

www.myveritasjournal.com

VERITAS:

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

ISSN: 3107-748X

Vol. I, Issue 04



June 2026

Editor: Lt. Dr. B. Ajantha Parthasarathi



REVEALING PERSISTENT GENDER NORMS: A SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S NATIONAL SURVEY ON INDIAN FAMILY ROLES

ATHIRA VENUGOPAL

Research Scholar

Department of Sociology

CMS College Kottayam (Autonomous)

Second Author

DR. SIBIN MATHEW MEDAYIL

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

CMS College Kottayam (Autonomous)

INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION: Mahatma Gandhi University (MG University), Kottayam.

Abstract

Indian society is shaped by patriarchal norms, and Gender roles in India reflect a complex interplay between traditional gender norms and emerging egalitarian ideals. This paper analyses public attitudes toward gender roles using secondary data from the report “How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society” (2022) published by the Pew Research Centre. This study adopts a qualitative thematic analysis approach and reanalyses nationally representative survey data to identify key patterns and contradictions in gender perceptions.

The findings from this study shows that there is a strong contrast between what people actually believe and how they perform in public and how they want to function within their family. Many of the people show greater support for gender equality, treating men and women equally irrespective of their caste, class, etc., and they are really welcoming, especially when it comes to women coming to the forefront of society and taking up leadership roles and being part of the decision-making process. But this is not the actual scenario .Patriarchal viewpoints still have a strong influence on everyday family life, as views on household responsibilities, male authority, and a preference for sons continue to follow conventional patterns. The Interesting fact that these attitudes do not differ across gender or age groups, suggesting that such norms are deeply ingrained in society. However, factors like education, religion, and region do create some differences, shaping how individuals perceive and respond to gender roles to a certain extent.

The study points out a significant gap between ideological acceptance of gender equality and its practical application in everyday life. It implies the need for interventions to change these situations and bring about equality. These interventions should address not only structural inequalities but also the deeply entrenched cultural patriarchal norms, which see women as subordinate, particularly within the family. This study contributes to a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in contemporary Indian society.

Keywords: Gender roles, patriarchy, gender attitudes, decision making,

Introduction

In today's society, there have been noticeable improvements in gender equality, achieved through measures such as increased literacy levels, government initiatives and programmes, greater

workforce participation by women, etc. But the most important aspect is that traditional gender role expectations still strongly influence people's attitudes and everyday behaviour. Gender roles play an important role in how society functions and how it is organised. They also influence who holds power, who takes responsibilities, and who gets access to more opportunities. In India, these roles are closely connected to deep rooted traditions, cultural and social practices, shaping both public and family life.

In recent years more people now show support to the concept of gender equality in areas of education, employment, and politics. This is the output of modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation. And it brought many changes in society, like reshaping how people think about gender. But these changes in the superficial layer of society are not always reflected in the family setting. So from this it is proved that deeply rooted traditional beliefs continue to influence household dynamics, where practices like preference for male child, unequal sharing of household responsibilities, lower autonomy, lack of decision-making power for women still exist in families. This shows that the ideas about gender may be changing only on the surface as a peripheral change.(Article, 2019)

In this context, large-scale empirical studies play an inevitable role. It helps in better understanding on how people think about gender roles and how these views differ across various social groups in the society. One such important study is the 2022 report, "*How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society*," by the Pew Research Center. This study uses a nationally representative data, and this report gave us a broader picture of the societal attitudes toward gender equality, family roles, gender discrimination, and cultural expectations in India.(Niazi et al., 2024)

This study examines the same data through a secondary thematic analysis. In this study, instead of just presenting the charts, tables and statistics, this paper organises the findings into key themes and patterns and examines them through a sociological lens. This approach helps to uncover the underlying patterns, as well as the contradictions and continuities in gender attitudes. This study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of gender relations and contribute to the society for better social change and equality in the Indian context.(Niazi et al., 2024)

Literature review

Health is not the same for everyone .There are Gender-based differences in health outcomes in India, and they continuously affect women in various ways. There is a greater difference in health status between the states, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala. In Uttar Pradesh, patriarchy is very strong, and there are also inequalities in terms of sex, literacy of women, and health infrastructure facilities. As a result, women didn't get proper medical care and attention. The head of the family is the eldest male member, and women had to seek the family's permission to visit a doctor. This leads to poorer delayed care and mortality.(Dana & Banerjee, 2024)

While comparing Uttar Pradesh and Kerala, Kerala is much better. In Kerala, women have generally greater freedom to make decisions, move freely and independently, and access to health and healthcare services. These are the result of social reforms and movements. widespread education, active civil society engagement, and public policies. These measures contributed to a

great extent to improve the position of women in society. This implies the importance of public efforts, and how this can make a meaningful difference in social life.(Dana & Banerjee, 2024)

Health is not a single aspect, According to WHO Health is defined as the state of complete physical , mental and social well being not merely an absence of disease and infirmity. So along with Physical health all other dimensions of health are important. When we analyze the mental health of women, gender roles have a significant impact. One key finding in this study is that women are more prone to mental health issues than men. Several social factors also affect women, including isolation, financial strain and family-related disputes and conflicts. As mentioned earlier, while Kerala has made significant improvements in initiating health programs, policies and awareness campaigns, the mental health sector is still facing many challenges. This implies that the general health measures does not always transform into better mental health outcomes.(Article, 2019)

Elder women seem to be at a greater disadvantage in healthcare settings, especially among those living with chronic illnesses. The most important steps are strengthening elderly care, improving community awareness, and ensuring fair and equal access to healthcare, all of which require more gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches. At the same time, addressing deeper issues such as unequal power relations within society is essential if Kerala's development is to benefit everyone and treat them equally. Kerala shows a notable burden of mental health issues despite its achievements in areas of education and community programs and healthcare access. But Kerala still falls in addressing the mental health aspect.(Fan, 2024)

Kerala is often considered a model framework because of the “Good health low cost” model. So people get more access to healthcare at low cost, and this minimises the rural-urban divide or rural-urban gap. These government policies and programs supported women in overcoming deep-rooted patriarchy. One of the most important indicators of women's health is the maternal mortality rate. So the government introduced certain programs, financial incentives to encourage institutional deliveries. As a result of this, women tend to live longer, and their life expectancy is increased. Many other parts of the country, still facing issues like maternal mortality, infant mortality and child malnutrition to a greater extent, Kerala's achievements really stand out in these aspects. At the same time, the picture isn't completely perfect. Kerala shows a slight imbalance in the number of girls compared to boys in childhood. This shows the gender preferences that continue to exist but in a concealed manner (Ajith Kumar DRadha Devi et al., 2010)

All parts of the country don't have the same picture. The situations of all states are different. When we compare Kerala and Gujarat, we get two distinct pictures of women's empowerment. Kerala gives greater importance to education, public health, and community welfare. Kerala's approach is mostly based on social development. As a result, women in Kerala tend to be highly educated, and they have better access to maternal health care and general healthcare, and often play a more active role in family decision-making. Kerala shows significant progressiveness across all aspects, yet deeply rooted cultural norms and gender expectations still limit women's participation in the workforce. This shows that social progress and empowerment does not automatically transform into decision making capability and financial freedom. (Hyderali et al., 2025)

The case of Gujarat is different. The social support systems are weaker in areas like education and healthcare, which can affect the overall health status and well-being of women. Gujarat has followed a Growth-oriented model, giving more importance for employment and economic participation and their goal is industrial development. Boosting employment is the prime focus. This has created more employment opportunities, including for women, particularly in sectors like manufacturing. But the benefits are not evenly distributed. Many women face difficulties in accessing quality healthcare, and they are more exposed to issues such as domestic conflict. Together, these contrasts show that both social investment and economic growth are equally important, but the real essence of empowerment depends on how well the two are equally managed and balanced without giving more weightage to one aspect over the another. Experts state the importance for blended strategy that is job creation along with empowerment, education and healthcare access.(Hyderali et al., 2025)

Kerala's women have better health than the national average. This is because of the education, good public health care systems, and social reforms that support girls from childhood. These factors help women live longer and have fewer child deaths compared to other parts of India.(Ajith Kumar DRadha Devi et al., 2010)

Physical Health is also important , the sedentary lifestyle leads to non-communicable diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes, which are rising due to city life changes, poor diet, and work stress. Women in rural areas face extra risks due to limited access to health care facilities and insufficient number of health care providers, but schooling helps them prevent these issues.(Rahna et al., 2024)

Another important aspect is the Dowry practices in India, which still harm the overall health of women by reinforcing oppression and subordination, inequality in social status, and gaps in accessing resources. Previous studies show that geographic variations in dowry correlate with poor female health outcomes like infant mortality and domestic violence, while broader work links gender equality to better health via reduced psychosocial stress and better access. Dowry erodes women's status, heightens local competition and anxiety, skews family investments toward sons, and increases trauma exposure like abuse killings, explaining why rising dowry prevalence predicts worsening self-rated health even after controlling for socioeconomic factors.(Niazi et al., 2024)

Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative secondary data analysis using a thematic analysis approach to examine gender roles and attitudes in Indian society. The data source is the report "*How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society*" (2022) published by the Pew Research Centre. The original report by the Pew Research Centre is based on a nationally representative survey of Indian adults and provides extensive quantitative findings on gender attitudes across socio-demographic groups. The Pew Research Centre surveyed 30,000 adults from 2019 to 2020. It shows that most Indians accept the importance of gender equality, the participation of women in the workforce and politics, but at home, many people still believe wives should obey

husbands and carry out all the domestic responsibilities, and the breadwinners should be men, and they earn money.

In this study, relevant data, including tables, charts, and key findings, were systematically extracted and reanalysed to align with the research objectives. Thematic analysis was conducted following a structured process. The First step was the careful reading of data and identified the patterns related to the Indians' perception of gender roles. The second step was coding. The codes were generated from the statistical findings and statements (e.g., attitudes toward equality, family roles, son preference, and perceptions of discrimination). The third step was grouping. Then, these codes were grouped into broader themes based on conceptual similarity. The major themes identified from this study include gender equality in the public sphere, persistence of traditional roles in the family, son preference, perceptions of discrimination, and socio-demographic variations. This study also examines comparisons between groups such as age, gender, religion, etc. The study goes beyond simple numbers and helps uncover deeper social patterns, including the contradictions that often exist in gender attitudes.

Results and discussion

The data for the present study were analysed using a thematic analysis approach based on the secondary data from the Pew Research Centre (2022) report. The most relevant findings appropriate for the study were systematically organised into different key themes, which are aligned with the objectives of the study. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns, contradictions, and variations in gender attitudes within Indian society.

Gender Equality in the Public Sphere

The analysis indicates a relatively high level of support for gender equality in public life. A majority of respondents express the view that men and women are equally capable in leadership roles, particularly in politics. This reflects an increasing acceptance of women's participation in public and professional domains. This is not the actual scenario when we look closer, at the views on family and private life, this support does not always converted into practice. In other words, while people show more favour for gender equality in theory, their everyday attitudes and behaviors may still reflect the effect of traditional roles. "Public Gender Egalitarianism (PGE)" dataset, which measures public attitudes toward gender roles in politics and paid work across 124 countries from 1972 to 2022. They pointed out that the main reason for the struggle of women to enter into leadership and economic role is societal attitude. (Woo et al., 2023)

Persistence of Traditional Gender Roles in the Family

Traditional gender roles are still evident in society, despite the support for equality in public spaces. The findings reveal that a significant proportion of respondents support male authority and domination and favour female subordination or suppression, particularly in decision-making and domestic responsibilities. Women are still widely considered as the primary caregivers, while men are viewed as the bread winners of the family. This highlights the strong influence of patriarchal family structures. (Sahgal et al., 2021)

Many couples today would describe themselves as equals. They both work, both of them believe in fairness and equality but when observed closely it is clearly evident that one who does the

dishes, who leaves for work early, who takes care of the child when the child is sick, or who quietly handles all the mental load of running a household often tells a different story. This is one of the most quietly revealing findings in research on modern families. Even in homes where both partners earn an income and genuinely believe in equality, traditional roles have a way of creeping back in. The wife still ends up doing more. The husband still makes more of the big decisions. And often, neither of them fully notices it happening. (Sahgal et al., 2021)

In today's society many couples see themselves as equal, the main reason is both are working and earning and they believe in equality and fairness. But when we look at their life more closely there is an effect of gender roles still influencing their life's. The female partner is the one who does the dishes most of the time and takes care of the child, preparing them to go to school and looking after them when they are sick. The reality often looks different. (Niazi et al., 2024)

Researchers who studied dual-income couples through interviews and daily routine diaries found a concept called "reality blindness" that means the couples are not aware of the imbalances that one partner contributes more in domestic responsibilities than the other. They are unaware because they found it as normal. (Niazi et al., 2024)

Son Preference and Gendered Family Expectations

The roots of son preference are in patriarchal social structures where men traditionally control property, carry the family name and provide economic support to their ageing parents. But daughters are often viewed as temporary members of the family who will "leave" upon marriage. In dowry societies, a daughter is also considered an economic liability. Son preference is considered as a social tendency in families and communities that values male children more than female children. This preference can be seen in many cultures, particularly in parts of South Asia, East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, but also exists in more subtle forms in Western societies. In Indian families, the analysis shows that there is a continued preference for male child. These male children are often assigned greater responsibilities, such as caring for parents, performing their last rites and rituals, and they are the one who inherit the major family assets. These deep-rooted cultural and religious norms reinforce and strengthen the male dominance and female subordination within the family system. The main reason behind this is daughters leave home after marriage (called "marry away"), and families have the burden or extra responsibility to pay an amount to the groom that is usually called dowry for the marriage, so these all made daughters a burden. This makes sons very important to keep the family strong. Because of this strong preference girls usually get less food, health care, and schooling and privilege compared to boys. (Kumar, 2025)

Variations Across Socio-Demographic Groups

Education was a strong predictor of son preference. Less educated parents, especially mothers, have a stronger preference for sons because they are more dependent on their sons for economic and financial support and social status. Female literacy levels were increasing, son preference is likely to decline not uniformly in all spheres. Educated women are more empowered, and they value daughters and sons equally. Women felt that they want to have more autonomy in taking reproductive decisions and to deny traditional gender roles. But education alone does not always

remove this son preference attitude; in some contexts educated families still engage in sex selection, just by more advanced means.

So education plays a key role here. Education appears to have a stronger influence on educated individuals, who express less traditional patriarchal views, yet are not willing to reject them completely. These variations indicate that regional and religious gender norms are shaped by specific cultural contexts. The analysis reveals variations in the gender attitudes across gender, age, education, religion, and region. However, these differences are generally moderate rather than radical. Women respondents show slightly more egalitarian and impartial views, but traditional norms remain prevalent across all groups.(Sahgal et al., 2021)

It is often assumed that son preference is less common among rich families, but the reality is more complicated. In some societies, sex selection is actually initiated by wealthier or richer families because they can afford technologies such as ultrasound scanning and who have more desire towards smaller family sizes, concentrating the pressure to produce a son. In contrast, poorer families may have a strong preference for sons because of their economic instability and the lack of social safety nets. The most intense attitude of son-preferring behaviour is generally seen among the middle classes who can afford the modern technologies and desire for small family.(Sahgal et al., 2021)

Coexistence of Egalitarian Ideals and Patriarchal Norms

Egalitarian Ideals and Patriarchal Norms coexist in society. People have two opposite views at the same time; they support gender equality as a good idea for betterment of the society and appreciate it, but at the same time, they are more inclined towards old traditional patriarchal rules and norms in their family life. Many of them say women should have equal rights in jobs, education, and politics (this is the progressive part), but they also believe men should make final family decisions, women should be involved in household work and childcare, and sons should inherit property (this is the traditional patriarchal part). This creates a clear contradiction between what people say they believe and what they actually practice.(Woo et al., 2023)

This pattern occurs because Indian society is changing, but not fully. The Modern ideas about egalitarian views usually come from educational institutions and the media. The reason for this transformation is global influences; many people accept these new concepts, but not in a practical way. The family system remains a private space where they tend to follow old cultural traditions, and they feel these traditions are safer and more important for a better family life. For example, someone might support a woman prime minister but still expect their own wife to obey the husband or their son to care for aging parents. The family protects traditional norms even when public life becomes more equal.

Conclusion

The present study, based on secondary data from the Pew Research Centre (2022) report, studied public attitudes toward gender roles using secondary data from the report “How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society. The findings reveal a clear coexistence of progressive and traditional attitudes, that is supporting gender equality and patriarchal norms at the same time.

Where support for gender equality in the public sphere exists alongside the continued dominance of patriarchal norms within the family.

A large majority of men and women agree that men and women have the same ability to discharge their roles and responsibilities as leaders. However, at home, many things have to be done the traditional way. Further, even though men and women today are ready to accept the idea of equal capability of men and women to discharge leadership roles, the deep-rooted cultural structures and the influence of past gender roles keep this from being translated into reality at the household level. There are also variations in gender attitudes across education, religion and regions, which points out to the fact that gender attitudes are uneven and are only ready to accept the theory and not ready to apply it in real life.

It will require a paradigm shift in societal values. Firstly, there is a need for change at the policy or government level; more importantly, there is a need for change at the societal level. Even though there have been some changes over the last few decades, they are not sufficient. There is a long way to go to bring about a noticeable change in deeply ingrained societal values, particularly within families. Gender sensitisation, along with more education and awareness, are needed to bridge the gap between ideals and practice.

Thus, efforts towards gender equality are an important component of overall development and can have implications for health, a better quality of life, and justice in society. And while India is hurtling towards modernity, it has a long way to go to translate ideals inculcated by education and the media into reality in the traditional family.

References

- Ajith Kumar Dradha Devi, N., Ajith Kumar, N., & Devi, Dr. (2010). *Health of Women in Kerala: Current Status and Emerging Issues Health of Women in Kerala: Current Status and Emerging Issues Health of Women in Kerala: Current Status and Emerging Issues*.
- Article, O. (2019). *Gender - equitable norms on domestic*. 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4103/jehp.jehp>
- Dana, A., & Banerjee, A. (2024). *Gendered health disparities in India : a comparative study of uttar pradesh and kerala*. 3(2), 159–166.
- Fan, J. (2024). *Multilevel longitudinal analysis*. 53(4), 508–521. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932020000334>. Gender
- Hyderali, K., Poovancheri, A., & Kp, S. (2025). *Gender Perspectives and Women Empowerment : A Comparative Analysis of Two Indian States , Kerala and Gujarat*. 22(5), 263–270.
- Kumar, B. (2025). Son Preference in India. *International Journal on Science and Technology*, 16(3). <https://doi.org/10.71097/ijst.v16.i3.7090>
- Niazi, F., Rahique, A., Sriram, S., Kaur, K. N., & Saeed, S. (2024). *Beyond Numbers : Decoding the Gendered Tapestry of Non-Communicable Diseases in India*.
- Rahna, K., Shamim, M. A., Valappil, H. C., Subramanian, J., Sharma, G. A., & Padhi, B. K. (2024). Gender disparity in prevalence of mental health issues in Kerala : a systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal for Equity in Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-024-02275-4>
- Sahgal, B. Y. N., Evans, J., Salazar, A. M., Starr, K. J., & Corichi, M. (2021). BY Neha Sahgal,



Jonathan Evans, Ariana Monique Salazar, Kelsey Jo Starr and Manolo Corichi. *Pew Research Center*, 6–7.

Woo, B. D., Goldberg, L. A., & Solt, F. (2023). Public Gender Egalitarianism: A Dataset of Dynamic Comparative Public Opinion toward Egalitarian Gender Roles in the Public Sphere. *British Journal of Political Science*, 53(2), 766–775.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123422000436>