

Majority of Indians Feel Wife Must Obey Husband, Men Have More Rights to Jobs: Report

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There is minimal difference in gender attitudes between Indian men and women, and also among adults of different ages, no matter how perceptibly regressive or progressive the views may be, a Pew Research Centre survey finds.

New Delhi: A new report has found that while Indians are keen to see women take up leadership roles in politics, when it comes to home and employment, traditional tropes dear to gender discrimination are alive and strong. What is more, little differentiates men and women when it comes to such notions.

The report, titled '[How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society](#)', was compiled by the Pew Research Centre after surveying 29,999 Indian adults between November 2019 and March 2020.

It offers insight into the subtle shifts in perception of gender discrimination among various groups in India. It also compares Indians' attitude towards women and gender equality to other countries'.

The survey finds that there is strong influence of education and religion in shaping gender attitudes. More surprising is that there is minimal difference in gender attitudes between Indian men and women, and also among adults of different ages, no matter how perceptibly regressive or progressive the views may be. Regional differences, too, are minimal.

The report examines the intersections of gender with religion and political affiliation, reflecting meeting points for both, at times.

Most Indians say that "women and men make equally good political leaders," and more than one-in-ten feel that women generally make better political leaders than men. But things change in the home.

While many Indians express egalitarian views on some gender roles in the home - 62% of adults say both men and women should be responsible for taking care of children - over a third of adults (34%) feel that child care should be handled primarily by women.

'Wife must obey husband'

Nearly 87% completely or mostly agree with the notion that "a wife must always obey her husband". Men (67%) only slightly outnumber women (61%) in this notion, which is held by large majorities of college graduates and less educated people alike.

At least half of adults surveyed in most of India's major religious groups say abortion should be

illegal in all or most cases. Those in the southern states, along with non-religious people, appear less inclined to say this.

In something of a contradiction, however, many Indians see sex-selective abortion as acceptable in at least some circumstances: Four-in-ten Indians say it is either “completely acceptable” or “somewhat acceptable” to “get a checkup using modern methods to balance the number of girls and boys in the family,” a euphemism to connote sex-selective abortion.

A slim majority (54%) says that both men and women in families should be responsible for earning money, but many Indians (43%) see this as mainly the obligation of men, the report finds.

Indian adults also feel that if there is a paucity of jobs, they better go to men than women. A majority of 56% completely agree with this line of thought, and eight out of every 10 persons surveyed are okay with this to some degree.

In some cases, Indians’ traditional discrimination on the basis of gender, saddles men with disproportionate responsibility.

For instance, nearly all Indians say it is very important for a family to have at least one son (94%) and, separately, to have at least one daughter (90%).

And most Indians say that both sons and daughters should have equal rights to inheritance from parents (64%) and have the responsibility to care for parents as they age (58%).

But survey respondents are rather more likely to say that sons, rather than daughters, should have greater responsibilities in these areas and also when it comes to performing last rites, the report states.

The report notes at several points the surprising fact that differences in opinion between men and women and across age groups are modest.

“In other words, Indian women typically are not much more likely than Indian men to express egalitarian views on son preference and gender roles...and the same is true of young Indian adults (ages 18 to 34) relative to their elders,” the report says.

With the exception of Manipur, Sikkim, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, the survey covered all states and Union Territories of the country.

The report tackles geography with attention, noting that regional analyses mask significant variation within the regions itself. Women in the southern states on average have better socioeconomic outcomes than those in other parts of the country, but their gender roles are not necessarily more egalitarian.

In places like Tamil Nadu and Telangana, gender attitudes tend to vary quite a lot based on the issue. “Tamilians are among the least likely to say that a wife must always obey her husband, but the state also has the highest share of people who say women should be primarily responsible for taking care of children,” the report cites.

Across several aspects of family life, the report establishes a pattern that Muslims are the most likely, and Sikhs are the least likely, to support traditional gender roles.

Perception of discrimination and violence

Only 23% Indians said there is “a lot of discrimination” against women in India. And 16% of Indian women reported that they personally had faced discrimination because of their gender in the year months before the 2019-2020 survey. The southern states are more likely to see discrimination against women.

The percentage of surveyed Indians who said there is a lot of discrimination against women in the country is slightly above the percentage who feel that some religious groups and the ‘lower’ castes face a lot of discrimination.

“This means that the vast majority of Indian adults do not see a lot of discrimination against any of these groups,” says the report.

More people (76%) feel that violence against women is a very big problem than those who feel that communal violence is a very big problem (65%).

The survey asked which of two options is more important to improve the safety of women: teaching boys to respect all women or teaching young girls to behave ‘appropriately’. Roughly half of Indians said teaching boys to respect women is more important. A quarter of Indians chose the other option.

Women are slightly more likely than men to say that teaching boys to respect all women is the more important way to improve safety (53% vs. 48%).

Global comparison

Indians, at 72%, are less likely than people in North America (92% median), Western Europe (90%) and Latin America (82%) to place high importance on women and men having the same rights, the report notes.

However, they do better than sub-Saharan Africa (48% median) and the West Asia-North Africa region (44%). Adults in Central and Eastern Europe (69% median) are roughly similar to Indians on this question.

India’s neighbour Pakistan, at 64%, is less likely to say that it is important for men and women to have equal rights.

The percentage of Indians who feel it is very important for women to have the same rights as men is 76%, as opposed to 96% in Sweden, the most egalitarian country.

When it comes to jobs, a median of 17% of those surveyed in 61 countries from 2013 to 2019, completely agree that men should have more rights to a job than women, when there is scarcity in jobs. Roughly three times as many Indians say the same (55%) with only Tunisia (64%) with a higher share.

At second place, Indians are substantially more traditional than people from North America (4% median), Western Europe (7%), Central and Eastern Europe (14%) and Latin America (20%).

Indians are also among most likely to completely agree that men should sometimes receive job preference, the report finds.

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