

## Women who remain unmarried after their thirties in India

N. Pautunthang<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute for Social and Economic Change, Dr, VKRV Rao Rd, Teachers Colony, Naagarabhaavi, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India 560072

\*Corresponding author

E-mail address: [naulakzomi@googlemail.com](mailto:naulakzomi@googlemail.com)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v7i2.24208>

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Keywords:</i> bachelorette single never-married unmarried spinster</p>	<p>This study analyses the dynamics of never-married women aged 30 years and above in India over three periods: 2005-06, 2015-16 and 2019-21 based on different socio-demographic dimensions. It analyses never-married women in India and uses data from three rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). The analysis examines different variables of interest such as rural-urban differences, educational attainment, types of occupation and wealth index followed by religion and caste. The results are nuanced and capture the intricacies of broad national trends and regional dynamics. Of course, such an overarching trend masks wide regional variation. On one hand, it is the states like Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim etc., where there has been prevalence of this trend showing an upward trend that marriage patterns are on change. On the other hand, states like Haryana and Bihar are showing a steady decrease which speaks about the effect of regional cultural dynamics. Moreover, the fluctuations in states like Meghalaya, and Assam reaffirm how multi-parameter is determining marital choices. The binary logistic regression used in the study analyses the effect of place of residence, education, occupation, wealth index, religion and caste on women's chances to remain unmarried. The regression analysis demonstrates the distinct influences of these factors on marital status and yet they still only tell part of the story about an understudied subgroup, never-married women.</p>

### Citation suggestion:

Pautunthang, N. (2024). Women who remain unmarried after their thirties in India. *Simulacra*, 7(2), 151–167. <https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v7i2.24208>

Received 12 January 2024; Received in revised form 16 September 2024; Accepted 30 September 2024; Published online 25 November 2024.

## Introduction

Historically, unmarried women were regarded as individuals who deviated from societal norms by not participating in procreation. This was thought to contribute to an imbalance in the sex ratio and raise health-related concerns (Gordon, 1994). Unmarried women who have reached the age at which they are considered suitable for marriage are often seen as problematic and deficient in terms of their ability to form close relationships and become mothers (Hamilton et al., 2006; Mustard, 2000). Unmarried women over 30 were viewed as unacceptable, disgraceful, and distressed. There was a belief that women over 30 who had never married were unable to have children, lacked life satisfaction, and had problems with personal and social adaptation, potentially reaching a pathological state (Cargan, 1986; Stolk & Brotherton, 1981). Unmarried women were stigmatized by society, attributing their single status to their lifestyle and attitude towards marriage. They are stigmatized, labelled as 'lonely,' and treated as unnoticed individuals who lack social approval from society (Thatal, 2021). Never-married women aged 65 and older are more highly educated and have higher incomes and wealth (Schwenk, 1992). Never-married women have higher education levels than married men (Thatal, 2021). Higher education levels among single females, while men in higher occupational levels do not remain single, females in higher occupational levels are more likely to stay single (Spreider & Riley, 1974).

Over time, the societal disapproval and restriction associated with being an unmarried woman decreases, transforming singleness into a viable alternative to marriage (Smith, 1986). As individuals gradually redirected their attention away from marriage, they gained greater autonomy from one another and prolonged their period of being unmarried (Cherlin,

1990). Singleness is increasingly being viewed as normal (Keith, 1986). As a result, there is a declining societal expectation for women to get married in the current era (DePaulo, 2019). The negative connotation of 'old maid' has been replaced by the portrayal of the 'Urban Single,' a woman who is self-sufficient and does not rely on a man to achieve her life goals and ambitions. The forced single is no longer a reason for not marrying, and 'by choice' is popular among educated urban women (Thatal, 2021).

Singlehood emerged as a new phenomenon and alternative to marriage (Forsyth & Johnson, 1995; Spreider & Riley, 1974; Stein, 1975). Thinkers and social scientists have focused on the growing number of single people. The current study is primarily concerned with women (over the age of 30) who have never married in their lives, also known as never-married women (Clover, 2003). A society is considered to be in marital transition if the number of marriages in each age group decreases and the proportion of women who remain single increases (Lesthaeghe, 2010; Chintsanya, 2015; Poppel et al., 2001).

From 1990 to 2010, the percentage of women who have never married increased on all continents (Thatal, 2021). Australia and New Zealand saw the greatest increase, up 9.7 percentage points from 4.4 per cent in 1990 to 14.1 per cent in 2010. whereas only 0.2 per cent in Central and Southern Asia (Sullivan, 2008). As a result, the proportion of singles is increasing across regions. In the United States, unmarried individuals aged above 30 have been increasing at a faster rate; this growth of the singles has been termed as 'single boom', which includes late marriage age and 'retreat from marriage' for many (Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992; Frazier et al., 1996; Manning & Smock, 1995). Women in South and East Asian countries are becoming more single. The percentage of single women in

South-East Asia increased between 1970 and 1990 (Jones, 2009; Podhisita & Xenos, 2015).

Some of the reasons for the growing proportion of singles in modern society include increased job and educational opportunities for women, as well as the removal of the stigma associated with sex outside marriage (Croll, 1985). The rise in the number of singles is directly related to dissatisfaction with traditional marriage (Thatal, 2021). The likelihood of marrying decreases as one grows older (Campbell, 2003). The postponement of marriage has led to a rise in the number of persons who have never married (Pelikh, 2019). Older single women declined marriage proposals, usually because they were afraid of becoming subordinate to their husbands (Simon, 2010). India's social and cultural milieu has long favored universal and early marriage for women. In ancient times, unmarried women were harshly condemned and had no place in the society. Under the SDT regime, the pattern of marriage has been changing; remarkably, the proportion of never-married women has been increasing, mainly because of the postponement of marriage. People are becoming choosy in partner selection and are prepared to wait until they find the right match. It is of significant curiosity how the proportion of never-married women has evolved across states and demographic categories (Abalos, 2023).

The number of women who have never married has emerged as a distinct demographic trend with far-reaching repercussions (Chintsanya, 2015). The causes for this transformation are diverse as India enters a new period characterized by modernity, urbanization, and changing gender dynamics. It results from a confluence of the shifting of goals, the growth of economic possibilities, the rise of education, and the re-evaluation of established norms in a fast-changing social setting. In urban India, single women have established themselves

as a distinct social demographic. Many successful unmarried women enjoy high status in the fields of profession, services, and social work (Thatal, 2021). Some of the reasons for singleness in Indian society can be attributed to changing marriage patterns, particularly the rise of late marriage among educated women and the increased preference for a career over marriage. Individuals who believe that marriage limits self-realization and involvement in other relationships, and singlehood provides greater freedom of choice and autonomy, permanent singlehood is often seen as a status choice (Thatal, 2021).

Although there is plenty of literature on marriage, studies on never-married women received less academic attention. The majority of the existing research on never married primarily concentrates on historical and traditional viewpoints. Most of the existing studies covered a small area. There is a scarcity of studies that thoroughly examine the current dynamics of never-married women, considering the changing societal norms, economic shifts, and personal aspirations that influence women's choices to stay unmarried. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of factors influencing women's marital status in India, utilizing data from the National Family Health Survey:

1. To examine the changes in the proportion of never married in India over time across states and districts.
2. To identify the factors influencing women to remain never-married after their thirties.

## Method

The study analyses data from three rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS): NFHS-3 (2005-06), NFHS-4 (2015-16), and NFHS-5 (2019-21). These

surveys, conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India, provide comprehensive and nationally representative datasets that cover a wide range of demographic, health and socio-economic variables. The longitudinal nature of the surveys enables an in-depth temporal analysis of changes in women's marital status over time.

The NFHS surveys are valuable due to their large sample sizes and rigorous methodology, which include household interviews and individual questionnaires. For this study, the focus is on women aged 30 and older. This age threshold is chosen based on the assumption that by this age, most Indian women would have married if they intended to do so (Goswami, 2012). Examining women who remained unmarried beyond this age provides insights into trends of delayed or non-marriage, revealing underlying social, economic and personal factors influencing this decision.

The Dependent Variable is never-married women. This binary variable indicates whether a woman has never married. It is coded as 1 for never-married and 0 for those who are married, divorced, separated, or widowed.

The independent variables are:

**Place of Residence:** Differentiates between urban and rural areas. This variable helps in understanding how geographic location affects marriage trends and opportunities.

**Educational Level:** Categorized into no education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education. Education level is a critical factor influencing marital decisions and opportunities.

**Occupation:** Classified as professional, technical, clerical, agricultural, and manual labor. This variable examines how different types of employment impact the likelihood of remaining unmarried.

**Wealth Index:** Based on household assets and consumption data, the wealth index is divided into quintiles (poorest, poorer, middle, richer, richest). This index provides insights into how economic status influences marital decisions.

**Religion:** Includes major religious affiliations such as Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and others. Religion can significantly impact marital norms and practices.

**Caste:** Categorized into Scheduled Tribe (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backwards Classes (OBC) and General categories. Caste can influence social expectations and marriage patterns.

The study employs statistical methods to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable (never-married) and the independent variables. Logistic regression models were used to assess how each factor affects the likelihood of remaining unmarried. The analysis has explored interaction effects between variables to understand complex influences on marital status.

## Results and Discussion

### *Trends over time*

This part provides the journeys of Jinarakkhita and the diverse versions of Buddhism he faced. The purpose is to discuss why, even if he experienced different forms of Buddhism, he prioritized Theravada tradition as his identity. Ashin Jinarakkhita (1923–2002), an Indonesian-born Chinese, is also known as Tee Boan-an. Table 1 shows the proportion of never-married women (30+) by age in 2005-06, 2015-16 and 2019-21. From 2005-06 to 2019-21, there is a clear rise in the proportion of never-married women in nearly all age groups, particularly among younger cohorts. The percentage of women in the 15–19 age range who have

never married has risen the greatest, from 72 per cent in 2005-06 to 87 per cent in 2019-21. This points to a rising tendency to postpone marriage among teenagers and their families. This discovery is consistent with the “Individualization Theory” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), which holds that people in contemporary societies are less concerned with following traditional society expectations, such as getting married young, and more focused on achieving their own objectives and fulfilling their own desires.

As demonstrated by the rise in the percentage of single women in the 20-24 age range—from 25 per cent in 2005-06 to 39 per cent in 2019-21, the “Delayed Transition Theory” put forth by Jeffrey Arnet (Jj, 2000) is supported (Vepa & Viswanathan, 2020). This theory suggests that young adults are delaying traditional life milestones, such as marriage and parenthood, as they prioritize education and career advancement. In India, where the average age of marriage has traditionally been lower, this shift highlights changing aspirations among young women, particularly those in more educated and economically stable demographics.

In the 25–29 and 30–34 age groups, the percentage of never-married women has also shown a steady increase, though less pronounced than in the younger age cohorts. This reflects that while many women still marry by their late 20s or early 30s, a growing minority are delaying marriage. The very constant proportions of single women in the 40–44 and 45–49 age groups suggest that although marriage is becoming less common in India, it is still a prominent social institution. However, the small proportion of women remaining unmarried in this age group suggests a gradual shift in the perception of singlehood and long-term career-focused lifestyles.

### *State-level variations*

Table 2 shows that the never-married proportion among women varies significantly across states. Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram had proportionately higher numbers of never-married women, reflecting regional differences in patterns of marriage. This result corresponds to the idea that education and employment opportunities delay marriage (Becker,

**Table 1.** *Percentage of Never-married Women across Age groups in India*

<b>Age Groups (in years)</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2019-21</b>
15-19	72	85	87
20-24	25	34	39
25-29	6	9	11
30-34	2	2	3
35-39	1	1	1
40-44	1	1	1
45-49	1	1	1
No. of Women	25,462	159,034	172,074

*Source: Calculated from National Family Health Survey, 2005-06, 2015-16 and 2019-21*

1991; Bhuwania et al., 2024). Northeastern states have higher levels of education and gender equality. The availability of these opportunities in the northeastern region suggests that economic independence and education are giving women an empowered view to exercise alternative life choices. In contrast, states such as Uttar Pradesh and Haryana where the patriarchal norms are very strong have lower proportions of never-married women. This aligns with previous research that highlights the influence of

cultural and regional variations on marital norms (Kaur & Singh, 2013).

Table 2 reflects the regional and cultural diversity of India. States with higher educational levels, greater employment opportunities, and stronger gender equality tend to exhibit higher proportions of never-married women, as seen in the northeastern regions. In contrast, states with entrenched patriarchal norms and limited educational and economic opportunities for women continue to see lower proportions of never-married women.

**Table 2.** *Percentage of Never-Married Women (30+) in India over time*

States	2005-06	2015-16	2019-21
Jammu & Kashmir	1	3	2
Himachal Pradesh	1	2	1
Punjab	0	1	2
Chandigarh	NA	1	2
Uttarakhand	1	1	1
Haryana	0	0	1
NCT of Delhi	1	2	2
Rajasthan	0	0	0
Uttar Pradesh	0	1	1
Bihar	0	0	0
Sikkim	3	7	8
Arunachal Pradesh	2	3	3
Nagaland	5	8	9
Manipur	7	9	7
Mizoram	9	11	10
Tripura	2	2	2
Meghalaya	5	5	4
Assam	4	5	4
West Bengal	2	2	2
Jharkhand	1	2	2
Odisha	1	3	3
Chhattisgarh	1	2	2
Madhya Pradesh	0	1	1
Gujarat	1	2	2
Dadra & Nagar Haveli And Daman & Diu	NA	2	3
Maharashtra	1	2	2
Andhra Pradesh	1	1	1
Karnataka	2	2	2
Goa	6	4	5
Lakshadweep	NA	4	4
Kerala	3	2	2
Tamil Nadu	2	1	1
Puducherry	NA	3	1
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	NA	4	4
Telangana	NA	1	1
Ladakh	NA	NA	4
India	1	1	1

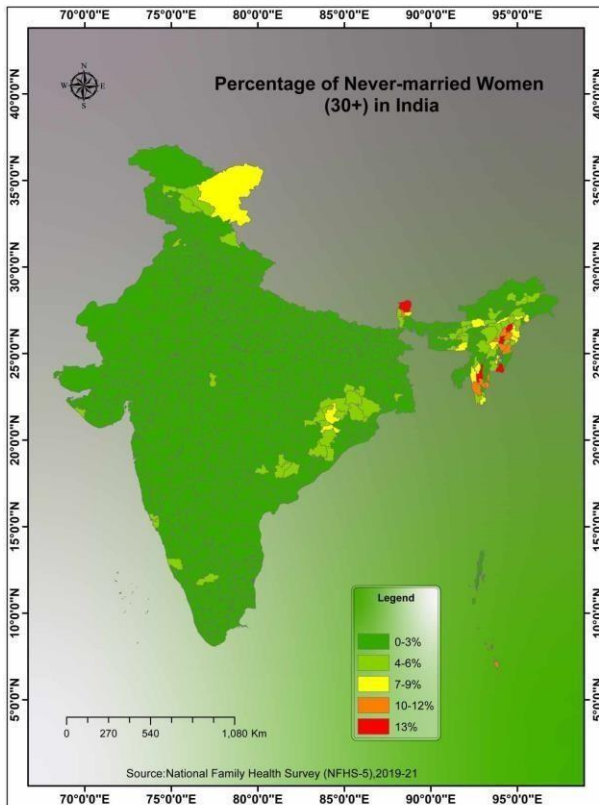
Source: National Family Health Survey, 2005-06, 2015-16, 2019-21

### *District-level differences*

Map 1 shows that there is considerable variation at the district level in the percentage of never-married women. Those from the northeastern states like Kohima (Nagaland), Chandel (Manipur) and Lunglei (Mizoram) tend to have more unmarried women. These are consistent with modernization theory, which posits that as societies develop, traditional institutions such as marriage may become less rigid (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Urban districts such as Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai record similar percentages of never-married women. This corresponds to the existing urbanization literature pointing to the fact that women in cities are more prone to careers, delay marriage or remain single (van der Lippe et al., 2014). Conversely, in certain rural districts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, the lower percentages also align with the “Rural Traditionalism Theory” which argues that areas like these continue to abide by traditional norms, including early marriage.

Map 1 shows that characteristics like education, urbanization, and conformity to traditional standards have a significant impact on district-level variances in the percentage of never-married women. Higher percentages in northeastern and urban districts underscore the role of education,

**Map 1.** *Percentage of never-married women in India by district*



Source: Prepared from National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

career opportunities, and modern values in delaying marriage. In contrast, lower percentages in rural districts point to the persistent influence of traditional marital norms, particularly in less developed regions. These trends reflect a complex interplay between modernization, urbanization, and cultural values, offering important insights into the evolving marital practices across India.

### *Rural-urban differentials*

Figure 1 demonstrates the existence of rural-urban disparities, with urban areas reporting a greater percentage of single women (2%) than do rural areas (1%). The proportion of single women, 30 years of age or older in the majority of states and union territories is higher in urban areas

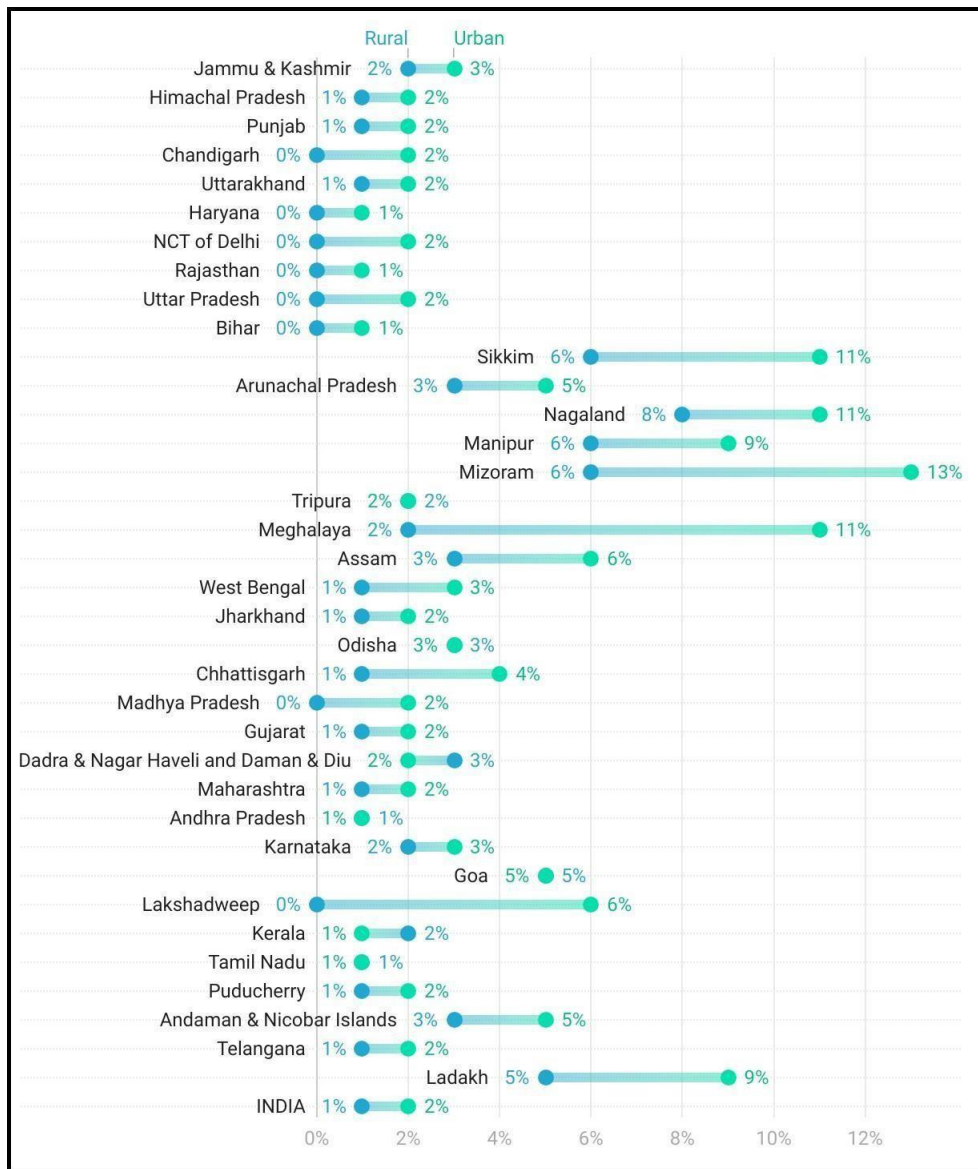
than in rural areas. The social structures in urban regions are more dynamic and diverse, which raises the percentage of single women. The advantage of living in an urban area could be attributed to exposure to contemporary ideas and work opportunities that subvert conventional gender stereotypes (R. Sen, 2020). According to Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) theory, urbanization has historically aided in the transition towards individualization, when one's own decision-making takes precedence over the pressure to follow conventional marital conventions. Urbanization empowers women by giving them the means to achieve educational and career success, which may delay or replace traditional life milestones like marriage. This shift is also reflected in changing cultural attitudes towards marriage in cities, where it is increasingly seen as one of many potential life choices rather than a societal obligation.

### *Educational attainment*

As it is illustrated in Figure 2 there is a relationship that is higher educational attainment and a higher percentage of never-married women. The proportion of uneducated women is 1 per cent, while the proportion of educated women is 4 per cent. This supports Becker's (1991) economic theory on the family which suggests that as women acquire more years of education they will be economically independent and therefore less likely to marry solely for financial support. In addition, A. Sen, (2006) explains that women are also engaged in their professional development hence marriage may be postponed or avoided altogether.

The information presented in Figure 2 emphasizes how important education is in enabling women to make decisions about their lives that go against conventional marriage norms. Higher-educated women are more likely to stay single because they can prioritize their personal and professional

**Figure 1.** Percentage of never married women (30+) in rural and urban areas of India



Source: Prepared from National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

aspirations over the expectations of society surrounding marriage because of financial freedom (Nakray, 2012).

### Occupational status

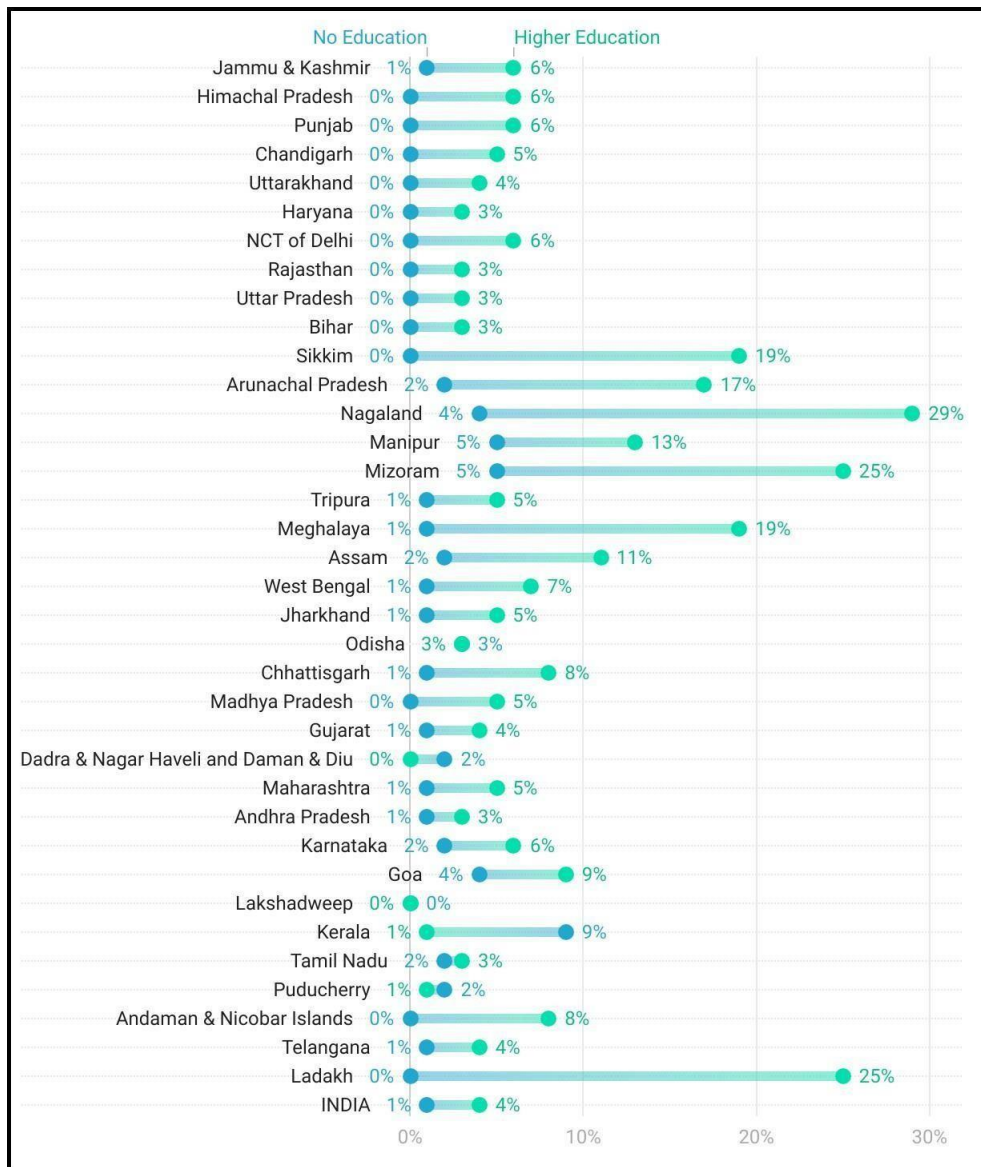
The rise in singles is also linked to their increased inclusion in labor market participation along with women as a whole (Simon, 2010). The proportion of professional, technical or managerial women unmarried shown in Figure 3 is 4 per cent. The result is indicative of

the trend in which women are becoming increasingly career-minded and focused on personal growth rather than traditional life paths. Such trends are underpinned by the individualization theory (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), which suggests that the rise in career opportunities for women has led to a redefinition of personal success and fulfilment beyond marriage.

Women working in clerical (4%) and sales (3%) sectors also show a relatively high proportion of remaining unmarried. These

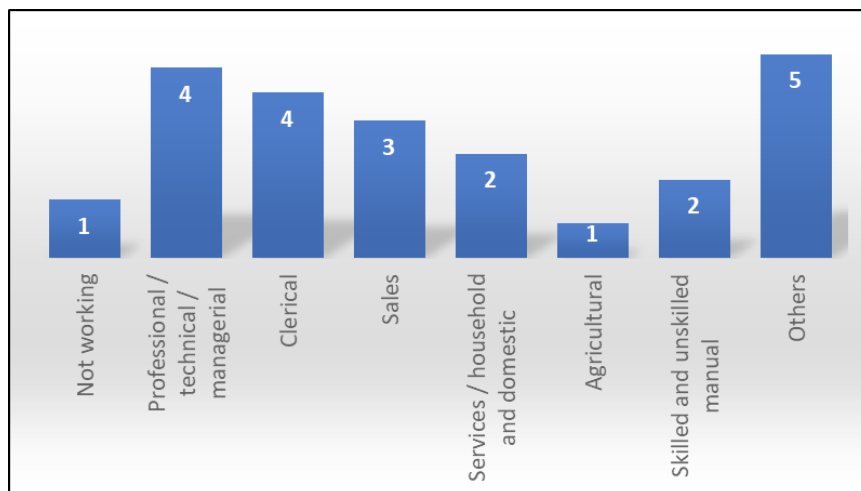


**Figure 2.** Percentage of never-married women (30+) in India by no education and higher education



Source: Prepared from National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

**Figure 3.** Percentage of never-married women (30+) in India by occupation



Source: Prepared from National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

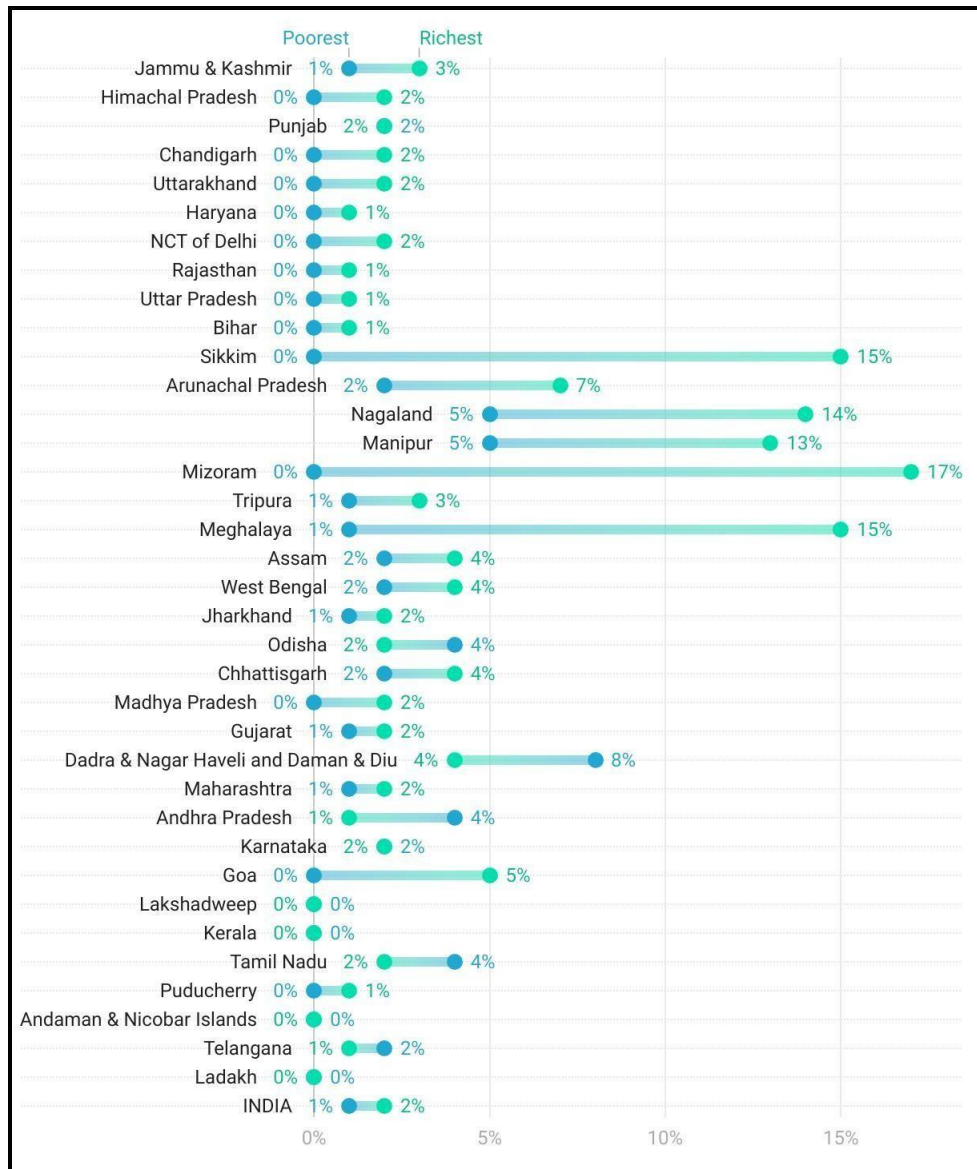
job categories often demand time, effort, and education, leading to delays in settling down. The relatively lower percentages of unmarried women in household/domestic services (2%) and agricultural roles (1%) may be due to traditional gender expectations in these sectors, where early marriage and family formation are often prioritized.

**Wealth index**

As can be seen in Figure 4, the wealthier families show a higher percentage of never-

married women. This trend points to the assumption that women’s financial freedom enables them to either defer or opt out of marriage, supporting traditional feminism’s critique of marriage as an institution that primarily brought disadvantages to women (Stacey, 1996). However, in certain states such as Mizoram, where 17 per cent of the never-married women resided in affluent households, money can be thought of as a shield against the pressure to marry (Bhuwania et al., 2024).

**Figure 4.** Percentage of never-married women in India by poorest and richest



Source: Prepared from National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

In wealthier households, women may experience less pressure to marry for financial stability. Economic independence offers the freedom to pursue personal and professional aspirations, delaying or even avoiding the traditional path of marriage. This is consistent with feminist critiques of marriage as a limiting institution and reflects broader societal shifts towards individualization, where financial stability offers women greater autonomy in shaping their life paths. The data underscores how economic resources can act as a buffer against societal pressures, allowing women more freedom to make personal choices, including the decision to remain single.

### *Religious affiliation*

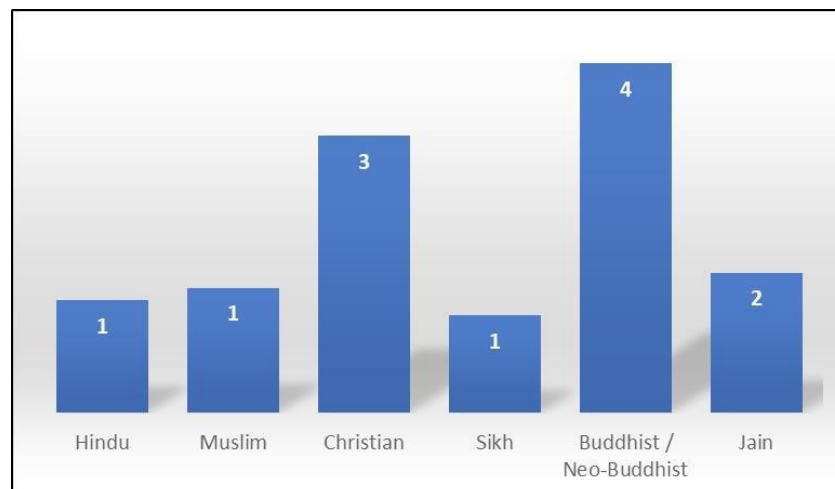
As seen in Figure 5, Buddhist women had the largest percentage of never-married women. Christians, Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist, and Jains have comparatively greater numbers of single women than do Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs (Kaur & Singh, 2013). Among Christians, Buddhists, and Neo-Buddhists, the percentage of single women is greater than that of Hindus and Muslims. **\*\***In Buddhism, traditional marital expectations may not be as pronounced or

obligatory compared in other religions. This fosters an environment where women may feel empowered to remain single, especially if marriage conflicts with their personal aspirations or spiritual pursuits.

Christian women, particularly in northeastern states like Mizoram and Nagaland show higher proportions of never-married women. This is largely attributed to higher levels of education and professional attainment among Christian communities in these regions. Christians in these areas tend to prioritize education and career development, which often leads to delayed or forgone marriages.

In contrast, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women have lower percentages of never-married individuals. These religious groups tend to have more traditional views on marriage, often emphasizing the importance of early marriage and family formation. For instance, in Hinduism, marriage is viewed as a sacred duty, particularly for women, who are often encouraged to marry within a certain age range as part of fulfilling religious and social obligations. The relatively lower percentages among Muslim women may be influenced by cultural norms that promote marriage at younger ages, especially in more conservative or rural areas where marriage

**Figure 5.** Percentage of never-married women (30+) in India by religion



Source: Prepared from National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

remains central to social life and women's identities. Sikh women, although often progressive in terms of gender roles, may also experience cultural pressures to marry at younger ages, particularly in traditional family structures.

### Caste dynamics

According to Figure 6, Scheduled Tribe women have a slightly higher proportion of never-married status compared to the other castes, but still, the percentage is not much, probably it is due to some uniqueness. These changes are also a result of the traits of the group such as being open about single status. It is quite possible cultural factors that cherish personality (A. Sen, 2006). Tribal societies are also known for more fluid and flexible gender roles, where women often enjoy greater economic independence and freedom compared to women in more rigidly patriarchal caste-based societies. This social structure may allow women to prioritize autonomy and delay or forgo marriage.

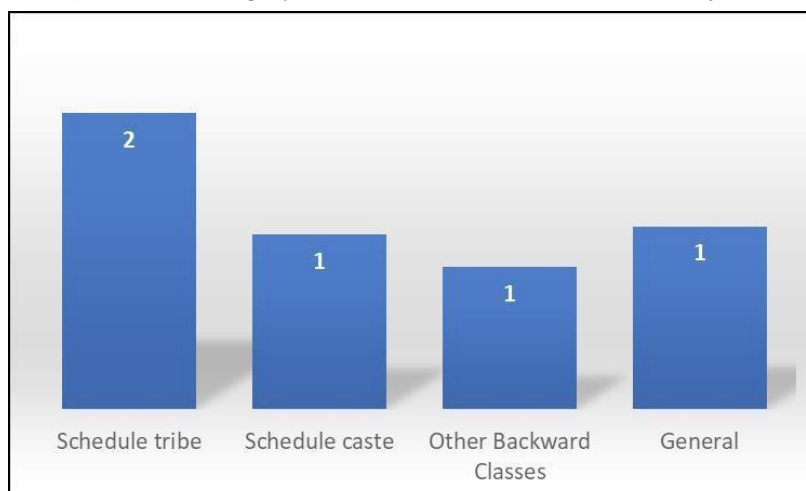
By contrast, in SC, OBC and General categories, societal norms regarding marriage tend to be more rigidly defined, and women may face greater pressure to marry within specific age ranges due to both

caste and class expectations. Marriage can serve as a way to maintain social cohesion and reinforce caste boundaries, making it more socially obligatory for women in these categories to marry.

This binary logistic regression table shows the odds of women never marrying based on various independent variables.

The positive coefficient ( $\beta=0.707$ ) for rural residents indicates that women in rural areas have a lower likelihood of never marrying compared to urban areas. The odds of being never married for urban women are approximately 2.03 times higher than for rural women. As education levels increase, the odds of being never-married also increase. For example, women with primary education are 5.53 times more likely to be never married than those without education. Professional, technical, and also managerial occupations have the highest impact, with an odds ratio of 7.601. Compared to the poorest wealth index, the log odds of being never-married for the poorer category are increased by 0.508. Different religious affiliations affect the odds of being never-married. Muslims, Christians and Buddhists have higher odds compared to Hindus. The odds are highest for Buddhists (OR=3.189). Jain religion does not have a statistically significant impact on

**Figure 6.** Percentage of never-married women (30+) in India by caste



Source: Prepared from National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

the odds of being never-married. The caste variable shows mixed results. Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste and General categories do not have statistically significant effects on the odds of being never-married. Other Backward Classes have lower odds (OR=0.697) compared to Scheduled Caste, indicating a decreased likelihood of being never-married.

Urban residence, higher education, certain occupations (Professional and

Manual) higher wealth index, and specific religious affiliations (Muslim, Christian, Buddhist) are associated with higher odds of being never married among women above 30 ages. On the other hand, being in rural areas, having no education and belonging to certain caste categories (OBC) are associated with lower odds of being never-married.

The binary logistic regression results corroborate with the earlier findings, indicating that urban residence, higher

**Table 3.** Results of binary logistic regression analysis

Variables	Categories	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Place of Residence	Rural ®					
	Urban	0.707	0.000	2.028	1.916	2.146
Education	No Education®		0.000			
	Primary	1.710	0.000	5.529	5.103	5.991
	Secondary	1.570	0.000	4.807	4.342	5.323
	Higher	1.198	0.000	3.313	3.092	3.551
Occupation	Not Working ®		0.000			
	Professional/technical/managerial	2.028	0.000	7.601	3.016	19.153
	Clerical	0.818	0.091	2.265	0.878	5.848
	Sales	0.937	0.098	2.553	0.841	7.753
	Services/household and domestic	1.161	0.020	3.193	1.205	8.458
	Agricultural	1.440	0.003	4.219	1.623	10.964
	Skilled and Unskilled Manual	2.552	0.000	12.837	4.982	33.076
	Others	1.726	0.000	5.616	2.175	14.502
Wealth Index	Poorest ®		0.000			
	Poorer	0.508	0.000	1.661	1.512	1.826
	Middle	0.394	0.000	1.483	1.358	1.620
	Richer	0.330	0.000	1.391	1.278	1.513
	Richest	0.142	0.000	1.153	1.065	1.248
Religion	Hindu ®		0.000			
	Muslim	1.016	0.000	2.763	2.024	3.772
	Christian	0.907	0.000	2.478	1.800	3.412
	Sikh	0.095	0.573	1.100	0.790	1.531
	Buddhists	1.160	0.000	3.189	2.159	4.710
	Jain	-0.143	0.448	0.867	0.599	1.255
Caste	Scheduled Caste ®		0.000			
	Scheduled Tribe	0.177	0.277	1.194	0.867	1.643
	Other Backward Classes	-0.361	0.028	0.697	0.505	0.962
	General	0.387	0.017	1.472	1.072	2.021

Source: Calculated from National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

education, professional occupations and specific religious affiliations are associated with higher odds of being never married. These results align with the “Social Change Theory”, which emphasizes how changing social and economic conditions impact individual behaviors and societal norms.

## Conclusion

Over the years 2005–2021, this study offers a thorough analysis of the socio-demographic trend and factors influencing Indian women who are 30 years of age and older but have never married. While the national percentage of single women in this age group is very low, some states- namely Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram show a comparatively higher proportion of unmarried women in their 30s. Furthermore, several areas in these states exhibit a notable concentration of single women.

There is a clear disparity between rural and urban communities, according to the data, with urban women roughly twice as likely to remain single as their rural counterparts. This implies that the phenomenon of never getting married is closely linked to urbanization, but living in a rural area seems to counteract this trend. One of the most important indicators of never getting married is educational attainment, with the probability of staying single increasing with an increasing level of education. Significant occupational inequalities are also identified by the study, with women working in managerial, and technical, and women who work in manual labor and agriculture also have higher odds of not getting married. Significant occupational inequalities are also identified by the study, with women working in managerial, technical, and professional having a greater proportion of never-married. On the other hand, women who work in manual labor and agriculture also have higher odds of not getting married.

Marriage patterns are also influenced by economic position; a distinct wealth gradient shows that women from wealthier families are more likely to stay single than women from weaker economic backgrounds. By contrast, no clear pattern is seen when it comes to religious affiliations, with Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains having differing likelihood of staying unmarried. Regarding caste, there are differences in the relationships between never-married and the scheduled caste and other backward class categories, but there are no meaningful connections between the Scheduled Tribe and General categories.

The results highlight the intricate and diverse characteristics of singlehood among Indian women over 30, which are influenced by the interplay of urbanization, education, occupation and wealth (Visaria & Ved, 2016). The study advances knowledge of the changing societal variables that impact marriage decisions generally and among women from affluent urban areas in particular. These understandings are essential for developing policy interventions that cater to the unique requirements and difficulties faced by single women in a range of socio-demographic settings. The results emphasize the need for more investigation to identify the institutional, sociological, and cultural elements behind these trends, to create focused interventions that encourage autonomy in marriage choices, and to enhance the well-being of single women in India.

## Declaration of Ownership

This article is my original work.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

## Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

## References

- Abalos, J. B. (2023). Do Filipinos still say “I do”? The continuing increase in non-marriage and cohabitation in the Philippines. *Journal of Family Issues*, 45(5), 1326–1349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X231182366>
- Ahuvia, A. C., & Adelman, M. B. (1992). Formal intermediaries in the marriage market: A typology and review. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 54(2), 452–463. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353076>
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446218693>
- Becker, G. S. (1991). *A treatise on the family: Enlarged edition*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv322v4rc>
- Bhuwania, P., Mukherji, A., & Swaminathan, H. (2024). Women’s education through empowerment: Evidence from a community-based program. *World Development Perspectives*, 33, 100568. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wdp.2024.100568>
- Campbell, T. L. (2003). The effectiveness of family interventions for physical disorders. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 29(2), 263–281. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2003.tb01204.x>
- Cargan, L. (1986). Stereotypes of singles: A cross-cultural comparison. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 27(3–4), 200–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002071528602700305>
- Cherlin, A. (1990). Recent changes in American fertility, marriage, and divorce. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 510, 145–154.
- Chintsanya, J. M. N. (2015). *Understanding the puzzle of high fertility and high contraceptive use in Malawi* [Master Thesis]. University of Southampton.
- Clover, D. (2003). *International encyclopedia of marriage and family*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09504120310490570>
- Croll, E. (1985). Lives: Chinese working women. Edited by Mary Sheridan and Janet W. Salaff. [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984]. *The China Quarterly*, 102, 341–342. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000030071>
- DePaulo, B. (2019). *Around the world, marriage is declining, singles are rising*. Psychology Today Canada. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/living-single/201908/around-the-world-marriage-is-declining-singles-are-rising>
- Forsyth, C. J., & Johnson, E. L. (1995). A sociological view of the never married. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 25(2), 91–104.
- Frazier, P., Arikian, N., Benson, S., Losoff, A., & Maurer, S. (1996). Desire for marriage and life satisfaction among unmarried heterosexual adults. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 13(2), 225–239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407596132004>
- Gordon, T. (1994). *Single women: On the margins?* NYU Press.
- Goswami, B. (2012). *An investigation into the pattern of delayed marriage in India* (Working Paper No. 275). Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. <https://econpapers.repec.org/paper/schwpaper/275.htm>
- Hamilton, E. A., Gordon, J. R., & Whelan-Berry, K. S. (2006). Understanding the work-life conflict of never-married women without children. *Women in Management*

- Review*, 21(5), 393–415. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420610676208>
- Inglehart, R. (2003). *Rising tide: Gender equality and cultural change around the world*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jiji, A. (2000). Emerging adulthood. A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *The American Psychologist*, 55(5), 45–66. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10842426/>
- Jones, G. W. (2009). Women, marriage and family in Southeast Asia. *Gender trends in Southeast Asia: Women now, women in the future*, 12–30. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/gender-trends-in-southeast-asia/women-marriage-and-family-in-southeast-asia/AC9D29D960D4C87F3AEFF76BE4607C9F>
- Kaur, G., & Singh, S. (2013). Changing patterns of marriage in Indian society. *Indian Journal of Economics and Development*, 9(3), 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.5958/j.2322-0430.9.3.010>
- Keith, P. M. (1986). Isolation of the unmarried in later life. *Family Relations*, 35(3), 389–395. <https://doi.org/10.2307/584366>
- Lesthaeghe, R. (2010). The unfolding story of the second demographic transition. *Population and Development Review*, 36(2), 211–251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2010.00328.x>
- Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (1995). Why marry? Race and the transition to marriage among cohabitators. *Demography*, 32(4), 509–520. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2061671>
- Mustard, D. J. (2000). Spinster: An evolving stereotype revealed through film. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 4, 1–6.
- Nakray, K. (Ed.). (2012). *Gender-based violence and public health: International perspectives on budgets and policies*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203077344>
- Pelikh, A. (2019). *Transition to adulthood in England and Wales: The analysis of life trajectories of young adults*. University of Liverpool.
- Podhisita, C., & Xenos, P. (2015). Living alone in South and Southeast Asia: An analysis of census data. *Demographic Research*, 32(41), 1113–1146. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2015.32.41>
- Poppel, F. V., Liebroer, A. C., Vermunt, J. K., & Smeenk, W. (2001). Love, necessity and opportunity: Changing patterns of marital age homogamy in the Netherlands, 1850–1993. *Population Studies*, 55(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324720127681>
- Schwenk, F. N. (1992). Income and expenditures of older widowed, divorced, and never-married women who live alone. *Family Economics Review*, 5(1), 2–8.
- Sen, A. (2006). *The argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian history, culture, and identity*. Picador.
- Sen, R. (2020). Transformations in kinship relations in a globalized India: Interrogating marriage, law, and intimacy. *Challenges of Globalization and Prospects for an Inter-civilizational World Order*, 605–619. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44058-9\\_32](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44058-9_32)
- Simon, B. (2010). *Never married women*. Temple University Press.
- Smith, D. S. (1986). Liberty, a better husband. Single women in America: The generations of 1780-1840. By Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller (Book Review). *Journal of Social History*, 19(4), 714–722. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh/19.4.714>
- Spreider, E., & Riley, L. E. (1974). Factors associated with singlehood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 36(3), 533–542. <https://doi.org/10.2307/350724>
- Stacey, J. (with Internet Archive). (1996). *In the name of the family: Rethinking family values in the postmodern age*. Beacon Press. <http://archive.org/details/innameoffamilyre00stac>



- Stein, P. J. (1975). Singlehood: An alternative to marriage. *The Family Coordinator*, 24(4), 489–503. <https://doi.org/10.2307/583033>
- Stolk, Y., & Brotherton, P. (1981). Attitudes towards single women. *Sex Roles*, 7(1), 73–78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00290900>
- Sullivan, R. E. (2008). Singled out: How singles are stereotyped, stigmatized, and ignored, and still live happily ever after. *Contemporary Sociology*, 37(2), 148–149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009430610803700229>
- Thatal, N. (2021). *Sociological inquiry into the lives of never-married women: A study of Sikkim* [PhD Thesis]. Sikkim University.
- van der Lippe, T., Voorpostel, M., & Hewitt, B. (2014). Disagreements among cohabiting and married couples in 22 European countries. *Demographic Research*, 31, 247–274. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26350064>
- Vepa, S. S., & Viswanathan, B. (Eds.). (2020). *Undernutrition, agriculture and public provisioning: The impact on women and children in India*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429344299>
- Visaria, L., & Ved, R. R. (2016). *India's family planning programme: Policies, practices and challenges*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315652498>