

## GENDER BASED POTENTIAL MATE PREFERENCES AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

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### ABSTRACT

*Emerging adulthood is a new developmental period characterized by delay in marriage which enables individuals to devote more time for various life decisions including matters related to marriage and mate preferences. The study was taken up to examine the mate preferences of male and female emerging adults of Dharwad, Karnataka. The Mate Preference Scale (Buss et al, 2013) was completed by a sample of 670 undergraduates in the age group of 18 to 26 years who were drawn out randomly from eleven colleges of Dharwad Taluk. The mean age at preferred age to marry for male was 27.84 years and for female it was 25.80 years. The study showed that males place higher value on good looks, relative to females and females place high value on resource potential, relative to males. The characteristics linked with resource acquisition such as college graduate, good earning capacity, favorable social status, ambitious and industriousness were desired more by the females than males. Good house keeper on the other hand was preferred more by males compared to females. However, good looks and good financial prospects typically didn't rank in the top most desired characteristics for either gender. In fact, kind and understanding, healthy and intelligent topped the ranking irrespective of gender.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Emerging Adults, Mate Preferences, Gender*

### INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood has been proposed as a new stage of development in which individuals feel that they have moved beyond adolescence, but have not yet achieved many of the milestones typically associated with adulthood. Arnett (2000) proposes this new developmental period from the late teens through the twenties referring to a period between the time when individuals consider themselves to have begun the transition to adulthood and the time when they consider themselves to have taken on the full responsibilities of being an adult. The rise in the ages of entering marriage and parenthood, the lengthening of higher education and prolonged job instability during the twenties reflect this developmental period. The delay in marriage enables emerging adults to devote more time for various life decisions, including matters related to marriage and mate preferences. The choice of a marriage partner is one of the most serious decisions people face.

Different studies show different results in terms of mate selection criteria. Many studies have shown that physical attractiveness and physical appearance are important criteria in mate selection (Abdullah et al., 2011, Furnham, 2009). Physical health was also seen as another important criterion in mate selection (Maliki, 2009; Regan et al., 2000;

Shackelford et al., 2005). Maliki (2009) found that physical health was an important criterion among 83% of students. In addition, studies also support, financial status as an important criterion in mate selection (Buunk et al., 2002; Regan et al., 2000; Shackelford et al., 2005).

Alavi et al., 2014 in his qualitative research found that the most important factors in mate selection among participants were religion, mental health, profession, physical attractiveness, and financial status, which were closely followed by intelligence, sociability, physical health, refinement and neatness, physical appearance, education, character, and chastity among Malaysian postgraduate students. Fisman et al., 2006 showed that women put greater weight on the intelligence and the race of partner, while men respond more to physical attractiveness. A study on mate preference in post-MaoChina (Buss et al., 2001) pointed that men give importance to 'goodlooks' and women gave importance to 'good financial prospects, ambition and industriousness'.

These differences in results give a compelling opportunity to know the trend of mate preference characteristics in the Indian context. Indian society, particularly that of urban is changing fast, and so are the norms of the selection of the marriage partner and exercising the preferences for mate selection is also changing even though there is a strong influence of cultural norms (Prakash and Singh, 2013). Thus, the study was taken up to examine the mate preferences of male and female emerging adults of India in general and Dharwad, Karnataka in particular.

## METHODOLOGY

The samples for the study comprised of undergraduate students who are in the emerging adulthood stage. A sample of 670 students in the age group of 18 to 26 years was randomly drawn out from eleven colleges of Dharwad Taluk. Participants completed Mate Preference Scale (Buss et al, 2013) which consists of two main parts. The first part is a rating scale consisting of 18 mate selection factors which are to be rated from a score of 0 to 3 where 0 indicates "irrelevant or unimportant", 1 indicates "desirable, but not very important", 2 indicates "important, but not indispensable" and 3 indicates "Indispensable, give it". A t-test analysis was done to compare between males and the females. The second part is a ranking scale comprising of 13 characteristics which have to be ranked from 1 to 13 from the most desired characteristic (1) to the least desired characteristic (13) desired in a mate. Garrett Ranking method was used for male and females separately for comparison.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentages of preferred age at marriage for both males and females. It can be observed that the minimum preferred age to marry was 21 years, irrespective of the gender (0.3 % for male and 1.6 % for female) and the maximum age of preferred age to marry for male was 35 years and for female it was 33 years. The highest percentage of female's preferred age to marry was 25 years (36.6 %) and for male it was 28 years (26.3 %). The mean age at preferred age to marry for male was 27.84 years and for female it was 25.80 years. This result is a little higher than the average age at marriage studied by the Medindia Medical Review Team, 2014, the average marriage age in India for men is 26 and 22.2 for women. The result of the present study showing preferred age of marriage for female and male in the mid and late twenties are unlike previous generations who marry by late teen and early twenties. This may be because young people who are in college generally want to get married after completing their studies and getting well-settled in life. Today's generation also feel that marriage can be delayed but not the career. This delay gives them ample time and

opportunities for building a career and having a well-settled life before marriage.

Table 2 shows the Garrett ranking from the most preferred to least preferred characteristics in a potential partner. It can be seen that the most desired characteristics for both males and females is kind and understanding followed by healthy and intelligent.

For females the characteristic easy going is in the fourth rank followed by exciting personality, creative and artistic, college graduate, good earning capacity, religious and good heredity. The least desired characteristic was wants children while the second least desired and third least desired characteristics were good housekeeping and physically attractive respectively.

For males, the fourth most desired characteristic was exciting personality. These were followed by creative & artistic, easy going, physically attractive, religious and good housekeeping. The least desired characteristic was good earning capacity while the second least desired and third least desired characteristic was wanting children and good heredity.

A perusal of table 3 shows the comparison of mean scores of factors in choosing a mate by gender. It can be observed that there was a significant difference in mean scores of male and female for eight factors. For the factors “good cook and housekeeping” ( $t = 8.77, p \leq 0.001$ ) as well as “chastity” ( $t = 3.01, p \leq 0.01$ ), male scored significantly higher than female. While for the factors “similar education background” ( $t = 3.27, p \leq 0.01$ ), “good financial prospects” ( $t = 8.08, p \leq 0.01$ ), “emotional stability and maturity” ( $t = 2.10, p \leq 0.05$ ), “favorable social status and rating” ( $t = 2.87, p \leq 0.01$ ) and “ambitious and industriousness” ( $t = 3.81, p \leq 0.001$ ), females scored significantly higher than males.

It can be observed that the top three characteristics preferred i.e, kind and understanding, healthy and intelligent didn't differ between genders. These characteristics are equally desired highly by both genders from their potential partners. This is in line with Souza et al., (2016) study where “kind and understanding” was the most desirable characteristic in a spouse for both gender at two time periods (1984 and 2014) with three decades apart. The characteristic good earning capacity is desired more by the females as compared to male as evident from both the ranking and the rating scales. For male it is the least desired characteristic for a potential mate was good earning capacity, however for females it is the 8<sup>th</sup> rank. The characteristic college graduate was also ranked higher in case of female (7<sup>th</sup>) compared to male (10<sup>th</sup>). From the rating scale it is evident that females scored significantly higher in the similar education background, good financial prospects, favorable social status and rating and ambitious and industriousness. This is again in line with Souza et al., (2016) who found out that women more than men in both samples valued resources, whether expressed as “good earning capacity” or “good financial prospects.” Women also desired qualities known to be linked with resource acquisition social status, education and intelligence, and ambition and industriousness. Khallad (2005) also revealed that female students showed greater interest in potential marriage partners who exhibit economic ability and commitment.

Good housekeeper was the second least desired characteristic for female, but was the 9<sup>th</sup> desired characteristic of male in the ranking scale and males scored significantly higher than females in the rating scale. This is in line with a study by Kamble et al., (2014) who also found that men valued “good cook and housekeeper” more than women in a potential mate. The characteristic ‘physically attractive’ was ranked slightly higher for male (7<sup>th</sup>) compared to female (11<sup>th</sup>). These results are in line with a study on mate preference in post-Mao China, (Buss et al 2001) which pointed that men give importance to ‘good looks’ and women give importance to ‘good financial prospects, ambition and industriousness. One

unexpected finding is that the characteristic ‘wants children’ is the least desired characteristic among both males and females. This may be because young people are increasingly becoming more focused on their career. Thus, they may not have given much importance for the characteristic ‘wants children’. A similar result was found by Souza *et al.* (2016) in a study which compared modern Brazilians with a Brazilian sample studied three decades earlier where both gender decreased in the importance of a mate who “wants children.”

## CONCLUSIONS

The preferred age of marriage for female and male were observed to be in the mid and late twenties unlike previous generations who marry by late teen and early twenties. The characteristics most preferred by the emerging adults were kind and understanding, healthy and intelligent irrespective of gender. The study also showed that males place higher value on good looks, relative to females, and females place high value on resource potential, relative to males. Interestingly, good looks and good financial prospects typically didn't rank in the top five most desired characteristics for either gender. The characteristics linked with resource acquisition such as college graduate, good earning capacity, favorable social status, ambitious and industriousness were desired more by the females than males. Good house keeper on the other hand was preferred more by males compared to females. These shows that the traditional norm that men are the breadwinners and women are caretakers still hold true to some extent among the emerging adults in the present generation.

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## APPENDICES

**Table 1: Gender Wise Distribution of Frequency, Percentages and Preferred Age to Marry by Emerging Adults**

SI/ No	Preferred age to Marry	Male		Female	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	21 years	1	0.3	6	1.6
2.	22 years	1	0.3	14	3.8
3.	23 years	7	2.3	19	5.2
4.	24 years	5	1.6	27	7.4
5.	25 years	36	11.8	<b>134</b>	<b>36.6</b>
6.	26 years	35	11.5	56	15.3
7.	27 years	35	11.5	34	9.3
8.	28 years	<b>80</b>	<b>26.3</b>	37	10.1
9.	29 years	30	9.9	14	3.8
10.	30 years	55	18.1	22	6.0
11.	31 years	2	0.7	-	-
12.	32 years	10	3.3	2	0.5
13.	33 years	1	0.3	1	0.3
14.	34 years	1	0.3	-	-
15.	35 years	5	1.6	-	-
Mean of preferred age to marry		<b>27.84</b>		<b>25.80</b>	

Table 2: Garrett Ranking of Mate Preference by Males and Females

Sl. No.	Characteristics	Rank	
		Male	Female
1	Kind and understanding	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	Religious	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>
3	Exciting personality	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
4	Creative and artistic	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>
5	Good housekeeper	9 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
6	Intelligent	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
7	Good earning capacity	13 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
8	Wants children	12 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup>
9	Easygoing	6 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
10	Good heredity	11 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>
11	College graduate	10 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>
12	Physically attractive	7 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>
13	Healthy	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>

Table 3: Comparison of Mean Scores of Factors in Choosing a Mate by Gender

SI/No	Factors in Choosing a Mate	Male	Female	t Value
		Mean (Sd)	Mean (Sd)	
1	Good cook and housekeeper	2.38 (0.8)	1.72 (1.0)	8.77***
2	Pleasing disposition	1.82 (0.9)	1.82 (1.0)	0.08
3	Sociability	2.35 (0.8)	2.45 (0.7)	1.63
4	Similar educational background	1.62 (1.0)	1.88(0.9)	3.27**
5	Refinement, neatness	2.35 (0.8)	2.31 (0.7)	0.57
6	Good financial prospect	1.64 (1.0)	2.23 (0.8)	8.08**
7	Chastity (no previous experience in sexual intercourse)	1.70 (1.2)	1.41 (1.3)	3.01**
8	Dependable character	2.31 (0.9)	2.29 (0.9)	0.14
9	Emotional stability and maturity	2.32 (0.8)	2.44 (0.7)	2.10*
10	Desire for home and children	2.35 (0.8)	2.24 (0.8)	1.65
11	Favorable social status or rating	2.13 (0.9)	2.31 (0.7)	2.87**
12	Good looks	2.06 (0.9)	1.98 (0.8)	1.23
13	Similar religious background	1.96 (1.0)	1.92 (1.0)	0.46
14	Ambition & industriousness	2.08 (0.8)	2.33 (0.8)	3.81***
15	Similar political background	1.21 (1.1)	1.05 (1.1)	1.81
16	Mutual attraction—love	2.43 (0.8)	2.30 (0.9)	1.91
17	Good health	2.53 (0.7)	2.58 (0.7)	0.89
18	Education & intelligence	2.39 (0.7)	2.58 (0.7)	3.27**

Figures in the parenthesis indicates standard deviation, \*Significant at 0.05 level, \*\*Significant at 0.01 level, \*\*\* Significant at 0.001 level.