

OTHER PROXIMATE DETERMINANTS OF FERTILITY

Key Findings

- **Age at first marriage:** The median age at first marriage is 18.8 years for women and 24.9 years for men age 25-49.
- **Consanguineous marriages:** Eleven percent of marriages are consanguineous marriages, which are more common in all of the southern states except Kerala.
- **Sexual initiation:** The median age at first sexual intercourse is 0.1 years later than the median age at first marriage for women age 20-49.
- **Abortion:** Three percent of pregnancies in the five years preceding the survey resulted in an abortion and 7 percent resulted in a miscarriage.
- **Main reason for abortion:** Almost half of women with an abortion (48%) sought their abortion due to an unplanned pregnancy.
- **Complications from abortions:** Sixteen percent of women with an abortion had complications from the abortion.
- **Widowhood:** One in nine women age 45-49 are widowed.

Marriage and sexual activity help to determine the extent to which women are exposed to the risk of pregnancy. Thus they are important determinants of fertility levels. However, the timing and circumstances of marriage and sexual activity also have profound consequences for women's and men's lives.

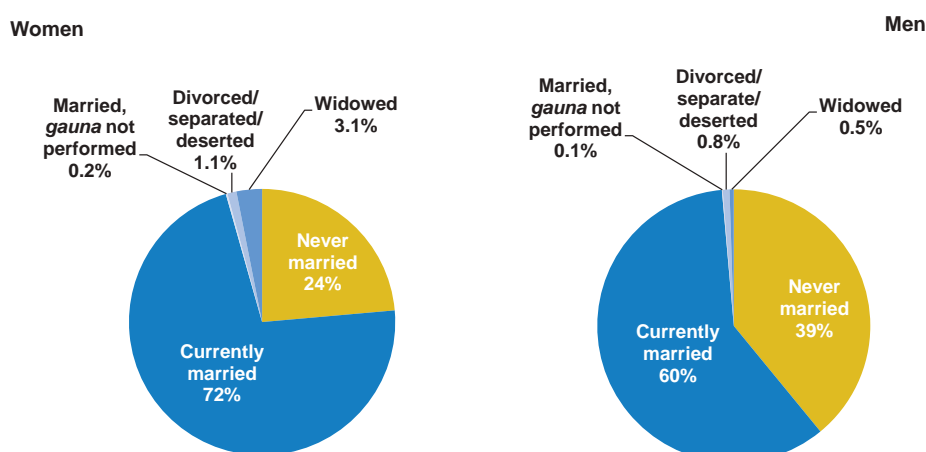
6.1 MARITAL STATUS

Marriage is nearly universal in India. By age 45-49, only 1 percent of women and 3 percent of men have never been married (**Table 6.1**). Seventy-two percent of women and 60 percent of men age 15-49 are currently married (**Figure 6.1**). Only a small proportion of women (0.2%) and men (0.1%) are married, but the *gauna* ceremony associated with the consummation of marriage has not been performed. Overall, 0.3 percent each of women and men age 15-49 are divorced. Eleven percent of women age 45-49 are widowed, compared with 1 percent of men.

Trends: The percentage of women who are currently married has declined slightly, from 73 percent in 2015-16 to 72 percent in 2019-21. The percentage of men who are currently married is almost the same in 2015-16 and 2019-21 (60% each).

Figure 6.1 Marital Status

Percent distribution of women and men age 15-49



6.2 AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Median age at first marriage

Age by which half of respondents have been married.

Sample: Women and men age 25-49

Men tend to marry considerably later than women in India. The median age at first marriage is 19.2 years among women age 20-49 and 24.9 years among men age 25-49 (**Table 6.2**). Thirty-eight percent of women age 20-49 marry before the legal minimum age of marriage of 18 years, and 23 percent of men age 25-49 marry before the minimum legal age of marriage of 21 years.

Trends: Early marriage has been declining over time. Marriage before the legal age of 18 is 23 percent for women age 20-24, compared with 47 percent for women age 45-49. Similarly, for men, marriage before the legal age of 21 years has dropped from 27 percent for men age 45-49 to 18 percent for men age 25-29. The median age at first marriage for women age 20-49 slightly increased from 19.0 years in 2015-16 to 19.2 years in 2019-21. For men age 25-49, the median age at first marriage slightly increased between 2015-16 and 2019-21 (from 24.5 to 24.9 years).

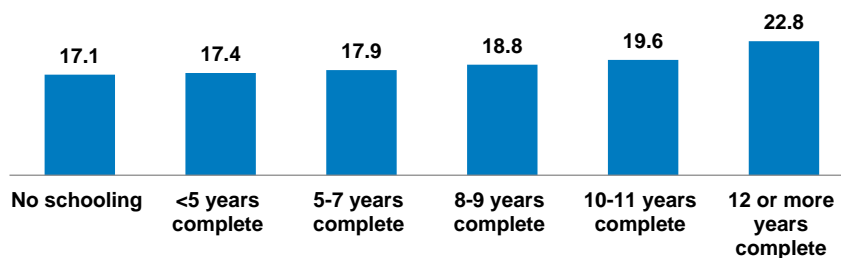
Patterns by background characteristics

- Urban women marry later than rural women. For women age 25-49, the median age at first marriage is 1.9 years higher among urban women than rural women (20.1 versus 18.2 years) (**Table 6.3.1**).
- Women having 12 or more years of schooling marry much later than other women. The median age at first marriage for women age 25-49 increases from 17.1 years for women with no schooling to 22.8 years for women with 12 or more years of schooling (**Figure 6.2**).
- The median age at first marriage for women age 25-49 is higher among Jain women (22.7 years), Christian women (21.7 years), and Sikh women (21.2 years) than women from all other specific religions (18.7-19.7 years).

- Women in the highest wealth quintile marry much later (21.1 years) than women in other wealth quintiles (17.5-19.3 years).

Figure 6.2 Women's Median Age at First Marriage by Schooling

Among women age 25-49



- Twenty-five percent of women age 18-29 and 15 percent of men age 21-29 marry before reaching the legal minimum age at marriage. About two-fifths of women marry before reaching the legal minimum age at marriage in West Bengal (42%), Bihar (40%), and Tripura (39%), and about one-third of women marry before reaching the legal minimum age at marriage in Jharkhand (35%) and Andhra Pradesh (33%). The percentage marrying before the legal minimum age is 32 percent in Assam, 28 percent in Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, 27 percent in Telangana, and 25 percent each in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The percentage of women marrying before reaching the legal minimum age of 18 is lowest in Lakshadweep (4%); Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh (6% each); Himachal Pradesh, Goa, and Nagaland (7% each), and Kerala and Puducherry (8% each) (**Table 6.4**).
- Overall, 20-25 percent of men age 21-29 in Bihar (25%), Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh (24% each), Jharkhand (22%), Arunachal Pradesh (21%), and West Bengal (20%) marry before the legal minimum age of 21 years. The lowest proportions of men marrying below the legal age at marriage are in Lakshadweep and Chandigarh (less than 1%), Kerala (1%), Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and Nagaland (4% each), Karnataka and Andaman & Nicobar Islands (5% each), Himachal Pradesh and Goa (6% each), and Delhi, Punjab, and Maharashtra (9% each).

6.3 CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES

Consanguineous marriage

Women who report that their husband was related to them by blood before their marriage.

Sample: Ever-married women age 15-49

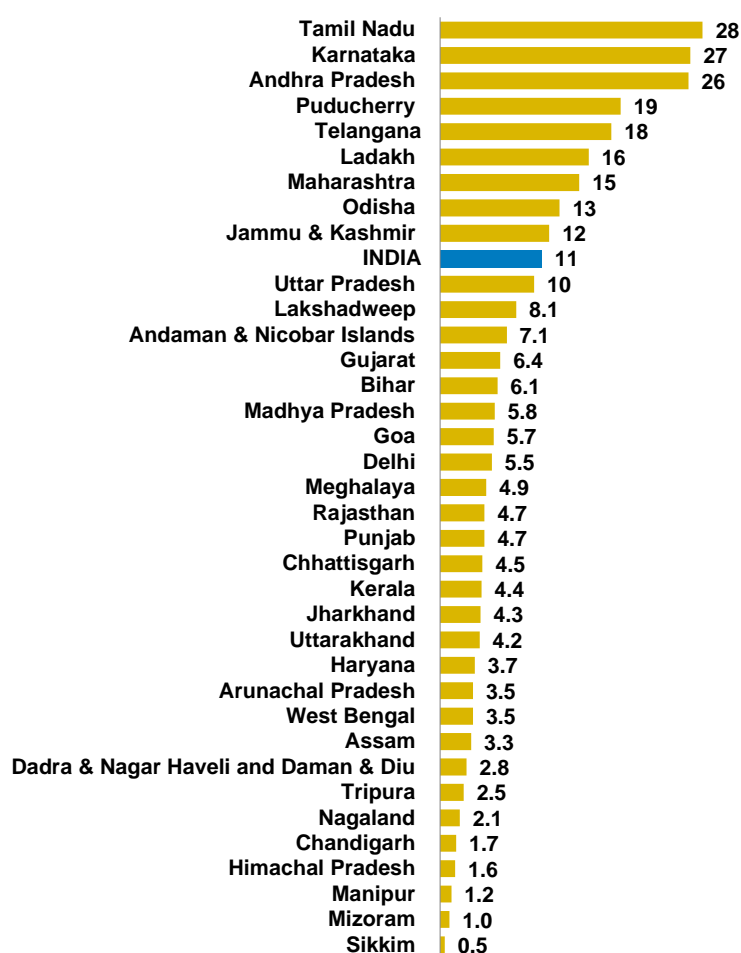
Thirteen percent of ever-married women were related to their husband before their marriage, and 11 percent of marriages were consanguineous marriages (**Table 6.5**). The most common type of consanguineous marriages were marriages to first cousins (8% of all marriages).

Patterns by background characteristics

- Young women are much more likely than older women to be related to their husbands.
- Women in urban areas are about equally as likely to be in consanguineous marriages as are women in rural areas.
- Muslim and Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist women are the most likely to be in consanguineous marriages.
- Women in all the Southern states except Kerala are much more likely to be in consanguineous marriages than women in other states. More than one-fourth of women in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, and almost one-fifth of women in Telangana and Puducherry reported being in consanguineous marriages (**Table 6.6** and **Figure 6.3**).

Figure 6.3 Consanguineous Marriages by State/UT

Percent of ever-married women age 15-49



6.4 AGE AT FIRST SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Median age at first sexual intercourse

Age by which half of respondents have had sexual intercourse.

Sample: Women and men age 25-49

In India, the median age at first sexual intercourse is 18.9 years for women age 25-49 (**Table 6.7**). Ten percent of women age 25-49 had sex before age 15, and 39 percent before age 18. By age 20, 60 percent of women age 25-49 have had sexual intercourse (**Table 6.7**).

The median age at first sexual intercourse for men age 25-49 in India is 24.8, six years older than women. One percent of men age 25-49 first had sexual intercourse before age 15, and 6 percent had sexual intercourse before age 18. By age 25, 52 percent of men age 25-49 have had sexual intercourse.

Age at first marriage is widely considered a proxy indicator for the age at which women begin to be exposed to the risks of sexual activity. A comparison of the median age at first intercourse with the median age at first marriage can be used as a measure of whether respondents engage in sex before marriage. The median age at first marriage for women age 25-49 in India (18.8 years) is about the same as the median age at first sexual intercourse (18.9 years). The same pattern is observed for men age 25-49, with a median age at first intercourse of 24.8 years and a median age at first marriage of 24.9 years.

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Trends: The median age at first sexual intercourse among women age 25-49 was almost the same in 2015-16 (19.0 years) as in 2019-21 (18.9 years). The median age at first sexual intercourse for men age 25-49 increased from 24.3 years in 2015-16 to 24.8 years in 2019-21.

Patterns by background characteristics

- Urban women age 25-49 begin having sex almost two years later than rural women. The median age at first sex is 20.2 years for women in urban areas, compared with 18.5 years for women in rural areas (**Table 6.8.1**).
- The median age at first intercourse increases with schooling for both women and men. Among women age 25-49, there is a gap of 5.3 years in the median age of first sex between those with no schooling (17.5 years of age) and those with 12 or more years of schooling (22.8 years of age).

6.5 RECENT SEXUAL ACTIVITY

NFHS-5 also collected data on recent sexual activity. Thirty-one percent of women and 30 percent of men age 15-49 reported having sexual intercourse within the last week. Twenty-three percent of women and 34 percent of men age 15-49 have never had sexual intercourse. For more information on recent sexual activity, see **Table 6.9.1** and **Table 6.9.2**.

6.6 INSUSCEPTIBILITY TO PREGNANCY

Median duration of postpartum amenorrhoea

Number of months after childbirth by which time half of women have begun menstruating.

Sample: Women who gave birth in the three years before the survey

Median duration of postpartum insusceptibility

Number of months after childbirth by which time half of women are no longer protected against pregnancy either by postpartum amenorrhoea or abstinence from sex.

Sample: Women who gave birth in the three years before the survey

Postpartum amenorrhoea refers to the interval between childbirth and the return of menstruation. The length and intensity of breastfeeding influence the duration of amenorrhoea, which offers protection from conception. Postpartum abstinence is the period between childbirth and the time when a woman resumes sexual activity. Eighty-one percent of women are insusceptible to pregnancy two months after a birth. Continued postpartum amenorrhoea and abstinence from sexual intercourse may protect women from pregnancy for longer periods.

During the first six months postpartum, 38 percent of women were amenorrhoeic, 29 percent of women were abstaining from sexual intercourse, and 52 percent were insusceptible to getting pregnant in 2019-21, compared with 42 percent of women who were amenorrhoeic, 25 percent who were practicing abstinence, and 52 percent who were insusceptible in 2015-16.

Among births in the three years before the survey, the median duration of postpartum amenorrhoea is 4.1 months, while the median duration of abstinence from sexual intercourse after giving birth is 3.5 months. Women are insusceptible to pregnancy after childbirth for a median of 6.3 months (**Table 6.10**).