Research Paper

Family, Personality, and Mate Selection: Exploring Discrepancies Between Young Adults' and Parents' Preferences

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ABSTRACT

Mate preferences are influenced by a complex interplay of individual characteristics, cultural norms, and family expectations. This study explores the discrepancies between young adults' and their parents' preferences in mate selection, with a particular focus on the role of family allocentrism and Big-5 personality traits. Conducted in Kerala, India, a culturally collectivist context, this research compares the ideal partner preferences of young adults with their perceptions of their parents' preferences. It was hypothesized that young adults' mate preferences would differ significantly from their perceptions of parental preferences, that there would be significant gender differences in mate preferences of young adults, that higher levels of family allocentrism would lead to a closer alignment between young adults' preferences and their parents' preferences and that personality traits would be associated with greater differences between young adults' and parental mate preferences. Using a sample of 300 college students, the study investigates three key dimensions of mate selection: warmth-trustworthiness, vitality-attractiveness, and status-resources. Data were gathered through well-established scales, including the Ideal Partner Scale, Family Allocentrism Scale, and Big Five Inventory-2 Short Form. Paired t-tests, independent t-tests, and Pearson's correlation analysis were used to test the hypotheses. The results reveal significant differences in the preferences of young adults and their parents, with young adults prioritizing warmth-trustworthiness and vitality-attractiveness, while parents emphasize status-resources. Family allocentrism and personality traits, such as neuroticism and agreeableness, significantly influenced these discrepancies, with individuals higher in family allocentrism aligning more closely with parental expectations. Females consider status-resources as ideal partner characteristics more than males. The findings highlight the role of cultural and familial factors in shaping mate preferences, demonstrating the complexity of mate selection in collectivist societies. This research contributes to the understanding of intergenerational dynamics in mate preferences and the impact of personality traits in navigating these differences.

Keywords: *Mate Preferences, Family Allocentrism, Personality Traits*

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Mate preferences, or the traits individuals seek in romantic partners, are complex and shaped by individual characteristics, cultural norms, and family expectations. Ideal mate preferences refer to the characteristics or traits individuals desire in a romantic partner, encompassing dimensions such as warmth-trustworthiness (e.g., kindness, emotional support), vitality-attractiveness (e.g., physical appeal, energy), and status-resources (e.g., wealth, social position) (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). The interplay between these factors is particularly pronounced in collectivist societies, where family influences may strongly affect individuals' mate choices. In collectivist contexts, family allocentrism, or the prioritization of family needs and goals over individual desires, plays a critical role. It reflects a cultural orientation that emphasizes interdependence, family cohesion, and adherence to familial expectations (Hui & Triandis, 1986). Personality traits have also been linked to variations in mate preferences, impacting how individuals prioritize compatibility, kindness, or stability in relationships (Furnham, 2009; Vasudevan, 2020). Big-5 personality theory is a widely accepted framework for understanding personality, encompassing five dimensions: Openness to experience – a tendency toward curiosity, creativity, and openness to new ideas; Conscientiousness – traits related to organization, responsibility, and goal-directed behavior; Extraversion – characteristics involving sociability, energy, and assertiveness; Agreeableness – qualities such as kindness, empathy, and cooperativeness and Neuroticism – a predisposition toward emotional instability, anxiety, and mood swings (McCrae & Costa, 1999). In societies like India, where family allocentrism is highly valued, young adults must often balance personal preferences with parental ideals, which emphasize factors like social stability, socio-economic status, and cultural compatibility over romantic attraction (Patel et al., 2011; Shukla et al., 2007). These tensions between young adults' and parents' mate preferences provide fertile ground for research. In such contexts, young adults often navigate between personal preferences and family ideals, balancing individual desires with culturally ingrained family expectations (Khallad, 2005; Hofstede, 2001).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In India, where family allocentrism is valued, personal preferences are weighed alongside parental expectations, which often emphasize social stability, socio-economic status, and cultural compatibility over romantic attraction (Patel et al., 2011; Shukla et al., 2007). The gendered dimensions of mate selection have been widely studied and are central to understanding mate preferences. Evolutionary perspectives suggest that, across cultures, men often prioritize physical attractiveness while women value resources and status—traits associated with reproductive health and social stability, respectively (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Furnham, 2009). However, these preferences are not universally rigid and may be influenced by cultural factors. Research shows that cultural values moderate gender differences in mate preferences, with collectivist cultures often prioritizing parental input and familial expectations over individual choice (Khallad, 2005). Personality variables have been shown to influence individual mate preferences. Individuals high in agreeableness are more likely to value traits related to kindness and warmth, while those with high neuroticism may prioritize emotional support and stability (South, 1991; Vasudevan, 2020). Research suggests that personality traits may shape preferences independently of gender, adding another layer of variation in mate selection criteria (Schmitt, 2005; Furnham, 2009). Despite these findings, limited research has examined how personality traits interact with family allocentrism in shaping mate preferences, especially in collectivist settings. Existing studies often focus on either personality or cultural influences, without addressing the interaction between familial and personal influences on mate preferences. This study addresses this gap by examining young adults' mate preferences in Kerala, India, a culturally collectivist

context where family involvement in mate selection is common. By comparing young adults' mate preferences with their perceptions of parental preferences, the study explores how family allocentrism and Big-5 personality traits contribute to discrepancies between personal and familial mate preferences.

The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to examine the differences between young adults' mate preferences and what they believe their parents prefer in a partner; (2) to analyze gender differences in young adults' mate preferences (3) to analyze how family allocentrism influences the discrepancies between young adults' and parental preferences and (3) to assess how Big-5 personality traits affect these differences. It was hypothesized that (1) young adults' mate preferences would differ significantly from their perceptions of parental preferences (2) there would be significant gender differences in mate preferences of young adults (2) higher levels of family allocentrism would lead to a closer alignment between young adults' preferences and what they believe their parents prefer in a partner and (3) personality traits, would be associated with greater differences between young adults' and parental mate preferences.

METHODOLOGY

The study is exploratory in nature and uses a correlational design. The sample consists of 300 college students (aged 18-27 years) from various higher education institutions in Kerala. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, ensuring a diverse representation of gender, religion, and socio-economic status. The study employed several scales to assess various constructs – 1) A personal data schedule to assess basic sociodemographic details, 2) Ideal Partner Scale (Fletcher et al., 1999) to measure preferences for mate attributes across three subscales: warmth-trustworthiness (e.g., "supportive," "good listener"), vitality-attractiveness (e.g., "nice body," "sexy"), and status-resources (e.g., "good job," "financially secure"), 3) Family Allocentrism Scale (Lay et al., 1998) to measure the extent of family closeness or connectedness, using a 5-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .80 and 4) Big Five Inventory-2 Short Form (Soto & John, 2015) to assess personality traits based on the Big Five dimensions. The test-retest reliability of the entire scale was 0.83 and average alpha reliabilities of 0.78 for the domain scales. Data was collected via Google Forms, with clear instructions provided to participants. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without consequences. Paired t-tests, independent t-tests, and Pearson's correlation were used to test the hypotheses, utilizing SPSS for statistical analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to (1) explore the differences between young adults' mate preferences and their perceptions of parental preferences, (2) examine gender differences in young adults' mate preferences, (4) examine how family allocentrism influences the discrepancy between young adults' and their parents' preferences and (5) assess the impact of Big-5 personality traits on these differences. It was hypothesized that (1) young adults' preferences would differ significantly from their perceptions of parental preferences, (2) there will gender differences in adults' mate preferences (3) higher family allocentrism would lead to closer alignment between the two and (4) certain personality traits would contribute to greater differences between young adults' and parental preferences.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Category	Subcategory	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)
Participant Gender	Female	80.5%	235
	Male	19.5%	57
Religion	Hindu	83.6%	245
	Christian	6.8%	20
	Muslim	8.2%	24
	Other	1.4%	4
Participant Educational Status	Undergraduate	56%	159
	Post-graduate	25%	70
	Diploma	3%	8
	Professional Courses	16%	47
Parents' Education	SSLC & Below	Father: 51% Mother: 33%	Father: 150 Mother: 96
	Plus-2	Father: 21% Mother: 29%	Father: 61 Mother: 86
	Graduate	Father: 19% Mother: 21%	Father: 57 Mother: 63
	Post-graduate	Father: 6% Mother: 11%	Father: 16 Mother: 31
	Professional Degree	Father: 3% Mother: 6%	Father: 9 Mother: 17
Parents' Occupation	Not working	Father: 33% Mother: 61%	Father: 96 Mother: 26
	Working for Daily wages	Father: 33% Mother: 9%	Father: 96 Mother: 26
	Self-employed/ Business	Father: 24% Mother: 4%	Father: 70 Mother: 12
	Private Jobs	Father: 14% Mother: 12%	Father: 40 Mother: 35
	Government Jobs	Father: 17% Mother: 14%	Father: 49 Mother: 40

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants in terms of gender, religion, educational background, parental education and occupation. The sample consisted predominantly of females (80.5%) and was mainly Hindu (83.6%). Most participants were pursuing undergraduate degrees (56%), with fathers generally having lower educational qualifications than mothers. The majority of fathers were employed, while 61% of mothers were not working.

Table 2 Paired Samples t-test for Young Adults' Mate Preferences and Perceived Parental Preferences

Trait	Preference type	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Warmth-trustworthiness	Young Adults	293	36.58	6.18	4.356	292	.000
	Perceived Parental	293	34.86	7.88			
Vitality-Attractiveness	Young Adults	293	25.04	5.57	1.923	292	.005
	Perceived Parental	293	24.42	6.26			
Status-resources	Young Adults	293	46.14	12.94	-15.224	292	.000
	Perceived Parental	293	58.25	13.58			

The paired samples t-test results highlight key differences between young adults' mate preferences and their perceptions of parental preferences across three traits: warmth-trustworthiness, vitality-attractiveness, and status-resources. These findings offer valuable insights into the interplay between individual and familial mate selection criteria. The significant t-value (t = 4.356, p < .001) indicates a notable difference between young adults' and perceived parental preferences for warmth-trustworthiness. Young adults (M = 36.58, SD = 6.18) scored higher on this trait compared to their perceptions of their parents' preferences (M = 34.86, SD = 7.88). This suggests that young adults prioritize emotional warmth and reliability in a partner more than they believe their parents do. This finding aligns with research indicating that young adults often seek partners who fulfill emotional needs and provide psychological support, reflecting contemporary values of companionship and trust in relationships (Furnham, 2009). For vitality-attractiveness, the t-value (t = 1.923, p = .005) also reveals a significant difference, albeit less pronounced. Young adults (M = 25.04, SD = 5.57) placed slightly greater emphasis on this trait compared to their perceptions of parental preferences (M = 24.42, SD = 6.26). This finding reflects the modern emphasis on physical appeal and energy in romantic relationships, which may be less critical in the context of parental preferences, where practical considerations like compatibility and stability often dominate (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). A striking result is observed for status-resources, where the t-value (t = -15.224, p < .001) indicates a strong and significant reversal. Young adults (M = 46.14, SD = 12.94) rated this trait much lower than their perceptions of parental preferences (M = 58.25, SD = 13.58). This suggests that parents prioritize financial stability, education, and social status in a prospective partner more than young adults do. This is consistent with findings from collectivist cultures like India, where families often emphasize these factors to ensure long-term stability and social compatibility (Khallad, 2005; Shukla et al., 2007).

Table 3 Independent Samples t-test between Females and Males

Trait	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Warmth-trustworthiness	Female	235	36.62	6.56	0.180	290	.857
	Male	57	36.46	4.40			
Vitality-Attractiveness	Female	235	24.91	5.73	-0.648	290	.517
	Male	57	25.44	4.77			
Status-resources	Female	235	47.94	12.58	5.086	290	.000
	Male	57	38.60	11.80			

The independent samples t-test results provide insights into gender-based differences in young adults' mate preferences for warmth-trustworthiness, vitality-attractiveness, and status-resources. These findings highlight areas of convergence and divergence between males and females in their priorities when evaluating potential partners. The analysis for warmth-trustworthiness (t = 0.180, p = .857) shows no significant difference between females (M = 36.62, SD = 6.56) and males (M = 36.46, SD = 4.40). This suggests that both genders place a similar emphasis on emotional warmth, kindness, and reliability in a partner. These results align with previous studies indicating that warmth-trustworthiness is a universally valued trait in mate selection, as it fosters long-term relational stability and mutual care (Fletcher et al., 1999; Buss & Schmitt, 1993). For vitality-attractiveness (t = -0.648, p = .517), the difference between females (M = 24.91, SD = 5.73) and males (M = 25.44, SD = 4.77) is also not statistically significant. This finding contrasts with earlier evolutionary studies suggesting that men generally prioritize physical attractiveness more than women (Buss, 1989). The lack of significant gender difference here may reflect a shift

in societal norms, where both genders value physical appeal to a similar extent as part of personal compatibility and mutual attraction (Eastwick et al., 2014). The results for status-resources (t = 5.086, p < .001) indicate a significant gender difference, with females (M = 47.94, SD = 12.58) scoring higher than males (M = 38.60, SD = 11.80). This aligns with evolutionary and socio-cultural theories positing that women often prioritize financial stability, social status, and resource availability in a mate due to historical roles in child-rearing and resource dependency (Trivers, 1972; Buss & Schmitt, 1993). The lower male emphasis on status-resources suggests a focus on other traits, potentially due to societal shifts emphasizing equality and shared responsibilities in relationships.

Table 4 Correlation Coefficients Between Discrepancy in Mate Preferences between Young Adults and their Parents across dimensions, Family Allocentrism, and Big-5 Personality Traits

Discrepancy	FA	Big-5 E	Big-5 A	Big-5 C	Big-5 N	Big-5 O
Warmth-trustworthiness	-.050	-.053	-.015	-.076	.092	-.003
Vitality-Attractiveness	-.037	-.069	-.074	-.092	.146*	-.019
Status-resources	.251**	.-.014	.143*	-.049	.232**	.145*

FA – Family Allocentrism; Big-5 E – Extraversion; Big-5 A – Agreeableness; Big-5 C – Conscientiousness; Big-5 N – Neuroticism; Big-5 O – Openness to experience.
*p<.05 - *, p<.01 - ***

The correlation between discrepancy in warmth-trustworthiness and the studied variables shows no significant relationships. Family allocentrism (r = -.050) and all Big-5 traits (Extraversion: r = -.053, Agreeableness: r = -.015, Conscientiousness: r = -.076, Neuroticism: r = .092, Openness: r = -.003) exhibit weak associations. This suggests that the alignment or divergence in warmth-trustworthiness preferences is relatively unaffected by these variables, potentially indicating that this dimension is universally valued and less influenced by individual or familial characteristics. For vitality-attractiveness, neuroticism (r = .146, *p* < .05) is the only variable significantly associated with the discrepancy, suggesting that individuals high in neuroticism may place greater emphasis on physical appeal than they perceive their parents do. Family allocentrism (r = -.037) and other Big-5 traits show weak, non-significant correlations, indicating that vitality-attractiveness preferences are minimally influenced by familial orientation or traits like agreeableness, openness, or conscientiousness. The discrepancy in status-resources preferences shows the strongest associations with family allocentrism (r = .251, p < .01) and neuroticism (r = .232, p < .01), along with a significant relationship with agreeableness (r = .143, *p* < .05). These results indicate that individuals with higher family allocentrism are more likely to align their preferences with their parents' emphasis on status-resources. Similarly, individuals higher in neuroticism appear more attuned to parental expectations in this domain, possibly due to their focus on stability and security. Agreeableness, associated with cooperation and harmony, may contribute to aligning personal and parental preferences regarding resources.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights significant differences between young adults' mate preferences and their perceptions of parental expectations. Young adults prioritize traits like attractiveness and vitality, reflecting individualistic values and modern relationship ideals, whereas parents emphasize status and resources, which align with collectivist and pragmatic concerns about long-term stability. Gender-based differences further illuminate the dynamics of mate preferences. Female young adults placed significantly higher importance on status-resources

compared to males, aligning with socio-cultural and evolutionary perspectives that emphasize resource acquisition in mate selection. Family allocentrism significantly influences alignment with parental preferences, especially in the domain of status-resources. This finding underscores the central role of family values in collectivist societies like India, where familial harmony often guides personal decisions. Neuroticism and agreeableness are significantly associated with discrepancies in mate preferences, with neuroticism linked to greater sensitivity to parental expectations and agreeableness fostering alignment in resource-related preferences. These results demonstrate the importance of individual psychological traits in navigating intergenerational dynamics. Traits like warmth-trustworthiness showed minimal discrepancies between young adults and their parents, suggesting a universal emphasis on emotional connection and dependability across generations.

These findings emphasize the importance of understanding the interplay between individual preferences, family influence, and personality traits in addressing intergenerational conflicts in mate selection. The study provides insights into collectivist cultures where familial involvement in marriage decisions is significant, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive interventions. Programs promoting open communication, such as workshops for young adults and parents, can help bridge gaps between individual desires and family expectations. Additionally, the results underscore evolving gender dynamics and the balance between traditional roles and modern values, paving the way for future research on how individualism and cultural shifts influence mate preferences. By offering practical strategies to manage relational conflicts, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of mate preferences in evolving societal contexts.

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How to cite this article: Gopika, P. & Menon, M. (2024). Family, Personality, and Mate Selection: Exploring Discrepancies Between Young Adults' and Parents' Preferences. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *12*(4), 1676-1683. DIP:18.01.158.20241204, DOI:10.25215/1204.158