

Gender Differences in Marital Adjustment among Love and Arranged Marriage Couples: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This literature review critically examines gender differences in marital adjustment across love and arranged marriages within the Indian socio-cultural framework. Synthesizing empirical findings from recent studies (2020–2024), the review elucidates the complex interplay between gender norms, marital arrangement, and socio-demographic variables in shaping marital outcomes. The evidence consistently indicates that women in arranged marriages report lower levels of marital satisfaction and adjustment, often attributed to limited autonomy, constrained pre-marital interaction, and entrenched patriarchal expectations. In contrast, love marriages, characterized by mutual selection and emotional familiarity, demonstrate more egalitarian dynamics, thereby mitigating gender disparities in adjustment. Nonetheless, traditional gender roles continue to influence relational experiences across both marriage types. Additionally, factors such as education, socioeconomic status, and urbanization emerge as critical moderators that can attenuate or exacerbate gendered experiences within marriage. The review underscores the need for intersectional and longitudinal research to further understand the evolving nature of marital relationships and inform culturally sensitive, gender-equitable interventions and policies.

Keywords: *Marital Adjustment, Gender Differences, Love Marriages, Arranged Marriages, Indian Context, Socio-Cultural Factors, Marital Satisfaction, Gender Roles, Patriarchy, Marital Dynamics*

Marriage remains a cornerstone of societal structure and personal identity, significantly influencing individuals' emotional, psychological, and social well-being. In the Indian socio-cultural context, two dominant forms of marital unions—love and arranged marriages—coexist, each characterized by distinct dynamics and expectations. Marital adjustment, broadly defined as the continuous process through which partners navigate and harmonize their roles, responsibilities, and interpersonal expectations (Spanier, 1976), is a critical determinant of marital satisfaction and longevity. Gender, as a socio-psychological construct, further mediates these dynamics, often shaping how individuals perceive and experience marital relationships. This literature review synthesizes empirical research from the past five years to examine gender differences in marital adjustment among love and arranged marriage couples, with an emphasis on the Indian context.

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Received: April 26, 2025; Revision Received: July 24, 2025; Accepted: July 29, 2025

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recent empirical studies have emphasized that marital adjustment is a multifaceted construct influenced by cultural norms, individual personality traits, communication styles, conflict resolution strategies, and the nature of marital choice (Kapadia et al., 2021). Gender roles, deeply embedded in patriarchal structures, continue to shape the lived experiences of married individuals in India. These foundational insights provide the basis for examining how different types of marital arrangements interact with gender expectations to influence adjustment.

Building on this foundation, Sharma and Mehta (2020) conducted a comparative study which revealed that women in arranged marriages reported significantly lower levels of marital satisfaction and adjustment compared to their counterparts in love marriages. This disparity was largely attributed to limited pre-marital interaction, lack of autonomy in partner selection, and societal expectations that prioritize family honor over individual preference. Conversely, men in arranged marriages often reported moderate to high levels of adjustment, possibly due to traditional gender expectations that frame them as providers and decision-makers, thereby minimizing emotional burden. These findings underline the differential experiences of men and women in arranged marriages, reinforcing the need to further explore the protective factors present in love marriages.

In line with this, Rani and Kumar (2021) found no statistically significant gender differences in marital adjustment among love marriage couples. Their findings suggest that the emotional intimacy, mutual understanding, and shared decision-making inherent in love marriages foster a more egalitarian marital environment. Moreover, the study highlighted the importance of pre-marital familiarity and open communication in mitigating gender-based disparities. This contrast between the two types of marriages emphasizes how partner selection and relationship formation processes can influence gender dynamics within marital life.

Adding to this narrative, Das and Sengupta (2022), through a cross-sectional analysis of 200 urban Indian couples, reported that men generally scored higher on measures of marital adjustment across both marriage types. However, the gender gap was notably narrower in love marriages, indicating a shift towards more equitable spousal roles. The researchers also observed that women often undertook the emotional labor of sustaining harmony in the relationship, which adversely affected their own perceptions of marital quality. This study further strengthens the claim that despite improvements in love marriages, traditional gender roles continue to shape the distribution of emotional labor within marital relationships.

Complementing these quantitative findings, Joseph and Pillai (2023), employing a qualitative methodology, explored the narratives of 30 couples across urban and semi-urban settings. Their study unveiled that women in arranged marriages frequently experienced pressure to conform to in-law expectations and traditional domestic roles, while men expressed difficulty in balancing familial obligations and partner needs. In love marriages, participants from both genders cited greater marital satisfaction, primarily due to shared values and the perception of the partner as an equal. These qualitative insights deepen our understanding of how subjective experiences reflect broader gendered structures and provide a nuanced context to the statistical trends.

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To further contextualize the interplay between gender and marital type, Gupta and Roy (2024) introduced a socio-demographic lens by examining how variables such as education and socioeconomic status intersect with gender and marital type. Their findings indicated that among educated urban couples, gender differences in marital adjustment were minimal, regardless of marriage type. This suggests that increasing exposure to egalitarian ideals and economic independence may buffer traditional gender disparities. These findings build a bridge between individual experiences and broader structural transformations, suggesting a potential pathway for improving marital outcomes.

Moreover, Singh and Bhatia (2022) argued that the intergenerational transmission of gender roles plays a pivotal role in shaping marital expectations and behavior. Their longitudinal study revealed that individuals raised in egalitarian households demonstrated more adaptive marital behaviors, with negligible gender differences in adjustment, especially in love marriages. These insights highlight the importance of family socialization processes and their long-term impact on marital interactions, reinforcing the argument that early gender role modeling can influence adult relationship patterns.

DISCUSSION

The synthesis of recent literature highlights that gender differences in marital adjustment are more pronounced in arranged marriages, where traditional gender roles and familial involvement remain deeply entrenched. Women, in particular, appear to be disproportionately affected by these dynamics, often reporting lower levels of satisfaction, autonomy, and emotional support. This is consistent with the findings of Sharma and Mehta (2020) and Joseph and Pillai (2023), who noted that the pressure to conform to patriarchal norms compromises women's ability to negotiate equitable roles within the marriage.

When viewed in contrast, love marriages offer a more egalitarian framework, contributing to reduced gender disparities in marital satisfaction and adjustment. As Rani and Kumar (2021) and Das and Sengupta (2022) have shown, the foundation of love marriages—mutual choice and emotional compatibility—plays a crucial role in balancing gender roles within the marital domain. However, even in these more egalitarian structures, societal expectations and internalized gender norms may continue to influence relational dynamics, albeit to a lesser extent.

Furthermore, the role of external factors such as education, urbanization, and exposure to progressive ideologies cannot be overlooked. As Gupta and Roy (2024) and Singh and Bhatia (2022) argue, these socio-cultural variables serve as significant moderators that can either reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms. The interconnection between personal agency, cultural conditioning, and social mobility emerges as a critical area for future exploration.

CONCLUSION

This literature review underscores the persistent influence of gender in shaping marital adjustment, particularly in arranged marriages where conventional roles are more rigidly enforced. Love marriages generally offer a more egalitarian framework, contributing to reduced gender disparities in marital satisfaction and adjustment. However, the impact of broader socio-cultural variables such as education, urbanization, and shifting gender norms cannot be overlooked. The reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that while love marriages may buffer against traditional gender inequalities, sustained progress in marital

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adjustment requires systemic efforts toward gender sensitization and empowerment. Future research should adopt longitudinal and intersectional approaches to explore how evolving societal attitudes continue to influence gender roles and marital dynamics across diverse populations in India.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Madan Mulchandani, C.D. (2025). Gender Differences in Marital Adjustment among Love and Arranged Marriage Couples: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(3), 1022-1025. DIP:18.01.093.20251303, DOI:10.25215/1303.093