

82% women in India able to refuse sex to their husbands, finds govt's family health survey

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Men were asked if they have right to 4 kinds of behaviour: Reprimand, refuse to give money, use force, or go have sex with another woman. 6% said all of the above, 72% said none.

New Delhi: With less than a third (32 per cent) of married women working and 44 per cent of women not even being allowed to go to the market alone, the findings of the National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS-5) do not exactly paint a picture of women empowerment.

But, the findings show that 82 per cent of women in India can refuse to engage in sex with their husbands.

"More than four in five women (82 per cent) can say no to their husband if they do not want to have sexual intercourse. Women are most likely to be able to say no in Goa (92 per cent) and least likely to be able to say no in Arunachal Pradesh (63 per cent) and Jammu & Kashmir (65 per cent)," states the [NFHS-5 report](#), released last week by Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya.

This is a new metric that has been introduced in the latest survey, which was conducted in two phases — Phase-I from 17 June 2019 to 30 January 2020 covering 17 states and 5 UTs, and Phase-II from 2 January 2020 to 30 April 2021 covering 11 states and 3 UTs.

Marital rape is an exception to the definition of 'rape' under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and means that a man forcing himself on his wife aged above 18 years cannot be prosecuted. However, the findings show that there is a gradual change in the attitudes of both partners in a marriage.

During the survey, men were asked some additional questions to assess gender attitudes. These pertained to a situation when a woman refuses to have sex with her husband when he wants her to. Men were asked whether they believe they have the right to four kinds of behaviour: Get angry and reprimand her, refuse to give her money or other means of financial support, use force and have sex with her even if she doesn't want to, and go and have sex with another woman.

"...only 6 per cent of men age 15-49 agree that men have the right to display all four of these behaviours if a wife refuses him sex, and 72 per cent do not agree with any of the four behaviours. However, 19 per cent of men do agree that a husband has the right to get angry and reprimand a woman if she refuses to have sex with her husband," the survey states.

"In almost all states, the percentage of men who agree with none of the four behaviours is well above 70 per cent, and the percentage of men who agree with none of the four behaviours is less than 50 per cent only in Punjab (21 per cent), Chandigarh (28 per cent), Karnataka (45 per cent), and Ladakh (46 per cent). The percentage of men who agree with none of the four behaviours has

decreased by 5 percentage points since NFHS-4 when it was 77 per cent,” it adds.

Only 32% married women employed

The survey has found the rate of employment among married women to be at 32 per cent — a marginal rise from the 31 per cent recorded in NFHS-4 survey which reflected the situation in 2015-16.

Of the married women who are employed, 15 per cent are not even paid, and 14 per cent do not have a say over how the money they earn is spent.

“In India, only 32 per cent of currently married women aged 15-49 are employed, compared with 98 per cent of currently married men aged 15-49,” it states.

“Among employed women, 83 per cent earn cash, including 8 per cent whose earnings are in both cash and in kind. Fifteen per cent of employed women are not paid for the work they do. By comparison, 95 per cent of employed men earn cash, and 4 per cent do not receive any payment for their work,” it reveals.

The survey has found that 85 per cent married women who earn cash make decisions alone or jointly with their husband on how that income is to be used. It is most common for women to make these decisions jointly with their husband; only 18 per cent mainly make these decisions alone. For 14 per cent women, the husband is the sole decision-maker regarding the use of women’s earnings, the data points out.

But this pattern is a little different for male incomes.

The NFHS-5 survey has found that while men and women often respond differently to this question, an estimated 6 per cent of each say that it is the wife who decides, 71 per cent women and 66 per cent men say that the decision is made jointly, and 21 per cent women and 28 per cent men say that it is the husband who decides how to spend.

Women cannot travel alone

The survey has found that 56 per cent women are allowed to go to the market alone, 52 per cent to a health facility, and 50 per cent to places outside the village or community. Overall, only 42 per cent women in India are allowed to go to all three places alone and 5 per cent are not allowed to go alone to either of the three places.

In NFHS-4, only 41 per cent of women had said they were allowed to go alone to the market, the health facility, and to places outside the village or community.

“The proportion of women who report freedom of movement varies greatly by state. In Himachal Pradesh, 82 per cent of women are allowed to go alone to all three places, compared with only 2 per cent in Lakshadweep, 15 per cent in Kerala, and less than one-third in Goa, Odisha, Manipur, Nagaland, and Karnataka,” the NFHS-5 report reads.

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