults' needs and expectations are from marital and family life is the context in which this study has evolved. The author believes that the findings from this study could feed into the contents of a more relevant and useful Family Life Education program for young adults in urban India. **Aims:** To explore and analyze the needs and expectations of single young adults with respect to marital and family life. **Materials and Methods:** A college in Bangalore with students from graduate and post-graduate courses in the age group of 18 to 25 years. A semi-structure interview schedule prepared by the author was administered on 100 students. Qualitative and Quantitative. **Results and Conclusion:** The results showed that a large number of the participants had very specific emotional, cognitive and physiological expectations from marital and family life. They also expressed an active need for education on mate selection, sexuality, parenting, interpersonal relationships, intimacy, conflict resolution, among other areas of need. The findings from this study would find great relevance in the preparation of a relevant and practical Family Life Education program for single young adults which in turn would be useful in colleges, workplaces, family counseling centers or any platform where single young adults wish to access such family base services.

**Key words:** Family life education, marital and family life, marital expectations

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the modernization and mobilization in recent decades, millions of Indian families, both rural and urban, have remained undeniably close and resilient. Family has always been the foundation of Indian society and contemporary Indian people continue to take pride in the centrality of marriage and family life.

However, subtle changes in family patterns especially with regard to the use of authority within the family as well as an increased focus on individual autonomy<sup>[1,2]</sup> are also likely to influence members' expectations of marriage and their choice of marriage partner. Educated middle class families are now more hesitant to make decisions for their offspring with regard to marriage,

education and employment.<sup>[2]</sup> Changes have also been noticed with regard to a greater focus on the husband-wife relationship rather than the parent-child relationship. With an increased onus of responsibility falling on the individual rather than on the entire family, young Indian adults today face what Dr. Gore calls "choice anxiety"- increased autonomy and increased choice that have led to increased anxiety [Table 1].<sup>[2]</sup>

Some researchers assert that an increase in single parent families has contributed to a greater percentage of children and adolescents experiencing serious difficulties. In total, increased role strain, marital difficulties, parent child conflicts, feelings of guilt and status confusion are commonly observed among working women, even though there are some economic and self-esteem-related advantages. Since more women

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**Table 1: Expectation from marriage**

Statement	Male (N=54)				Female (N=46)			
	A	S	R	N	A	S	R	N
13 I expect that we are allowed to spend time with our parental family and our friends in our marriage	46	8	0	0	35	8	3	0
14 I expect household work to be shared between us	31	18	2	3	27	14	2	3
15 I expect that we help each other in the care and upbringing of our children	52	2	0	0	43	2	2	0
16 I expect that my spouse should handle the financial responsibilities	7	30	13	4	16	22	5	3
18 I expect my spouse to compromise more than I do in our marriage	14	15	3	23	7	13	11	15
19 I expect that we will be honest and not cheat each other in our marriage	52	0	0	2	41	0	3	2
21 I would like to have an emotional relationship before marriage with the person I am to marry	22	22	3	7	10	18	7	11
22 I would like to have an emotional and physical relationship before marriage with the person I am to marry	7	23	4	20	3	7	5	31
23 I would like to have a purely physical relationship before marriage with the person I am to marry	0	13	13	28	8	5	2	31
24 Sexual satisfaction in marriage is a small part of marital life	15	13	4	22	19	14	3	10
25 Sexual satisfaction in marriage is the most important part of marital life	18	16	8	12	16	10	2	18
28 I am not willing to marry a person who does not wish me to pursue my career plans	37	5	5	7	27	2	7	10
29 I believe that it is a woman's responsibility to take care of all household chores	4	18	10	22	16	18	2	10
30 A woman must not expect her husband to help out with any kind of household activities	29	16	3	6	5	5	7	29
31 A man's role is to provide financially and materially for the household	18	20	12	4	14	13	3	16
32 A working woman must still continue to balance her work and family life	29	16	3	6	35	7	2	2
33 A working man must focus on providing for household need and leave the chores to the woman	11	15	8	20	11	3	10	22

A= Always Agree, S= Sometimes Agree, R= Rarely Agree, N= Never Agree

in India are joining the labor force without proper support and assistance often in the face of extended family and community opposition, an increase in family difficulties is to be expected.<sup>[3-6]</sup>

In all, the notion that individuals, couples, and families need ongoing support and useful information about family life appears to be in the early stages of acceptance in professional circles. With the kind of changes that Indian families are experiencing, it is very essential that mental health professionals address the psychosocial fallouts of these changes on marital and family life among the younger generation. There is therefore a tremendous need for education of youth with regard to the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required for successful family living. Having a better understanding of themselves and others as well as a clearer concept of their own roles as husbands and wives, parents and responsible members of the society, will help young people today develop their own codes of behavior and of ethics instead of blindly submitting to the codes of behavior currently being promoted as trendy and fashionable.

### Changes in role allocation

Recent changes in the nature and types of marriages, childrearing, and employment are resulting in a differentiation in the parental and marital roles. The nuclear family structure is assumed to favor a sharing of roles rather than a hierarchical structuring of roles, a liberal rather than conservative attitude, role diffusion rather than role differentiation. There is a greater emphasis today on mutual decision-making and the sharing of power in many Indian homes. Married couples see themselves as partners in childrearing

and providing for the family. Although this trend has empowered women, it has not always contributed to marital happiness and stability, even though there appears to be more benefits than liabilities.

Young Indian adults in contemporary society often prefer to make their own marital choice for a mate based on love, with their parents and the extended family's blessing, rather than have an arranged marriage per se. The movement toward equality of the sexes in Indian society has played a major role in both personal and marital choice, especially among more educated families. However, a marriage which is based exclusively upon romance alone without consideration of money, social position, cultural dissimilarities, and parental objections faces a tremendous handicap from its very beginning. Many young men and women are convinced that romantic happiness is the sole criteria of marriage. But when the romantic attraction starts to fade and reality sets in, many of these love marriages become vulnerable. This incidence of conflict and unhappiness in these modern love marriages is believed to be relatively high. Many partners are coming together these days because of less parental control in the choice of mates and greater freedom of choice. These choices often mean that they do not have the emotional or moral support of the extended family and thus lose out on essential advice and the skills learning required to have a healthy marriage.

All these gradual changes mean that a bridge has to be built to connect old familial wisdom with modern familial realities in a practical manner. An important means of doing this is the use of Family Life Education Programs (FLE). However, in order to develop a

meaningful and culturally relevant family FLE for single young adults the author wanted to understand the current expectations and preconceptions that single young adults already had about marital and family life. This was the primary objective of the study. The ultimate goal is to see how the expectations culled out from this study can form the basis for content development of a FLE program for single young adults.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Aims

To explore and analyze the needs and expectations of single young adults with respect to marital and family life.

### Tools: *Semi-structured interview schedule*

The author designed a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of 76 statements and 4 open ended questions making a total of 80 items in all. Of these, 33 statements were categorized as Expectations from Marriage, 23 statements were categorized as Expectations from Partner, and 20 statements as Expectations from Partners Family. The 76 statements had to be answered as Always Agree, Sometimes Agree, Rarely Agree or Never Agree on a four-point Likert-type scale. The statements were created by the researcher using common statements and phrases that had been identified from Key Person Interviews with family intervention experts and themes that had emerged from verbatim transcriptions of Focus Group Discussions with 20 young adults. The responses to these statements would help the researcher to understand how respondents perceived marital and family life and to identify needs that could then be addressed in the FLE Program that the researcher intended to develop.

### Sample

The semi-structured interview schedule was administered to a hundred volunteers consisting of 46 girls and 54 boys from a local college. The researcher was not allowed to choose the group herself. Instead a coordinator at the college appointed by the authority was briefed by the researcher about the inclusion criteria. The coordinator then scheduled classrooms filled with young people depending on their availability, for the researcher, so that researcher could then explain and administer the semi-structured interview schedule after ensuring participants' consent.

### Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as mean and frequency were used to analyze the socio-demographic details and responses to statements. The statements were cross-tabulated on the basis of gender to understand the difference in responses to statements based on gender.

The responses to the four open ended questions (Q77, Q78, Q79, and Q80) were coded into themes separately for male and female respondents. These themes were then categorized into three areas, namely: "Specific Male Responses," "Specific Female Responses," and "Common Responses among Males and Females". This was done for each of the four open ended questions. A total of 46 females and 54 males responded to these questions which were a part of the semi-structured interview schedule. There were multiple responses for each question.

Then the category that was coded as "Common Responses among Male and Females," for all four questions, was further examined for similar responses. A total of 30 responses were gathered from this category and then distributed under 10 clusters based on the similarity of themes. For example, the themes Sexuality and Marriage, STD/HIV/AIDS Information, Safe Sexual Practices, Family Planning, and Intimacy were grouped under the cluster titled "Sex Education."

## RESULTS

There were 54 male and 46 female respondents. 68% of the respondents were in the age range of 18 years to 21 years and 32% fell in the age range of 22 to 25 years. Around 28% of the respondents were doing their MBA, 9% were doing M. Pharm, while a total of 63% of the respondents were in various under-graduation programs such as BBM, B.Com, B. Pharm, and B.Sc. There were 15 male respondents and 8 female respondents doing their BBM degree, 12 male respondents and 4 female respondents doing their B.Com degree, 1 male B. Pharm student and 6 female B. Pharm students, 14 male B. Sc students and 3 female B. Sc students, 9 male MBA students and 10 female MBA student, and finally 3 male M. Pharm students and 6 female M. Pharm students. A majority of the females (19) were in the MBA course and majority of the males (15) were in the BBM course. A large majority of the respondents were currently living in Joint Families (44%), while 39% of them were living in nuclear families. Most of the respondents (28%) were in the income bracket of Rs.10,000 to Rs.30,000 per month. An equal number of respondents chose not to provide us with this information and 24% were in the category of those with a total monthly family income of Rs.50,000 or more.

The following tables present a quantitative analysis of the responses to the Expectations Checklist which forms a part of the semi-structured interview schedule prepared by the researcher, when it was administered to 100 male and female volunteers. The statements in the checklist are broadly classified into three domains

namely Expectations from Marriage, Expectations from Partner, and Expectations from Partners Family. A few key statements from each of the three domains have been chosen and represented in three separate table that are described in the following tables. Responses to statements were in the form of Always Agree, Sometimes Agree, Rarely Agree, and Never Agree.

The responses of participants to 17 out of the total 33 statements in the domain on Expectations from Marriage in the checklist are described. These statements showed interesting responses because of which they were chosen to be included in this table. In the above table some significant points to note are as follows.

1. In response to statement 18 a larger number of male respondents expected their spouses to compromise more than them in the marriage
2. In response to statement 21 a larger number of male respondents expected to have an emotional relationship before marriage with the person they were to marry
3. In response to statement 25 a larger number of male respondents felt that sexual satisfaction in marriage was the most important part of marital life
4. In response to statement 30 a larger number of male respondents expected that a woman must not expect her husband to help out with any kind of household activities, whereas a very large number of women said they never agreed to this expectation [Table 2].

The responses of participants to 14 out of the total 22 statements in the domain on Expectations from Partner

in the checklist are described. These statements showed interesting responses because of which they were chosen to be included in this table. In the above table some significant points to note are as follows.

1. In response to statement 44 a large proportion of both male and female respondents said they Always or Sometimes agreed with this expectation that their parents approval of their marital partner would be a very important factor in their choice of partner
2. In response to statement 45, both male and female respondents said they Always or Sometimes agreed to the expectation that their partner should belong to the same religion as theirs if they are to marry the person
3. In response to statement 46, both male and female respondents said they Rarely or Never agreed to the expectation that their partner must be of the same financial status as my family if they were to consider marriage to the person
4. In response to statement 50, most of the male respondents said they Always or Sometimes agreed to the expectation that they would have a love marriage with the complete support and approval of my parents. None of the male respondents said Never to this expectation whereas 10 of the female respondents said they would never agree to this expectation [Table 3].

The responses of participants to 8 out of the total 19 statements in the domain on Expectations from Partner in the checklist are described. These statements showed interesting responses because of which they were chosen to be included in this table. In the above table some significant points to note are as follows

**Table 2: Expectations from partner**

Statement	Male (N=54)				Female (N=46)			
	A	S	R	N	A	S	R	N
36 I expect physical demonstration of affection and appreciation from my spouse	20	26	0	8	18	20	8	0
38 I expect my spouse to be sensitive to my sexual needs	23	19	7	5	21	14	10	1
40 I expect my spouse to discuss his/her professional matters with me	29	22	0	3	28	13	5	0
41 I expect that we discuss the financial situation of the family with each other	49	5	0	0	39	7	0	0
42 I expect my spouse to take decisions for the family	16	29	5	4	16	25	5	0
44 My parents' approval of my partner is very important factor in my choice of partner	32	11	7	4	39	3	0	4
45 I expect my partner to belong to the same religion as mine if I have to marry him	21	11	3	19	29	2	5	10
46 My partner must be of the same financial status as my family if I have to consider marriage to him	2	10	12	30	3	13	5	25
49 I would prefer an arranged marriage rather than a love marriage	13	23	10	8	21	13	5	7
50 I expect to have love marriage with the complete support and approval of my parents	41	11	2	0	27	2	7	10
51 I expect to have a love marriage and I do not really care about the approval of my family	2	8	3	41	0	2	0	44
54 Dowry is not a crime because it is a gift that the girl's family gives to the boy to ensure her security for the future	10	7	10	27	8	8	5	25
55 I will not marry a partner who asks for dowry	33	3	5	13	30	5	3	8
56 I expect my spouse not to work after marriage	8	14	7	25	0	0	2	44

A= Always Agree, S= Sometimes Agree, R= Rarely Agree, N= Never Agree

**Table 3: Expectations from partner's family (in-laws)**

Statement	Male (N=54)				Female (N=46)			
	A	S	R	N	A	S	R	N
57 I would prefer to stay in a joint family rather than a nuclear family	33	10	5	6	17	11	8	10
60 Nuclear family allows for more freedom and independence	10	20	12	12	13	23	2	8
63 I expect to consult my in-laws when major decisions are being taken	29	13	7	5	38	5	3	0
65 I expect their help in taking care of our children	12	18	16	8	23	20	3	0
67 I expect them to give me sufficient independence to lead my life the way I want to	36	13	2	3	22	16	5	3
70 I expect their encouragement in my professional/occupational pursuits	26	16	8	4	35	11	0	0
73 It will be my spouses responsibility to bring up the children as I will be the financial provider	2	12	5	35	8	7	3	28
75 I would like my in-laws/parents to bring up my children as I would like to focus on my career plans	8	15	9	22	8	16	8	14

A= Always Agree, S= Sometimes Agree, R= Rarely Agree, N= Never Agree

1. In response to statement 57 a large number of both male and female respondents said they 'Always' or 'Sometimes' agreed with the expectation that would prefer to stay in a joint family rather than a nuclear family. Ten of the female respondents said they would never agree to this expectation whereas none of the male respondents said 'Never Agree'
2. In response to statement 63 a large number of both male and female respondents said they Always or Sometimes agreed with the expectation that they would consult their in-laws when major decisions were being taken
3. In response to statement 65 a large number of both male and female respondents said they Always or Sometimes agreed with the expectation that they would get help from in-laws in taking care of their children
4. In response to statement 70 a large number of both male and female respondents said they Always or Sometimes agreed with the expectation that they would get the encouragement of in-laws in their professional/occupational pursuits

#### Qualitative analysis of open ended questions:

The following tables present the qualitative findings from the analysis of Q77, 78, 79 and 80 of the semi structured interview schedule [Table 4].

The respondents' qualitative responses to the open ended question no.77 in the semi structured interview schedule are described. The question asked was: 'What are some of the things you would like to know more about in order to be better prepared for marriage?' There were a total of 54 male respondents and 46 female respondents. Those themes that were common among both male and female respondents are stated in the third column. Largest number of participants responded with the theme of 'Conflict Resolution with Spouse' [Table 5].

The respondent's qualitative responses to the open ended question no.78 in the semi-structured interview

schedule. The question asked was: 'If a Family Life Education Program was conducted for single young adults, what would you like such a program to include?' Among the themes that arose specifically among males 27 of the respondents wanted the program to include content on how to deal with infidelity. Among the specific female responses 31 respondents wanted content that would focus on how to balance the traditional with the modern in marital and family life. The common themes that arose from both male and female respondent was the highest for Choosing a partner, Love vs Arranged Marriages and Sex Education-based themes such as Contraception, STD/HIV information and Safe Sexual Practices [Table 6].

The respondent's qualitative responses to the open ended question no.79 in the semi structured interview schedule are described. The question asked was 'What do you think are the most common reasons for marital conflict?' The most common Specific Male Responses were Resistance to Change and Incompatibility in Family Background and Personality. The most common Specific Female Responses were Jealousy, Lack of Independence and Lack of Caring and Love. The most common themes that were common to both male and female responses were Emotional and Intellectual Incompatibility, Infidelity and Priority to Career over Family [Table 7].

The respondent's qualitative responses to the open ended question no.80 in the semi structured interview schedule are described. The question asked was 'What are some of the essential qualities of a good marriage. Specific male responses which were most common fell within the themes of Compromise and Humility. Among the female respondents the most common specific female responses were Love and Affection and Independence. Responses that were common to both male and female were mutual understanding and trust [Table 8].

A consolidated picture of the categorization of themes from common responses of both females and males

**Table 4: Things you want to know more about to be prepared for marriage**

Specific male responses	No.	Specific female responses	No.	Common responses among F and M	No.
Ensuring compatibility with spouse	36/54	Negotiating for a love marriage	21/46	Contraception	79/100
Financial planning	35/54	Duties of a daughter in law	33/46	Sexuality in marriage	84/100
Reworking relationships with parents/siblings	23/54	Negotiating personal goals with spouse	14/46	Sharing friends with spouse	56/100
		Conflict resolution with in-laws	36/46	Conflict resolution with spouse	92/100
				Mate Selection	35/100
				Adjusting to spouses family	35/100
				Communication skills	48/100

**Table 5: What a family life education program to include**

Specific male responses	No.	Specific female responses	No.	Common responses among F and M	No.
Caring for the elderly	36/54	Balancing tradition and modernity	37/46	Domestic role distribution	88/100
Maintaining social relationships after marriage	47/54	Adapting to in-laws	42/46	Financial management	49/100
Dealing with infidelity	26/54	Maintaining independence in marriage	31/46	Parenting	78/100
		Tips to make marital life successful	29/46	STD/HIV/AIDS	62/100
				Contraception	87/100
				Love vs arranged marriages	79/100
				Balancing work and family	39/100
				Safe sexual practices	56/100
				Building marital bonds	75/100
				Conflict resolution with inlaws/spouse	65/100
				Choosing partner	82/100

**Table 6: Common causes of marital conflict**

Specific male responses	No.	Specific female responses	No.	Common responses among F and M	No.
Lack of spousal compromise	36/54	Lack of mutual trust	22/46	Dishonesty	56/100
Misunderstandings	48/54	Jealousy	36/46	Male dominance	31/100
Pride	26/54	Lack of maturity	21/46	Priority to career	67/100
Sexual dissatisfaction	30/54	Lack of independence	32/46	Work stress	46/100
Resistance to change	43/54	Addictions	41/46	Domestic violence	29/100
Incompatibility in family background/ personality	46/54	Caste/religion differences	21/46	Emotional/intellectual incompatibility	79/100
Large age difference	22/54	Lack of caring and love	33/46	Infidelity	72/100
Nagging interference of Spouse	34/54			Interference of in-laws	58/100
				Woman having higher salary	32/100

**Table 7: Essential qualities of a good marriage**

Specific male responses	No.	Specific female responses	No.	Common responses among F and M	No.
Compromise	23/54	Love and affection	21/46	Mutual Understanding	91/100
Priority toward spouse	18/54	Independence	36/46	Cooperation	78/100
Sexual satisfaction	41/54	No fear of spouse	13/46	Trust	82/100
Education level of spouse	12/54	Maturity	10/46	Honesty	64/100
Humility	28/54			Sacrifice	51/100
				Intimacy	42/100
				Family planning	72/100
				Financial stability	54/100

taken from Q77, Q78, Q79, and Q80 is given. The common themes under which all the male and female responses fell were put under nine common categories which are represented in the table. These include Sexuality and Sex Education, Mental Health and Marriage, Marital and Family Life, Stages and Tasks of Marital and Family Life, Mate Selection, Gender roles and Sensitization, Marital Communication, Conflict Resolution, Financial Management and Work-Life Balance.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of semi-structured interview scheduled as well as the review of the literature provided a rich amount of understanding about the needs and expectations of single young adults.

The salient findings of the study reveal that:

- There were 54 male participants and 46 female participants

**Table 8: Categorization of themes from common responses of male and female respondents**

Themes	Categorization
Sexuality and Marriage, STD/HIV/AIDS information, Contraception, Safe sexual Practices, Family Planning, Intimacy	Sexuality and sex education
Sharing Friends, Mutual Understanding, Trust, Sharing Friends, Cooperation	Mental health and marriage
Building Marital Bonds, Sharing Friends With Spouse, Sacrifice, Infidelity	Marital and family life
Domestic Role Distribution, Adaptation to In-laws, Conflict Resolution with In-laws, Parenting	Stages and tasks of marital and family life
Love Vs Arranged Marriage, Choosing Partner, Emotional/Intellectual incompatibility	Mate selection
Domestic Role Distribution, Male Dominance, Woman Having More Salary, No Fear of Spouse	Gender roles and sensitization
Dishonesty, Trust, Intimacy, Nagging and Interference of Spouse	Marital communication
Conflict Resolution With Spouse, Dishonesty, Domestic Violence	Conflict resolution
Financial Stability	Financial management
Priority to Career, Work Stress, Work Life Balance	Work life balance

- 35% wanted the program to help them choose good life partners
- 44% lived in joint families and 39% in nuclear families
- 35% said they wished to learn how to adjust to their in-laws
- 62% wanted an MFLE program to include a topic on sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS
- 56% wanted an MFLE program to include topic on safe sexual practices
- 78% wanted an MFLE program to include matter on parenting skills
- 48% wanted to have more information about communication skills
- 62% wanted to learn how to resolve conflicts in an extended or joint family setting
- 80% wanted to learn more about family planning and sexuality

Promotive mental health care is an aspect of practice

that has not been given much emphasis. As mental health practitioners we deal with broken families, families of the mentally ill or mentally challenged, emotionally disturbed children, adolescents, and adults, and provide a lot of other curative services. However we have little to offer as preventive/promotive care for the single young adult who could tomorrow be starting on a family of their own. Although there are programs that focus on sexuality and reproductive health as a part of premarital counseling or education, very few of these programs have comprehensive content which has been prepared based on actual needs expressed by single adults, which they can use as educational material while relating to these young people. The findings from this study would find great relevance in the preparation of a relevant and practical Family Life Education program for single young adults which in turn would be useful in colleges, workplaces, family counseling centers, or any platform where single young adults wish to access such family base services.

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