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Perceptions of the Declining Fertility Rate and Evolving Views on Motherhood: A Comparative Study among University Students in India and Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study examines the perceptions of declining fertility rates and evolving views on motherhood among female undergraduates in Sri Lanka and India, with a focus on disciplinary and cultural variations. A mixed-methods approach was employed; the research combined a survey of 300 students from the University of Colombo and 234 students from the Vellalar Educational Trust (VET) Institute of Arts and Science in Tamil Nadu with qualitative data from 20 in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions. The findings indicate that students in both countries express moderate to high concern about fertility decline, with Indian students expressing slightly higher concern overall. In Sri Lanka, concern levels varied significantly by academic discipline, with Arts students showing greater awareness than their Science counterparts. Across both countries, delayed motherhood was primarily associated with higher education, career priorities, financial insecurity, and shifting societal norms. Nevertheless, cultural expectations continued to influence preferred childbearing ages of 25–30 years and the ideal family size of two children. These findings suggest a gradual shift towards more

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individualistic and diverse reproductive attitudes, while traditional values remain deeply embedded. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how generational perspectives on fertility and motherhood are shaped by the intersection of personal aspirations, academic environment, and socio-cultural context in both countries.

Keywords: Childbearing, Culture, Personal autonomy, Pronatalist attitudes

Introduction

Motherhood is a deeply embedded concept in South Asian cultures, with its implications extending into the realms of gender roles, employment, and societal expectations. With the influence of both cultural norms and the increasing participation of women in the workforce, traditional views of motherhood are evolving in Sri Lanka and India (Gunathilake, 2023; Kodagoda & Duncan, 2010; Mitra, 2020). In Sri Lanka, the traditional male-breadwinner model has been challenged by the growing presence of women in various professional fields. Despite this shift, the expectations for women to balance work and childcare responsibilities persist, creating significant work-family conflicts (Kodagoda & Duncan, 2010). Traditional conceptions of motherhood as a central and defining role for women are increasingly contested and redefined within contemporary contexts (Arendell, 2000). This evolving discourse reveals a complex interplay between individual agency, structural constraints, and normative expectations.

Motherhood is a role and institution that defines a woman's identity and provides her adult status in Indian society (Bhambhani & Inbanathan, 2018). India, with its rich cultural and religious heritage, also presents a unique perspective on motherhood. The idealization of the maternal role is prominent, with a deep-rooted tradition of reverence towards motherhood depicted through religious and cultural symbols (Mitra, 2020). However, this idealization often contrasts with the lived realities of women, who navigate the pressures of traditional expectations alongside modern professional aspirations. The concept of motherhood in India is further complicated by a patriarchal view that reinforces biological determinism, attributing maternal qualities as innate and disregarding the practical challenges faced by mothers (Mitra, 2020).

This research has explored how young, unmarried female university students perceive motherhood amidst a rapidly changing social landscape where traditional family roles often intersect with aspirations for education and employment. The findings highlight how young women navigate and balance their views on motherhood with their personal goals and identities, shaped by educational advancement, cultural norms, societal expectations, and individual aspirations.

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Furthermore, the research underscores the connection between these shifting attitudes and the ongoing decline in fertility rates observed in both countries. Ultimately, this study offers valuable insights into the nature of motherhood in contemporary Sri Lanka and India. In both contexts, young women's reproductive plans are shaped by similar forces: the tension between personal autonomy and societal expectations, economic insecurity, and the symbolic significance of motherhood. Consequently, policies aimed at addressing fertility decline must strike a balance between pro-reproductive imperatives and the aspirations of a generation that is actively redefining womanhood.

Research Objectives

- To examine the key factors influencing students' decisions to delay motherhood in India and Sri Lanka.
- To examine variations in perceptions of motherhood across academic disciplines in India and Sri Lanka.
- To examine future childbearing intentions among students in India and Sri Lanka.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate how female undergraduates in Sri Lanka and India perceive declining fertility and evolving notions of motherhood. A two-step sequential design was adopted: the first phase involved a structured questionnaire survey to capture broader trends and distributions of attitudes, while the second phase involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to contextualize and deepen understanding of these quantitative findings. This design was chosen to generate both measurable comparisons and a nuanced exploration of the underlying beliefs and experiences shaping them.

Study Population and Sampling

The study population comprised female students from three academic streams in each country. In Sri Lanka, participants were drawn from the Faculties of Arts, Management, and Science at the University of Colombo. In India, participants were drawn from the Schools of Social Sciences, Business Administration, and Computer Science at the VET Institute of Arts and Science, Tamil Nadu. These sites were selected because they represent diverse academic disciplines while also offering a manageable framework for cross-national comparison.

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Table 1: Population sizes of the institutions

University of Colombo		VET Institute of Arts and Science	
Arts		**Social Science**	
1st Year	756	1st Year	24
4th Year	450	4th Year	30
Science		**Computer Science**	
1st Year	603	1st Year	60
4th Year	380	4th Year	60
Management		**Business Administration**	
1st Year	727	1st Year	60
4th Year	711	4th Year	45

Sri Lanka sample – At the University of Colombo, the total female undergraduate population across the selected faculties was 1,385. From this, a judgmental sample of 300 students was selected. The decision to use judgmental sampling was guided by practical constraints: direct access to students was coordinated through faculty administrators and student representatives, limiting the feasibility of randomized techniques. This method allowed the research team to ensure balanced representation across faculties and years, which was essential to the comparative design. Specifically, 50 students were chosen from each of the first-year and final-year cohorts in all three faculties ($50 \times 2 \times 3 = 300$). This ensured proportional coverage across academic and temporal strata.

India sample – At the VET Institute, the total female population across the three schools was 279, of whom 234 were selected to participate. The distribution was: Social Sciences (20 first-year, 25 final-year), Computer Science (51 first-year, 51 final-year), and Business Administration (50 first-year, 37 final-year). This higher coverage relative to population size reflects both the smaller institution and the greater willingness of students to participate when approached via faculty channels.

Comparability – While the Sri Lankan and Indian samples are not identical in size (300 vs. 234), the proportional distributions reflect institutional realities. This difference is explicitly acknowledged as a limitation for cross-national comparison. Findings are therefore interpreted with caution, focusing on trends and contrasts rather than strict numerical equivalence.

Data Collection Procedures

Survey administration – The first phase of data collection involved a structured questionnaire hosted on Google Forms. To maintain control over distribution and ensure alignment with the intended sample composition, survey links were not shared publicly. Instead, they were disseminated selectively through official class representatives and faculty coordinators, who

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were instructed to circulate them only among first- and final-year female students in the identified faculties/schools. This targeted strategy reduced risks of overrepresentation or misalignment with sample quotas.

The questionnaire was developed in English, then translated into Sinhala and Tamil in Sri Lanka and into Tamil in India to ensure linguistic accessibility. Back-translation checks were performed on a subset of questions to confirm consistency of meaning. The introduction to the survey outlined the objectives, emphasized voluntary participation, and confirmed that no incentives would be provided. Students were required to indicate informed consent before proceeding.

Interviews – The second phase of data collection involved semi-structured in-depth interviews. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to indicate interest in being interviewed by providing their contact details. From this pool, 20 students were purposively selected to reflect diversity across faculties and years of study. In Sri Lanka, 12 students participated (two from each year in each faculty), while in India, 8 students participated across the three schools. The interviews provided an opportunity to probe the reasoning behind attitudes expressed in the survey and to capture personal experiences influencing views on fertility and motherhood.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) – To further explore shared perspectives and points of divergence, two FGDs were conducted, one in each country. Each group consisted of 10 participants drawn from both first- and final-year cohorts and across different disciplines. The FGDs allowed interaction between participants, helping to uncover collective dynamics, peer influences, and the ways students negotiate attitudes within their academic and cultural environments.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis – Survey responses were downloaded from Google Forms, cleaned for incomplete entries, and coded prior to statistical analysis in SPSS. The primary analyses were descriptive, employing univariate statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to summarize attitudes within each faculty and country. Cross-tabulations were also employed to compare responses between first-year and final-year students and across faculties, enabling bivariate descriptive contrasts. While inferential tests (e.g., chi-square) were initially considered, the structure and distribution of responses did not support robust significance testing. Consequently, the analysis focuses on descriptive comparison rather than causal inference. This decision enhances transparency and avoids overstatement of findings.

Qualitative analysis – Interview and FGD recordings were transcribed in local languages and translated where necessary. Thematic analysis was undertaken to analyze the data. An inductive approach was employed,

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allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing a priori categories. This process facilitated the integration of qualitative insights with quantitative patterns, thereby strengthening the validity of interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards of informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Students were informed that they could withdraw at any stage of the data collection process. Identifying details were anonymized during transcription and analysis, and data were stored securely with access limited to the research team. Ethical clearance was obtained through the host institution in Sri Lanka (Centre for Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation in Social Policy (CEMRI), University of Colombo with parallel approval sought through institutional channels in India.

Results

The declining fertility rate has emerged as a pressing demographic issue in many countries, including Sri Lanka and India. As fertility patterns shift, it becomes essential to understand how younger generations perceive these changes, particularly female undergraduates, who represent the future of reproduction. This study explores university students' concerns regarding the declining fertility rate and their evolving perceptions of motherhood. Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data, the study highlights how academic background, societal change, and personal aspirations shape these views.

Concerns about the Declining Fertility Rate

The survey results revealed notable differences between Sri Lanka and India in public perceptions of declining fertility rates. In India, a higher proportion of respondents (23.1%) reported being very concerned about the issue compared to Sri Lanka (12.7%), indicating that the matter is perceived as more urgent among the Indian sample. However, in both countries, the largest proportion of respondents expressed moderate concern, with 54.7% in Sri Lanka and 50.4% in India falling into the "somewhat concerned" category (See Table 1). This suggests that while the issue is on the public radar, the prevailing sentiment is one of measured rather than extreme worry. Interestingly, Sri Lanka recorded a substantially higher share of respondents who were "not very concerned" (26.3%) compared to India (9.4%), pointing to a more relaxed perception of the problem among Sri Lankans. At the same time, India had a greater proportion of respondents who were "not concerned at all" (7.7% versus 4.7% in Sri Lanka) and a significantly higher percentage who believed that fertility is not declining at all (9.4% compared to 1.6% in Sri Lanka). These findings suggest that public opinion in India is somewhat polarised, with strong concern among some respondents but scepticism or lack

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of awareness among others, while in Sri Lanka, attitudes are generally more moderate and less urgent.

Table 2: Concerns about the Declining Fertility Rate

Perspectives on Declining Fertility		**n =300**	**n= 234**
		Sri Lanka	**India**
How concerned are you about the declining fertility rate in your country?	Very concerned (70-100%)	12.7%	23.1%
	Somewhat concerned (40 – 69%)	54.7%	50.4%
	Not very concerned (10 – 39%)	26.3%	9.4%
	Not concerned at all (0 – 9%)	4.7%	7.7%
	I do not think it is declining (0%)	1.6%	9.4%

Source: Survey data (2025)

Students from both countries identified well-known socio-demographic drivers behind fertility decline: rising education levels and career aspirations among women, delayed marriage and childbearing, economic uncertainty, and the erosion of traditional family norms. During the interviews, many students, regardless of country, mentioned the high cost of living, the desire for financial independence, and the increasing value placed on personal autonomy as key reasons for delaying or avoiding motherhood altogether.

Key Factors Influencing the Decision to Delay Motherhood

In both Sri Lanka and India, education and career advancement were cited as top priorities before considering motherhood. Sri Lankan students across all fields emphasized achieving academic qualifications and career stability before becoming mothers. Financial independence was another critical factor; respondents noted that without adequate financial resources, raising a child would be stressful and potentially limiting.

Table 3: Key Factors Influencing the Decision to Delay Motherhood

Perspectives on Declining Fertility		**n= 300**	**n=234**
		SL	**IND**
Why do you think fertility rates are declining?			
Higher education levels of females	Yes	75%	32.9%
	No	25%	67.1%
Females being interested in their career	Yes	46%	47.4%
	No	54%	52.6%
Financial instability	Yes	25%	23.5%
	No	75%	76.5%
Changing societal norms	Yes	22%	22.2%
	No	78%	77.8%
Lack of Childcare Support	Yes	21%	20.9%
	No	79%	79.1%
Females being overly concerned about their bodies	Yes	20%	20.1%
	No	80%	79.9%
Females being concerned about their health	Yes	21%	21.8%

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	No	79%	78.2%
Others	Yes	15%	15.8%
	No	85%	84.2%

Source: Survey data (2025)

The data from Sri Lanka and India reveal a similar overall ranking pattern of perceived reasons for declining fertility rates, with differences in the proportion of responses. In both countries, "higher education levels of females" record the highest "Yes" responses, though the proportion is considerably higher in Sri Lanka (75%) than in India (32.9%). "Females being interested in their career" is the second most common response in both contexts, with relatively close percentages (46% in Sri Lanka and 47.4% in India). The remaining factors, "financial instability," "changing societal norms," "lack of childcare support," "females being overly concerned about their body," and "females being concerned about their health", all record lower "Yes" responses in both countries, generally between 20% and 25%. The "Others" category is the least cited in both cases, at 15% in Sri Lanka and 15.8% in India. Across all factors, the proportion of "No" responses is consistently higher than "Yes" responses, except for the first two factors, where "Yes" responses are relatively prominent (See Table 2).

In India, Other reasons included personal freedom (27.4%), health concerns (14.5%), lack of support (8.5%), and the absence of a partner (4.7%). In Sri Lanka, 15% of respondents (n = 45) cited "Others (please specify)" as reasons for delaying motherhood. Within this category, the most frequently mentioned factor was personal freedom (26% of the 45 respondents), followed by health concerns (16%), lack of support (10%), and the absence of a partner (6%).

This distribution mirrors the structure observed in the Indian data, with personal freedom being the most commonly reported reason and the absence of a partner the least, highlighting similar patterns in secondary factors influencing fertility decisions in both countries. Across both countries, many students valued the opportunity to travel, pursue hobbies, and focus on self-development during their twenties and early thirties. This trend reflects a redefinition of womanhood, in which motherhood is no longer seen as the defining life milestone but rather as one of several life choices. Increasingly, motherhood is regarded as a conscious and deliberate decision, rather than an inevitable stage of life.

Variations in Perceptions of Motherhood Across Academic Disciplines

Perceptions of motherhood varied notably across academic disciplines in both contexts. In Sri Lanka, Arts students were more likely to view

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motherhood as central to womanhood, with 56 out of 100 agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. Cultural influences often shaped these views. One student noted,

> *"In a society like Sri Lanka, motherhood is very much important for a woman... women are getting their respective recognition from society because of being a mother."* (In-depth interview data, 2025).

Conversely, science students expressed more individualistic views, with 36 out of 100 disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the idea that motherhood is essential to womanhood. Business Administration students reflected a transitional stance, influenced by both traditional values and modern aspirations.

In the Indian context, as shown in Table 3, students' perceptions of changing attitudes toward motherhood were examined across three fields of study: Sociology, BBA, and Computer Science. Respondents were asked to select factors they consider to be influential in this shift, including women being more educated, raising children in a rapidly changing society, women being more career-oriented, and little support from fathers in child-rearing. Across all fields, "Little support from father in child-rearing" emerged as the most frequently cited factor. Among Sociology students, 34.1% selected this reason, while 17.3% indicated that raising children in a rapidly changing society is challenging, and smaller proportions noted women being more career-oriented (7.3%) or more educated (2.4%). For BBA students, 30.5% highlighted limited paternal support, followed by raising children in a changing society (6.2%) and career orientation (5.5%), with none citing women's education. Computer Science students emphasized paternal support even more strongly (43.1%), followed by career orientation (9.2%), while education (0%) and societal challenges (3.1%) were minimally reported.

Table 4: Changing Perception towards Motherhood in India

Domain	Field of study	Changing Perception towards Motherhood				Total
		Women are now more educated	Raising children in a rapidly changing society is challenging	Women are now more career-oriented	Little support from father in child rearing	
Field of Study	Sociology	1	3	3	14	20
		2.4%	17.3%	7.3%	34.1%	48.8%
	BBA	0	8	7	39	74
		.0%	6.2%	5.5%	30.5%	57.8%
	Computer Science	0	2	6	28	29
		.0%	3.1%	9.2%	43.1%	44.6%

Source: Survey data (2025)

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Interview responses from both countries further highlighted changing perceptions. Many students now view motherhood as a flexible and personal decision.

One Sri Lankan student commented,

> *"To be honest, I don't think being a mother is a main thing in life. My priorities are studying and my career."* (In-depth interview, 2025)

This perspective was mirrored in Indian responses, where students emphasized personal growth and independence over societal expectations. Indian students also cited increased educational and employment opportunities for women, economic pressures, and a stronger focus on individual fulfillment as key drivers of these changing attitudes.

Ideal Age and Future Childbearing Intentions

In both countries, the majority of students favored having children between the ages of 25 and 30. In Sri Lanka, 80% of Sociology students, 60% of BBA students, and 53% of Science students chose this age range, while in India, the preference was even stronger, with 80.5% of Sociology students, 88.3% of BBA students, and 88.0% of Science students selecting 25–30 years (See Table 5).

Table 5: Association between Ideal Age and the Field of Study

	Ideal Age First Child			Total
	Before 25	**25-30**	**31-35**	
Sociology				
IND	7.3%	80.5%	12.2%	100.0%
SL	6%	80%	14%	100.0%
BBA / Management				
IND	7.0%	88.3%	4.7%	100.0%
SL	30%	60%	37%	100.0%
Computer Science/Science				
IND	7.3%	88.0%	4.7%	100.0%
SL	1%	53%	46%	100.0%

Source: Survey data (2025)

Among Sri Lankan students, Management students and science students were more likely than their peers to prefer the 31–35 age range (37% and 46%, respectively), whereas Arts students (Sociology) predominantly favored 25–30. Only a small proportion of students in either country considered having children before 25, and very few selected post-35 as the ideal age.

Intentions to have children also varied. In Sri Lanka, 50.3% of students expressed a definite intention to have children, while 12.4% indicated they probably would not, and 3.9% were certain they would not. Arts students showed the strongest commitment to motherhood, while science students

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exhibited the most ambivalence or rejection.

Interview insights from both Sri Lankan and Indian students added depth to these findings. Some admitted that they had not given much thought to motherhood or preferred to leave the decision open.

One Sri Lankan student remarked,

"I've never really thought about being a mother… I would like to become an aunt first." (In-depth Interview, 2025)

A similar uncertainty was expressed in India, despite the general consensus on the ideal age for childbearing. Only 7.3% of Indian students favored having children before 25, and 4.7% preferred 31–35, reflecting increasing acceptance of delayed motherhood.

Preferred Number of Children and Alternative Views on Motherhood

In India, 61.5% of students preferred two children, 31.2% opted for one child, and only 5.1% preferred three or more. A small group (2.1%) stated they did not want children at all. This trend toward smaller families - most commonly two children as the preferred number - was largely consistent across both countries. In Sri Lanka, preferences varied slightly by field of study: among the sociology students, 65% preferred two children, 19% chose three, 11% opted for one, 1% selected four or more, and 4% stated they did not plan to have children. BBA students showed a similar pattern, with 56% favoring two children, 20% three, 10% one, 6% four or more, and 8% not planning to have children. Among Computer Science students, 45% preferred two children, 28% three, 11% one, 3% four or more, and 13% did not plan to have children (See Table 6).

In India, a majority of students across fields also favored two children, with 58.5–70.8% selecting this option. Preferences for one child ranged from 23.1% to 34.4%, while three or more children were rarely chosen (2.3–3.9%), and only a small proportion (1.6–3.1%) reported that they did not plan to have children (See Table 5).

Table 6: Association between preferred number of children and field of study

Domain	Field of study	Number of Children					Total
		1	2	3	4 or more	I do not plan to have children	
Field of Study		**Sociology**					
	India	34.1%	58.5%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	100.0%
	SL	11%	65%	19%	1%	4%	100.0%
		BBA / Management					
	India	34.4%	57.8%	3.9%	2.3%	1.6%	100.0%
	SL	10%	56%	20%	6%	8%	100.0%
		Computer Science / Science					
	India	23.1%	70.8%	3.1%	.0%	3.1%	100.0%
	SL	11%	45%	28%	3%	13%	100.0%

Source: Survey data (2025)

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Notably, in both Sri Lanka and India, a small but significant group of students expressed alternative visions of motherhood. Some were interested in non-biological caregiving through adoption, fostering, or caring for animals. One Sri Lankan participant shared,

"I would really love to be a mother too, not to human children, but to dogs and other animals." (In-depth Interview, 2025)

Others challenged the glorification of biological motherhood, asserting that love and care are not dependent on genetic ties. These perspectives highlight a growing diversity in how young women envision their futures, challenging the notion that motherhood must follow a culturally prescribed path. They reflect an important generational shift in reproductive values, where motherhood is increasingly regarded as one of many possible life choices.

Discussion

The results of this comparative study of female undergraduates from Sri Lanka and India show how conceptions of motherhood and fertility drop are shaped by a complicated interaction between growing individualistic values and old pronatalist norms. Although there is concern about decreased fertility in both situations, the extent and type of this concern differ depending on the academic field, the country, and the individual's goals.

Concern over decreasing birth rates was moderate to high among students in both Sri Lanka and India, with slightly greater levels of concern among Indian students. According to the findings in Sri Lanka, there was a relationship between concern levels and academic discipline, with Arts students demonstrating higher levels of concern. This aligns with previous research, which shows that fields focusing on demographic and social issues tend to foster greater awareness of population patterns and their socioeconomic implications (De Silva, 1997). The lack of concern among science students might be the result of a more data-driven, detached perspective or a lack of exposure to the sociocultural effects of demographic change. Besides, these findings echo global patterns where fertility awareness is often stratified by education type, with social science and humanities students more likely to contextualize demographic shifts in broader societal debates (Park, 2005).

In both countries, delaying motherhood was primarily motivated by factors such as education, professional growth, and financial freedom. These goals are in line with broader global trends that have been observed in Western cultures, where women's improved access to higher education, career possibilities, and reproductive autonomy are frequently associated with voluntary childlessness or delayed motherhood (Gillespie, 2003). The idea that parenting is a deliberate life choice rather than an unavoidable life stage

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is reinforced by students' emphasis on personal autonomy, travel, and self-improvement. The demographic history of Sri Lanka must also be taken into consideration, as postponed marriage has been a major factor in the country's decades-long drop in fertility (De Silva, 1997). Students in both nations choose the 25–30 age range for childbirth, which is indicative of enduring cultural standards on biological "ideal" timing, even as a minority show openness to later or non-motherhood paths.

Views on the importance of motherhood differed greatly among females pursuing different academic disciplines. Arts students in Sri Lanka were more inclined to recognize its significance, frequently citing cultural and religious imperatives. Science students, on the other hand, tended to have more individualistic views, which aligned with Gillespie's (2003) remarks that rejecting motherhood can be part of a larger reinterpretation of femininity beyond traditional reproductive duties. The persistence of large percentages of students evaluating motherhood as "extremely important" demonstrates that pronatalist attitudes are still established in both societies. However, the growing minority who consider motherhood optional reflects developments in Western countries, where the "childfree" identity challenges normative links between femininity and motherhood (Gillespie, 2003; Park, 2005).

Students from many academic fields in India commonly mentioned a lack of paternal support as a major factor affecting their views on motherhood (Table 3). Given the importance of family support networks in influencing reproductive choices, the belief that fathers offer little help with child-rearing may delay motherhood and increase the allure of childfree lives or alternative caregiving practices.

The prevalence of students contemplating non-biological forms of caregiving, such as adoption, fostering, or animal care, indicates a diversity in how nurturing responsibilities are conceived. This is consistent with Park's (2005) findings, which show that deliberate childlessness is frequently presented not as a lack of caring, but as a shift in care toward non-traditional beneficiaries. Such perspectives question cultural scripts that link "real" parenting primarily to biological reproduction.

While Sri Lanka and India share many structural and cultural effects, such as marriage-centered fertility, economic pressures, and gendered expectations, India's slightly higher level of concern may be due to increased public discourse on demographic changes or different policy framing. However, in both circumstances, young women's reproductive plans are influenced by similar forces: the conflict between personal liberty and societal norms, economic insecurity, and the symbolic significance of motherhood.

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Conclusion

Findings reveal that while Sri Lankan and Indian female undergraduates share concerns about declining fertility, their views differ according to academic discipline. Moreover, individual choices and aspirations related to education, career goals, and financial security play a significant role in delaying motherhood. However, cultural norms still shape young women's preferred age for marriage (25-30 years) and preferred number of children (two children). It is also visible that a growing number of young women question the ideal type of biological motherhood; a pattern that reflects a shift towards more individualistic and diverse reproductive choices.

Therefore, policies aimed at addressing fertility decline in these contexts will need to reconcile pronatalist objectives with the aspirations of a generation redefining womanhood. Such policies may include supportive family measures such as affordable childcare, paternal leave, flexible work hours, and structured return-to-work schemes that enable women to re-enter the workforce once children reach a certain age. They should also provide tax concessions, salary benefits, and government subsidies for families with children, thereby reducing the economic burden of parenthood. In addition, policies must recognize diverse life paths, including childfree lifestyles, without stigma, and integrate demographic issues into education across disciplines to promote informed reproductive decision-making from an early age. Finally, beyond economic and institutional measures, policies should also emphasize familial factors, particularly paternal engagement, to make parenthood a more viable and supported choice for young women.

The findings of this comparative analysis reveal both convergence and divergence in how young women in Sri Lanka and India perceive motherhood and fertility decline. Overall, the results indicate that generational shifts toward individualism, education, and self-determination are reshaping traditional reproductive values, even as cultural expectations surrounding motherhood remain deeply rooted.

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