

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEGAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES [IJLSSS]

ISSN: 2584-1513 (Online)

Volume 3 | Issue 4 [2025] | Page 613 - 630

© 2025 International Journal of Legal Studies and Social Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlsss.com/>

In case of any queries or suggestions, kindly contact editor@ijlsss.com

THE DUAL BURDEN DILEMMA AND WOMEN'S REJECTION OF MARRIAGE: SOCIOECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY GAPS

-Akashi Khandelwal and Moyesha Sharma¹

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the dual burden dilemma refers to the expectation that women must balance both professional and domestic responsibilities if they are choosing to work after marriage. This issue has become increasingly relevant as women participate more in the workforce while still being expected to manage household duties. The pressures of fulfilling both roles often lead to significant stress, contributing to growing concerns about work-life balance.

This is leading to a new socioeconomic trend in contemporary society- the increasing rejection of marriage by women. This trend is particularly significant because marriage has historically been seen as a stabilizing institution for families and economies. The declining marriage rates among women reflect broader structural changes, including shifting gender norms, financial independence, and policy failures in supporting work-life balance.

This paper explores how economic independence, changing social norms, and work-life balance concerns influence women's decisions regarding marriage. It further examines how these decisions affect economic development, gender equity, and societal structures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In past years, there has been a noticeable shift in the way Indian women view marriage. As more women gain education, financial independence, and social confidence, they are increasingly questioning whether marriage—especially in its traditional form—fits into their lives. The literature surrounding this topic shows that the reasons behind this shift are not superficial or personal alone,

¹3rd-Year Students at the Institute of Law, Nirma University, Ahmedabad.

but are rooted in gender inequality, unequal distribution of labour, and changing values about freedom and fulfillment.

One major issue raised in the literature is the unequal burden of unpaid domestic and care work that continues to fall almost entirely on women—even those who work full-time jobs. The World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law 2022*² report explains that women often drop out of the workforce after marriage because they are expected to take care of the household and children with little to no help³. This leaves them exhausted, underpaid, and often dependent on their spouse. Even when women want to work, the demands of home and care leave them little choice but to step back. According to the report⁴, this imbalance is a major reason why many working women see marriage as a barrier rather than a support system.

Linked to this is the fact that women are also discriminated against in the workplace for being married or having children, while men are usually rewarded⁵. The literature notes that employers often assume married women or mothers will be less committed to their work. On the other hand, married men are seen as more responsible and stable, which can lead to promotions and higher pay. This unfair double standard discourages women from marrying, especially when they have worked hard to build careers of their own.

Many women today are also redefining the meaning of success and happiness. In the past, marriage was often seen as the ultimate goal for women, offering financial support, social respect, and a sense of purpose. But now, as Uma Shashikant writes, many women have found these things through their jobs, education, and personal growth instead. With their basic needs met, they no longer feel pressured to marry just for security or social approval. As Shashikant points out,

² World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2022* (World Bank Group 2022) <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099071624120594545>

³ World Bank, 'Nearly 2.4 Billion Women Globally Don't Have Same Economic Rights as Men' (1 March 2022) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/01/nearly-2-4-billion-women-globally-don-t-have-same-economic-rights-as-men>

⁴ Monisha Israni and Vikash Kumar, 'Gendered Work and Barriers in Employment Increase Unjust Work–Life Imbalance for Women: The Need for Structural Responses' (2021) *The International Journal of Community and Social Development* <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/25166026211040374>

⁵ David F Arena Jr, Sabrina D Volpone and Kristen P Jones, '(Overcoming) Maternity Bias in the Workplace: A Systematic Review' (2023) *Journal of Management* <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/01492063221086243>

modern women now have the freedom to choose whether or not they want to marry, rather than feeling like it is their only option.

Surveys support this cultural shift. A 2023 Bumble India study shows that 81% of Indian women say they feel secure being single, and 83% believe that focusing on themselves is more important than chasing romantic relationships⁶. These numbers highlight a growing sense of self-worth and confidence among women. Being single is no longer a sign of failure, but a valid and fulfilling lifestyle choice. For many, staying unmarried means being free to chase personal goals without compromise or sacrifice.

From an economic point of view, the literature also shows how women's full participation in the workforce is good not just for individuals, but for the country. The World Bank⁷ explains that if more women were able to work and earn like men, it could increase GDP in South Asia by as much as 51%. But this potential is being held back by the same challenges—unpaid care work, workplace discrimination, and rigid gender roles. While government programs like Start-Up India and Stree Shakti Yojana⁸ aim to support women entrepreneurs, their impact is still limited unless the deeper social and structural issues are addressed.

The paper also includes real-life stories that show how empowered women are reshaping their roles in society. For example, Priyanka Salot, who started a tech-based mattress company during her pregnancy, proves that when women are supported and resourced, they can balance business and personal life in ways that benefit both. Research further shows that when women control household income, they tend to spend more on essentials like food, health, and education, contributing to better family outcomes and long-term development.

⁶ WION News, 'Women in India Feel More at Ease Being Unmarried, Living Alone: Study' *WION News* https://www.wionews.com/entertainment/lifestyle/news-_1-women-in-india-feel-more-at-ease-being-unmarried-living-alone-study-550444

⁷ World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2022* (World Bank Group 2022) <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099071624120594545>

⁸ Fincash, 'Stree Shakti Scheme' *Fincash* https://www.fincash.com/l/loan/stree-shakti-scheme#google_vignette

At the national level, the Global Gender Gap Report 2023⁹ shows a mixed picture. While India has nearly closed the gender gap in education, women's economic participation is still very low, with only 36.7% of the gap closed in that area. This proves that the issue isn't about women lacking skills or knowledge—it's about social and structural barriers that keep them from using those skills to their full potential.

Finally, the literature suggests that the rejection of marriage is not just a personal preference but also a form of protest against the way marriage often treats women unfairly¹⁰. It questions why women should enter an institution that demands so much of their time, energy, and freedom, while offering little recognition or equal partnership in return. It is a call for a more equal system—at home, at work, and in society—where women don't have to choose between being successful and being themselves.

In summary, the literature combines policy reports, surveys, expert opinions, and real-world examples to paint a clear picture: many Indian women are choosing not to marry because they want to live freely, without the constraints that marriage often brings¹¹. They are rejecting outdated roles and expectations, and instead are building lives that reflect their ambitions, values, and sense of self-worth. Unless there are major changes—such as shared domestic responsibilities, flexible workplaces, and recognition of unpaid care work—this trend is likely to continue and grow stronger.

⁹ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2023* (20 June 2023) <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>

¹⁰ Mandy Len Catron, 'The Case Against Marriage' *The Atlantic* (July 2019) <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2019/07/case-against-marriage/591973/>

¹¹ Amit Mathur, 'The Rise of Delayed Marriage: Exploring Why Indian Women Are Choosing to Say "Not Yet"' *NCR Journal* (18 January 2025) <https://www.ncrjournal.com/post/the-rise-of-delayed-marriage-exploring-why-indian-women-are-choosing-to-say-not-yet>

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the economic and social factors contributing to women's decisions for denial of marriage?
2. How does the dual burden dilemma and the gender-specific social norms influence the women's well-being and her career growth?
3. How do patriarchal norms of different societies have evolved and the pay disparity impacted the status and opportunities of working women on national and international levels?
4. What future endeavours and initiatives is the government implementing to support and encourage women in the workforce while addressing the challenges of balancing professional and domestic responsibilities?

ISSUES DISCUSSED

- **The Dual Burden Dilemma:** The burden of paid and unpaid labour which many women face, affecting physical and mental well-being of women as they balance professional careers alongside household duties, an expectation deeply embedded in traditional societal norms. These pressures lead to challenges in managing work-life balance, affecting mental health and career advancement.
- **Changing Gender Norms:** Shifting societal attitudes towards gender roles and financial independence play a pivotal role in decisions surrounding marriage. How the traditional notions revolving around the idea of marriage as an essential institution have changed and liberalized. The sharing of household responsibilities has been redefined by changing gender roles.
- **Socioeconomic Trends:** The rejection of marriage by women highlights broader structural transformations in society, including gender equity and economic integration of women in workforce. The financial independence gives women a greater choice and freedom. This has significantly changed from the traditional view, wherein the condition and the identity of women was based on her marital status.
- **The Greater Impact:** The changing dynamics could result in greater impacts other than the shift in traditional gender norms and women empowerment. The far reaching impact of

this could be reduced birth rates and lower population growth. This could create a high dependency ratio and affect the availability of human capital globally.

CONNECTION WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

This article highlights how marriage and unpaid care work, especially done by women, play a hidden but important role in the economy. In many families, women are expected to take care of children, do household chores, look after elders, and provide emotional support—all without pay or formal recognition. This unpaid work is essential for society to function, but it is not counted in GDP or considered "economic" work.

Because of this, women's contributions are often ignored in economic policies and planning. This results in a dual burden—they do paid work outside the home but are still expected to manage most of the housework and caregiving responsibilities after coming home. This leaves them overworked and undervalued, reducing their productivity and well-being, and making it harder for them to progress in their careers.

The article also points out that marriage often brings financial dependency for women. Many have no steady income, own no property, and are not included in pension or social security systems. This makes them economically vulnerable, especially in cases of separation, abandonment, or widowhood. As a result, a large section of the female population is pushed toward poverty, affecting not just them but also the country's ability to grow in an inclusive and sustainable manner. But the times are changing as women are now becoming increasingly independent through education and employment.

An important question raised is: What if women stop getting married? We're already seeing this trend in countries like Japan and South Korea. If large numbers of women choose not to marry and refuse to do unpaid care work, then someone else will have to do it—paid workers or public services. This could shift a lot of currently "invisible" work into the formal economy, creating new jobs in areas like childcare, elder care, and domestic help.

This change would push the government and society to seriously rethink how care work is valued and supported. Policies would need to include better child care systems, caregiver allowances, pensions, and legal recognition of unpaid work. Such steps can lead to a more equal and balanced economy, where both men and women can participate fairly, and all forms of work—paid or unpaid—are respected and included in economic planning.

UNDERSTANDING THE DUAL BURDEN DILEMMA

In traditional families, women were expected to stay at home and do all the household work. Even today, despite more number of females going to school and getting jobs, many people still expect them to take care of the house. This creates an unfair situation. Most of the time, women do not get paid for their work at home. Tasks like looking after children, cooking, and cleaning are not seen as “real work,” even though they are very important. Now, things are slowly changing. More people are starting to see the value of women’s work, and women are also earning money outside the home. But the problem is that women often have to manage both their jobs and housework. In many families, men do not help much at home, so women are left with too much to do. This creates a heavy burden on them.

Marriage also brings many new responsibilities, especially for women. After getting married, a man is seen as an adult, no matter if he is fully responsible or not. But a woman is expected to leave her parents' home, live with her husband, and take care of his family, including children and in-laws. These expectations come with a lot of pressure.¹²

This sex-specific labour specialization of labour based on gender doesn’t make much sense today. As more women are earning money and working outside the home, marriage offers fewer benefits if they are still expected to do all the housework. This old way of dividing roles is no longer helpful for women.¹³ Because of this, they now expect more fairness in marriage. Many women decide whether to marry based on whether their partner will share the household work equally. A recent

¹² B-H Kim, J K Lee and H Park, ‘Marriage, Independence and Adulthood among Unmarried Women in South Korea’ (2016) 44(3) *Asian Journal of Social Science* 338–362.

¹³ H-P Blossfeld and U Jaenichen, ‘Educational Expansion and Changes in Women’s Entry into Marriage and Motherhood in the Federal Republic of Germany’ (1992) 54(2) *Journal of Marriage and Family* 302.

study conducted by the National Statistics Office of India discovered that women spend 81.5% of their time doing unpaid household work, while for men it was only 27.1%¹⁴. This also signified how less time women get for leisure activities as compared to men.

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS BEHIND WOMEN'S REJECTION OF MARRIAGE

I. INCREASED FEMALE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Uma Shashikant writes that, "There was a time when women did not have a share in ancestral property. Before it could be changed, customs and rituals that were rooted in patriarchy had created enough social conditioning in the minds of the people of both the genders. So women accepted men in their lives as some kind of saviours, who gave them status, wealth and security. Much has changed since the agriculture- and business based joint family system, but men and women continue to suffer from that conditioning about family, marriage, life and the roles of men and women in the household."¹⁵ Society taught them that men were their protectors, giving them status and stability. But times have changed. Women now have better access to education and jobs, making them financially independent. More women are pursuing higher education and entering the workforce, reducing their need to rely on marriage for survival. With financial freedom, they can make their own life choices, and marriage is no longer the only path to security and respect in society.

II. FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE REDUCING RELIANCE ON MARRIAGE

Historically, marriage served as an economic necessity for many women. However, with better career opportunities and equal pay movements, women now have the means to support

¹⁴ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, *Time Use Survey Factsheet* (25 February 2025) https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/TUS_Factsheet_25022025.pdf.

¹⁵ Uma Shashikant, 'Why Women Refuse Marriage' (*The Economic Times*, 18 March 2024) <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/wealth/personal-finance-news/why-women-refusemarriage/articleshow/109640655.cms>.

themselves, making marriage a choice rather than a necessity. In India, according to a World Bank report, female employment rates drop by 12 percentage points after marriage, about one-third of the pre-marital employment level, even in the absence of children. Meanwhile, men gain a 13-percentage-point employment premium upon marriage, although this advantage gradually erodes after five years.¹⁶ Financially independent women have realized the cons of marriage and are deciding to say no to marriages as it is no longer a necessity from their perspective.

Bumble's recent study substantiates this dating trend with its eye-opening finding that 81% of Indian women surveyed are comfortable being single and on their own.¹⁷ Women now see marriage as a choice rather than a necessity. Many prefer to focus on their careers, personal growth, and financial independence instead of following traditional expectations. They fear

losing their freedom, taking on extra household work, or facing workplace discrimination after marriage. Changing social norms and the push for gender equality have also made them more confident in living life on their own terms. As a result, more women are choosing to delay or skip marriage and prioritize their own happiness and success.

III. REALIZING THE “MARRIAGE PENALTY”

Despite career advancements, women often face workplace discrimination, particularly after marriage. The "marriage penalty" refers to the decline in women's employment rates postmarriage, attributed to societal expectations that married women should prioritize family over career. Conversely, men experience a "marriage premium," with increased employment rates after marriage. This disparity discourages women from marrying, as it poses a threat to their professional growth and financial independence.¹⁸ After marriage, the way people see a working woman often changes negatively. Before marriage, she is seen as ambitious and independent, but after marriage,

¹⁶ Maurizio Bussolo, Jonah Rexer and Margaret Triyana, *Education, Social Norms, and the Marriage Penalty* (World Bank Group, 2024) <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099310110072427893/pdf/IDU196e9729d1933114282196bc1b0d91dd9f24d.pdf>.

¹⁷ 'Indian Women Say No to Compromise: "Consciously Single" Is the Latest Dating Trend on the Rise' (*Vogue India*, 21 January 2023) <https://www.vogue.in/story/indian-women-say-no-to-compromise-consciously-single-is-the-latest-dating-trend-on-the-rise/>.

¹⁸ Nandini Singh, 'Why Marriage Costs Indian Women Their Jobs While Boosting Men's Careers' (*Business Standard*, 16 October 2024) https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/why-marriage-costs-indian-womentheir-jobs-while-boosting-men-s-careers-124101600552_1.html.

society expects her to focus more on family. Many employers assume she will be less dedicated to work, making it harder for her to get promotions or leadership roles.

If she becomes a mother, the situation worsens. People think she will be too distracted or unavailable because of the childcare and other household tasks, leading to fewer job opportunities and lower pay. At home, family members may expect her to handle most household duties, even if she works full-time. If she prioritizes her career, she might be judged as neglecting her family, while a man in the same situation is praised for being hardworking, women are seen negatively.

These unfair expectations make it difficult for married women to balance work and family. To change this, workplaces need better policies, and society must stop judging women differently from men.

IV. SHIFT IN SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS REGARDING MARRIAGE

In Indian culture, parents feel that it's their responsibility to arrange marriage for their daughters so that they can live with dignity. In this society women's dignity, respect, empowerment are connected by their marital status. Marriage therefore becomes the only option for future settlement of Indian women in absence of their parents since it takes care of

their security and livelihood. In such social environment, women's decision to remain single (unmarried, separated and divorcee) is seen as denial to their assigned social duty transmitting the traditional social rules and values across generations. Moreover, there is a possibility of facing social and economic insecurity in absence of adequate income.¹⁹Traditionally, women were expected to prioritize marriage and motherhood over personal ambitions.

However, evolving gender roles and feminist ideologies have challenged these expectations, leading to a growing number of women choosing alternative lifestyles. Women have started to follow their own hearts and do not shy away from rejecting the plans of marriage made by their

¹⁹ Chaiti Sharma Biswas and Ishita Mukhopadhyay, 'Marital Status and Women Empowerment in India' (2018) 2(1) *Sociology International Journal* 29 <https://doi.org/10.15406/sij.2018.02.00030>.

families. They now choose what they want for themselves and not quietly abide what is being expected from them by the society.

IMPACT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

I. HIGHER FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH

With change in structural demography, the Contribution of the other gender is driving the economic growth of the country boosting production, prompting innovation and contributing to the growth of economy. Studies signify that this change has resulted in the strengthening of the economy that is better equipped to face global competition and change to changing economic trends²⁰. This is a clear indication of the shift towards optimum and efficient use of labour force available in the country. Not only that, but it is also clearly a big leap towards gender equality and financial stability as the women would be less dependent on men.

II. MORE WOMEN CONTRIBUTING TO INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

With schemes like Annapurna, Start Up India, Mudra Yojana and Stree Shakti Yojana etc, the government is aiding women entrepreneurs and providing them with funds to start small scale businesses and industries. The advantage of having women-run businesses is that these encourage more women to join the economy and contribute to it. The Labour Force Participation Rate for women shifted from 30% to around 33%, from 2019 to 2022²¹. While the shift is gradual, there is a positive side to it considering the conservative societal norms prevalent in India. The stories behind these innovations are interesting and inspiring arising out of personal experiences. As Priyanka Salot, Co-founder of The Sleep Company, quoted: "During my pregnancy and

²⁰ Press Information Bureau, *Specific Document Title* (2024)
<https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2024/nov/doc20241118436101.pdf>

²¹ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, *Press Note on Annual Report of PLFS 2021–22* (2023)
https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/press_release/Press_note_AR_PLFS_2021_22_24022023.pdf

postpartum phase, I spent countless sleepless nights searching for the right mattress. Despite trying multiple options, none provided the comfort and support I needed as a new mother. This realization unveiled a glaring gap in the Indian market, where mattresses lacked innovation and quality compared to global standards²².” This demonstrates how the search for a solution to a problem sometimes brings in innovation.

III. SHIFTS IN CONSUMER SPENDING PATTERNS DUE TO INDEPENDENT WOMEN.

As women are stereo-typically attributed to be as the ‘homemakers’ much of their choices could be dependent on the household and not individual pleasures. Emotionally, women tend to care for others and for the overall well-being of the Family more as compared to men. In a study, it was evident that women-headed households had a stronger inclination to allocate household income towards food items, while their expenditure on fuel and entertainment was comparatively lower than that of male-headed households²³. This pattern would be impacted by the financial independence and stability of women. As per the recent studies conducted by CRISIL and DBS Bank India, it was discovered that approximately 47 percent of women independently make financial decisions, highlighting their autonomy and empowerment in managing finances²⁴. This significant shift reflects not only financial autonomy but also the advancement of economic awareness and prudent decision-making skills in women.

PRESENT STANDING OF INDIA

Global gender gap report 2023 by world economic forum states that, “India has closed 64.3% of the overall gender gap, ranking 127th on the global index. It has improved by 1.4 percentage points and eight positions since the last edition, marking a partial recovery towards its 2020 (66.8%) parity

²² *Entrepreneur*, ‘How Women-Led Startups Can Champion Gender Balance in India’ (2025) <https://www.entrepreneur.com/en-in/news-and-trends/how-women-led-startups-can-champion-gender-balancein-india/485794>

²³ Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, *Working Paper No. 484* (2018) https://www.iimb.ac.in/sites/default/files/2018-07/WP_No_484.pdf.

²⁴ Economic Times, *47% Women Take Independent Financial Decisions, 51% Prefer Low-Risk Instruments: Report* (2024) <https://bfsi.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/47-women-take-independent-financialdecisions-51-prefer-low-risk-instruments-report/106916509>.

level. The country has attained parity in enrolment across all levels of education. However, it has reached only 36.7% parity on Economic Participation and Opportunity. On the one hand, there are upticks in parity in wages and income; on the other hand, the shares of women in senior positions and technical roles have dropped slightly since the last edition. On Political Empowerment, India has registered 25.3% parity, with women representing 15.1% of parliamentarians, the highest for India since the inaugural 2006 edition.” Franziska Ohnsorge, World Bank’s chief economist for South Asia said, “If women worked in as productive jobs as men, GDP in the South Asian region could go up by up to 51%,”.²⁵ These findings show that while India has made progress, there are still big challenges and gaps, in achieving true gender equality. Women now have equal access to education, which is a big step forward. But when it comes to jobs and leadership roles, they still face many barriers. Even though wages have improved slightly, fewer women are getting senior positions, and their participation in the economy remains low.

At the same time, women’s representation in politics is at its highest, but it’s still far from equal. Franziska Ohnsorge’s statement makes it clear—if women had the same job opportunities as men, the economy in South Asia could grow by 51%. This isn’t just about fairness; it’s about making sure women can contribute fully to society and the economy. To truly close the gender gap, workplaces need to become more supportive, policies must change, and mindsets need to evolve.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

The present situation shows how society is changing and how more women now want financial independence and better opportunities, which is a positive sign for gender equality. However, it may also lead to fewer people getting married and a slower population growth in the future. These changes could affect the economy in the long run. To manage this well, thoughtful reforms and supportive policies are needed so that progress continues without creating new challenges.

²⁵ ‘Is Marriage Killing Women's Careers? World Bank Report Shows Many South Asians Pay "Marriage Penalty"’ *The Economic Times* (India, 4 March 2024) <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/hr-policiestrends/is-marriage-killing-womens-careers-world-bank-report-shows-many-south-asians-pay-marriagepenalty/articleshow/114272721.cms>

I. WORKPLACE REFORMS

Facilities like safe workplaces, proper hygiene, healthcare support, and most importantly, affordable childcare, should be available at every step to support working women. These things help women manage both their jobs and home responsibilities better. When workplaces become more women-friendly, it not only makes life easier for them but also helps improve their performance and confidence. These would also increase their efficiency, and better facilities would aid women in balancing their paid and unpaid labor. A greater women made workforce could only be possible if there are childcare policies and the stigmas surrounding the idea of working women should be eradicated.

To truly support women at work, welfare policies should be easy to access and actually useful in everyday life. Facilities like safe workplaces, proper hygiene, healthcare support, and most importantly, affordable childcare, should be available at every step. These things help women manage both their jobs and home responsibilities better. When workplaces become more women-friendly, it not only makes life easier for them but also helps improve their performance and confidence.

Policies like maternity benefits and flexible work hours already exist, but many women either don't know about them or are unable to benefit due to lack of awareness or implementation. Also, the belief that women must choose between family and career needs to change. We should stop judging women for working and start appreciating their contribution—at home and at work.

Many other countries have taken strong steps to support working women. For example,

Japan launched a plan called “Womenomics” to increase women’s participation in jobs. The government increased childcare facilities and encouraged companies to reduce long working hours, which were making it difficult for women to continue working²⁶.

Canada, especially in the province of Quebec, introduced a universal low-cost childcare program. This helped more women go back to work and also reduced child poverty.³ These examples show

²⁶ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, ““Womenomics” in Japan’ (*Asia Pacific Curriculum*) <https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/womenomics-japan> accessed 5 April 2025.

that with the right support and a change in mindset, women can become strong contributors to the economy and society.²⁷ If India can learn from these models and build similar systems suited to its culture, it can empower more women and create a more balanced and fair society.

II. LEARNING GENDER- NEUTRAL APPROACH FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

To truly bring change, it's important that men also take part in household responsibilities. The government can help by encouraging men to be more involved at home. But real change needs to come from society as a whole — from families, schools, and workplaces.

Countries like Sweden have shown how government support can make a real difference. There, parents are given 480 days of paid parental leave, with a non-transferable share reserved for each parent, motivating men to participate equally in childcare²⁸. Similarly,

Japan's "Ikumen Project" encourages fathers to be more hands-on in raising children, aiming to shift cultural norms and reduce the domestic burden on women.²⁹

Private companies can also play a vital role. They can offer equal parental leave to both mothers and fathers, enabling both to contribute to parenting. In countries like Canada, where subsidised childcare has been introduced, women are better able to join the workforce without being overburdened³⁰. Such policies help reduce gender-based disparities at home and promote more inclusive participation in the economy. Schools, too, can talk to fathers and encourage them to take an active role in caring for their children. When both men and women share duties at home, relationships become more understanding and equal. The first and most important step is promoting gender equality at home. We must challenge the old idea that only women should cook,

²⁷ Pierre Fortin, Luc Godbout and Suzie St-Cerny, *Impact of Quebec's Universal Low-Fee Childcare Program on Female Labour Force Participation, Domestic Income, and Government Budgets* (2024) <https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/home/sites/default/files/2024-02/impact-of-quebec-s-universal-low-feechildcare-program-on-female-labour-force-participation.pdf> accessed 5 April 2025.

²⁸ Sweden.se, *Work-life balance* (2024) <https://sweden.se/work-business/working-in-sweden/work-lifebalance> accessed 5 April 2025.

²⁹ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Japan), *Ikumen Project* <https://ikumen-project.mhlw.go.jp/> accessed 5 April 2025.

³⁰ Government of Canada, *Early Learning and Child Care Agreements* (2022) <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care.html> accessed 5 April 2025.

clean, or look after the elderly and children. Instead, both men and women should share these responsibilities. Countries like Norway have demonstrated the impact of top-down change; their corporate board quota policy, ensuring at least 40% gender representation, has had a powerful ripple effect in promoting equality in leadership³¹. Also, Iceland has made equal pay a legal requirement, forcing companies to eliminate wage gaps and value women's work fairly³².

These examples show that shared roles and equal policies do not just help women — they create healthier homes, stronger partnerships, and a more balanced society. By changing how we divide responsibilities and view gender roles, we create space for both men and women to thrive, support one another, and lead fulfilling lives.

III. REDUCING THE GENDER PAY-GAP

In many families, especially for married women, working outside the home is often discouraged because they don't earn as much as men. This mindset needs to change.

Women's work deserves equal pay and respect. If the wage gap between men and women is reduced, more women will feel supported and valued, both by their families and in society.

While the idea of equal pay sounds simple, it's not easy to achieve. Even after many laws and reforms, equal pay is still a distant dream for most women. What we need are fair wages for all, no matter the gender, and an equal share in income and opportunities.

It's also important to recognize that a lot of the work women do at home is unpaid — cooking, cleaning, caring for children and elders. This work keeps families running, yet it's rarely counted or rewarded. In a study, it was concluded that high burden of unpaid domestic work, restricts

³¹ Mingzhu Wang and Elisabeth Kelan, 'The Gender Quota and Female Leadership: Effects of the Norwegian Gender Quota on Board Chairs and CEOs' (2013) 117 *Journal of Business Ethics* 449, DOI:10.1007/s10551-0121546-5.

³² Government of Iceland, *Equal Pay Certification* <https://www.government.is/topics/human-rights-andequality/equality/equal-paycertification/#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20the%20obligatory,or%20jobs%20of%20equal%20value.accessed5April2025>.

women's ability to engage in paid work, which impacts their economic independence as well as mental health³³.

CONCLUSION

Many women today are choosing not to marry, and this isn't just about personal preference. It reflects deeper problems in our society. Women often carry the "double burden": working jobs while also handling most of the housework. On top of that, they face unfair treatment at work and are still expected to fit into old-fashioned gender roles.

This shift is not just a protest, it's a wake-up call. It shows the need for fairer sharing of responsibilities at home, equal treatment at work, and freedom from outdated expectations.

As women take charge of their own paths, they're not only changing their lives, they're also making a wider impact on the economy and society. This change opens the door to a future where growth is shared, work is valued equally, and gender doesn't decide anyone's worth.

Learning Outcomes

- Gained deeper insight into how marriage functions as a patriarchal institution, often reinforcing the idea that a woman's ultimate role is that of unpaid care work performed by women, including child-rearing, cooking, and household responsibilities, and how this remains outside the purview of formal economic recognition.
- Observed how gendered norms assign different values to men's and women's work, resulting in systemic undervaluation of female labour both inside and outside the home.
- Learned about the concept of the dual burden, where women manage both paid employment and unpaid domestic responsibilities.

³³ *India Today Insight*, 'What Keeps Women Out of Paid Labour Force? An IIM Ahmedabad Study Reveals' (24 September 2024) <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/what-keeps-women-out-of-paid-labourforce-an-iim-ahmedabad-study-reveals-2605703-2024-09-24> accessed 5 April 2025.

- Gained insight into the legal and policy gaps in recognizing unpaid work within India's current economic and legal framework.
- Explored the economic vulnerability of women due to financial dependence within marriage and lack of access to pensions, property, or paid employment.
- Analyzed how changing marriage patterns (e.g., women choosing not to marry) can have larger implications on the society not only in terms of socio-cultural order, but also in terms of development of the economy.
- Recognized the comparative lessons from countries like Japan and South Korea, where declining marriage rates have led to broader economic and social shifts.
- Strengthened research skills in analyzing social norms, gender roles, and economic structures, using examples and lived experiences mentioned in the article to support observations.