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Harmonizing Marriage Age Globally: An In-Depth Global Exploration of Marriage Age Norms, Challenging Gender Stereotypes in India and Insights from the Tapestry of Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

Marriage age, a multifaceted interplay of societal norms and individual autonomy, is the subject of a pressing inquiry within the legal framework of India. This research not only addresses the imperative need for a unified age of consent for marriage, challenging the existing gender-based legal age disparity, but also emphasizes the importance of harmonizing this age with international standards. Beyond the prevention of child marriages, the discourse extends globally, exploring marriage age norms and disparities, with an emphasis on aligning with international benchmarks. The study delves into the societal implications of maintaining distinct marriage ages in India, particularly focusing on age-related stereotypes. It endeavors to contribute to the discourse on marriage age, challenge ingrained stereotypes, and advocate for a more equitable societal landscape, all while emphasizing the harmonization of age standards to avoid conflicts of law. The empirical core of the research unfolds in Tamil Nadu, a culturally diverse state, offering insights into the lived experiences of individuals navigating societal expectations in the realm of marriage. The research poses and answers vital questions, aiming to contribute to the discourse on marriage age, challenge ingrained stereotypes, advocate for a more equitable societal landscape, and emphasize the harmonization of age standards to avoid conflicts of law. The methodology combines a comprehensive global analysis, a critical examination of existing legal frameworks, and an in-depth empirical investigation in Tamil Nadu, employing surveys and statistical analyses to unravel the complex dynamics surrounding marriage age and stereotypes.

Keywords: *Marriage Age, Age of Consent, Child Marriages, Stereotypes, Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, India Marriage, Conflict of Law, Private International Law.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Marriage age is a crucial aspect of societal norms and individual choices. The discourse surrounding marriage age in India extends beyond the prevention of child marriages; it necessitates a distinct conversation on establishing a uniform age of consent for all citizens. The existing discrepancy, where the legal age for girls is eighteen and for boys, it is twenty-one, inadvertently perpetuates the stereotype that wives should be younger than their husbands. Recently, there has been a push to increase the legal age of marriage for both genders to twenty-one². This research endeavors to unpack this issue by conducting a comprehensive analysis of global patterns of marriage age, examining the implications of age-based disparities and conflicts in the private international law, and presenting in-depth empirical analysis focusing on age-related stereotypes insights from the culturally diverse state of Tamil Nadu.

BACKGROUND

Marriage Age in India: The legal age for marriage in India has been eighteen for girls and twenty-one for boys. The proposed increase to twenty-one for both genders prompt an examination of its potential impact on societal norms and individual choices.

Global Perspectives: This research will conduct a comprehensive review of marriage age norms across countries. The analysis will include an exploration of legal frameworks on region wise towards marriage age. Relevant statistical tests will be applied to identify trends and variations.

Challenging Stereotypes and Advancing Gender Equality: The research will delve into the societal implications of maintaining distinct marriage ages for girls and boys in India. It will critically analyze how this practice contributes to age-related stereotypes, particularly the notion that wives should be younger. By exploring the cultural and historical roots of such beliefs, the study seeks to advocate for a more equitable approach to marriage age, challenging ingrained stereotypes and fostering a more egalitarian society.

Empirical Insights from Tamil Nadu: As a focal point of the study, Tamil Nadu will be subjected to an in-depth empirical analysis. Through surveys, the research will investigate how age-related stereotypes influence marriage decisions in the state. The aim is to uncover the lived experiences of individuals navigating societal expectations, shedding light on the complex interplay between cultural norms and individual choices in the context of marriage.

² The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, <https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-prohibition-of-child-marriage-amendment-bill-2021> (last visited November 20, 2023).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. What are the prevailing marriage age norms across different countries?
2. How does the existing age disparity in marriage age norms in India contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes, specifically the notion that wives should be younger than their husbands?
3. What are the potential implications of raising the legal age of marriage to twenty-one for both genders in India?
4. How do age-related stereotypes influence individuals' decisions regarding marriage in the state of Tamil Nadu?
5. To what extent do societal expectations regarding age and marriage align with or diverge from legal age norms in Tamil Nadu?
6. What are the lived experiences of individuals navigating age-related stereotypes in marital relationships in Tamil Nadu?

OBJECTIVES

- To conduct a comparative analysis of marriage age across different countries and identify trends and variations and explore the Gender stereotype marriage age in India. To empirically analyze age-related stereotypes in marriage within Tamil Nadu.

METHODOLOGY**India and Global Analysis:**

- Conduct a literature review on the proposed increase in the legal age of marriage in India. Collect and analyze data on marriage age from various countries and explore and compare with the India Law. Apply statistical tests to identify significant patterns and variations.

Empirical Analysis in Tamil Nadu:

Select a diverse sample representing different demographics in Tamil Nadu. Employ surveys to gather quantitative data. Utilize statistical tests to explore age-related stereotypes and societal expectations.

II. INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the fundamental rights related to marriage, emphasizing equality between men and women without discrimination based on

race, nationality, or religion. It asserts the entitlement of individuals of full age to marry and establish a family with equal rights during the marriage and at its dissolution. Crucially, it stipulates that marriage should only be entered into with the free and full consent of the intending spouses³.

CEDAW, in its Article 16, further articulates the commitment of States Parties to eliminate discrimination against women in matters pertaining to marriage and family relations. It calls for equality between men and women in various aspects, including the right to enter into marriage, the freedom to choose a spouse with free and full consent, equal rights and responsibilities during marriage and its dissolution, and parity in parental rights and responsibilities, irrespective of marital status⁴.

The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages 1962 aligns with the principles enshrined in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It seeks to promote the consensual nature of marriages, protect individuals from early or forced unions through the establishment of a minimum age, and enhance legal recognition and transparency through the compulsory registration of marriages. This collective framework reflects a commitment to upholding human rights and ensuring the dignity and autonomy of individuals in the context of marriage⁵.

III. INDIA

Child marriage in India was initially addressed through legislative measures with the enactment of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929. This legal framework marked the first prohibition of child marriages, specifying that girls under the age of 14 and boys under the age of 18 were not permitted to marry. Subsequently, in 1978, amendments were made to the 1929 Act, raising the minimum age for females to 18 and for males to 21. A significant milestone in the legal landscape concerning child marriage occurred with the introduction of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2006, which replaced the earlier 1929 Act. The revised legislation retained the minimum age limits set in 1978, prohibiting the marriage of girls below 18 years and boys

³ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> (last visited November 20, 2023).

⁴ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, [Citation] United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13 (adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981, in accordance with article 27(1)), available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf> (last visited November 20, 2023).

⁵ Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-consent-marriage-minimum-age-marriage-and> (last visited November 20, 2023).

below 21 years.

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution embodies the foundational principle of equality before the law and the equal protection of laws, safeguarding individuals from unjust and discriminatory treatment by the State⁶.

In India Section 5(iii) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955⁷ (the Act 1955) for Hindu and Section 2(a) of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA)⁸ establish the minimum age for marriage at eighteen for brides and twenty-one for grooms within the Hindu legal framework. Notably, the Act 1955 considers marriages between a sixteen-year-old girl and an eighteen-year-old boy as valid but voidable under PCMA, introducing a nuanced perspective on the age of consent within Hindu law. Contrastingly, Muslim Law in India recognizes the validity of marriages involving minors who have attained puberty in other words 15 year of age for both. This recognition signifies a departure from the statutory provisions under the Hindu Marriage Act and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, reflecting the diversity of legal approaches to the age of marriage within different religious contexts. The Special Marriage Act, 1954⁹ (SMA 1954) aligns with the provisions of the Hindu Marriage Act by prescribing eighteen as the minimum age for brides and twenty-one for grooms. This legal framework is applicable to individuals who choose to marry irrespective of their religious affiliations, emphasizing a secular approach to marriage laws in India.

Similarly, other religious communities such as Parsis and Christians adhere to similar age prescriptions for marriage. Within the Parsi community, the legal minimum age is set at eighteen for women and twenty-one for men¹⁰. Similarly, Christian marriage laws in India also reflect these age differentials, maintaining consistency with the broader legal landscape.

This diverse legal landscape underscores the complexity of marriage age norms in India, with variations arising from religious and personal law contexts. The varying age prescriptions across different religious frameworks prompt a critical examination of the underlying principles and cultural considerations shaping these legal provisions. In the broader context of this research, this legal diversity serves as a crucial backdrop for understanding the nuances and challenges associated with proposing changes to the marriage age in India.

⁶ INDIA CONST. art. 14.

⁷ Section 5, The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 1955 (India)

⁸ Section 2, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, No.6 Acts of Parliament, 2006 (India)

⁹ Section 4, The Special Marriage Act, 1954, No.43 Acts of Parliament, 1954 (India)

¹⁰ Section 3, the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936, No. 3, Acts of Parliament, 1936 (India)

The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021

The proposed Bill seeks to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, with the primary objective of raising the minimum age of marriage for females to 21 years. This amendment reflects a substantial change to the existing legal framework, aligning with efforts to discourage child marriages and promote the well-being of young individuals. Notably, the Bill includes a provision that explicitly asserts its supremacy over any other law, custom, or practice. This provision underscores the legislative intent to prioritize the new age requirement over potentially conflicting legal or customary norms, emphasizing the gravity of the issue and the need for a uniform standard¹¹.

In its modification of the 2006 Act, the Bill extends the timeframe during which a person married below the stipulated minimum age can seek annulment. Previously, under the 2006 Act, an individual could apply for annulment within two years of attaining majority, which translates to before reaching 20 years of age. The Bill proposes to extend this period to five years, thereby allowing individuals until the age of 23 to seek annulment¹².

Reason for the amendment stated in the bill

The Constitution of India guarantees gender equality as a fundamental right and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. However, existing laws fall short in effectively ensuring gender equality in the context of the marriageable age for men and women. Women often face disadvantages in areas such as higher education, vocational training, psychological maturity, and skill development. Encouraging women to enter the workforce before marriage is crucial to fostering self-dependence and mitigating the perpetuation of dependence on men.

Addressing these disparities is imperative not only for gender equality but also for lowering maternal and infant mortality rates, improving nutrition levels, and achieving a balanced sex ratio at birth. Empowering women in these aspects contributes to responsible parenthood, enhancing the well-being of both mothers and fathers for better child care. Additionally, addressing teenage pregnancies is vital, considering the adverse effects on women's health and the increased risk of miscarriages and stillbirths¹³.

Eliminating discrimination against women aligns with international commitments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which India is a signatory. Tackling gender inequality is not only a constitutional mandate but also essential

¹¹ *Supra note 1.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*,

for achieving sustainable development goals. The focus should be on implementing measures that secure the health, welfare, and empowerment of women and girls, ensuring equal status and opportunities on par with men¹⁴.

The minimal age threshold for specific activities

Specific Activities	Minimum Age
Driving license ¹⁵	18
Signing a contract ¹⁶	18
Voting ¹⁷	18
Contesting elections - Lok Sabha ¹⁸	25
Contesting elections - Rajya Sabha ¹⁹	30
Contesting elections – President ²⁰	35
Contesting elections – Local bodies ²¹	21
Age for Consent Sexual relationship	18
Criminal liability	18 – General, Individuals aged 16-18 may face adult prosecution for serious crimes using alternative language.
Majority for various personal Law like Adoption and Guardianship	18

Judiciary Analysis:

In the legal landscape of India, the Supreme Court has, through various cases, underscored the significance of the right to marry as an integral component of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. Notably, in the case of *Shafin Jahan vs Ashokan and Others*²² (2018), the Court emphasized that the right to marry is a fundamental right and can only be curtailed through a law that is substantively and procedurally fair, just, and reasonable.

Furthermore, the case of *Shakti Vahini vs Union of India and Others*²³ in 2018 reiterated the

¹⁴ Id.,

¹⁵ The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, No. 59, Acts of Parliament, 1988 (India)

¹⁶ The Indian Contract Act, 1872, No. 9, Acts of Parliament, 1872 (India)

¹⁷ INDIA CONST. art. 326.

¹⁸ INDIA CONST. art. 84.

¹⁹ INDIA CONST. art. 84.

²⁰ INDIA CONST. art. 58.

²¹ INDIA CONST. art. 243F.

²² *Shafin Jahan vs Ashokan and Others*, A.I.R 2018 SC 357

²³ *Shakti Vahini vs Union of India and Others*, (2018) 7 SCC 192

Court's stance that when two adults willingly choose each other as life partners, it represents an expression of their choice, protected under Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution. This perspective reinforces the idea that adults have the right to make decisions about their marital choices, and any restrictions on such choices must be scrutinized against constitutional standards.

The current legislation under consideration, which proposes a restriction on the right to marry for individuals between the ages of 18 and 21, prompts a legal analysis. Referring to the principles established in Justice K. S. Puttaswamy Vs. Union of India²⁴, the courts typically require that any restriction on fundamental rights must serve a public purpose, have a nexus with that purpose, and lack a less intrusive alternative to achieve the intended goal.

Moreover, the contradiction between legalizing consensual sexual relations, as affirmed in Navtej Singh Johar and Others Vs Union of India (2018), while simultaneously restricting the right to marry for those between the ages of 18 and 21, raises constitutional concerns. The Supreme Court, in the context of decriminalizing consensual adult relationships, affirmed the fundamental right under Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21 of the Constitution.

Therefore, if the proposed bill were to become law, allowing consensual sexual relations but limiting the right to marry for individuals aged 18 to 21, it may necessitate a careful examination to ensure compliance with constitutional principles and the standards set by the judiciary regarding the reasonable restriction of fundamental rights.

IV. GLOBAL ANALYSIS OF LEGAL AGE OF MARRIAGE

The legal age of marriage varies significantly across the globe, reflecting diverse cultural, social, and legal perspectives. This global analysis aims to provide an overview of the minimum age requirements for marriage in different countries, shedding light on the legal frameworks that govern this fundamental aspect of personal choice and societal norms.

In examining the legal age of marriage worldwide, it becomes evident that nations have adopted varying approaches to regulate when individuals can enter into matrimony. While some countries set a uniform age for both genders, others may differentiate between males and females. Understanding the global landscape necessitates consideration of recent legal developments and amendments that reflect evolving societal attitudes toward marriage. In some jurisdictions, efforts have been made to align legal provisions with principles of equality and individual autonomy, recognizing the right of consenting adults to choose their life partners

²⁴ Justice.K.S. Puttuswamy v. Union of India, 2017(10) SCC 1

freely. By conducting a comprehensive analysis, we aim to provide insights into the diverse approaches taken by nations and the ongoing discussions shaping the global discourse on the legal age of marriage.

1. Africa Region – Countries and Legal Age for Marriage

The legal age for marriage in African countries ranges widely, influenced by cultural, social, and legal factors. This section provides an insightful overview of the legal age for marriage in various countries across the vast and diverse continent of Africa. The detailed information in the accompanying table outlines the legal age requirements for marriage in African nations.

Table 1: Countries and Legal Age of Marriage for both male and female

Countries	Male	Female	Same Legal Age for Both
Algeria	19	19	YES
Benin	18	18	YES
Botswana	21	21	YES
Burkina Faso	20	17	NO
Burundi	21	18	NO
Cabo Verde	18	18	YES
Cameroon	18	18	YES
Central African Republic	18	18	YES
Chad	18	18	YES
Comoras	18	18	YES
Cote d'Ivoire	18	18	YES
Democratic Republic of Congo	18	18	YES
Djibouti	18	18	YES
Egypt	18	18	YES
Equatorial Guinea	14	14	YES

Eritrea	18	18	YES
Eswatini	21	21	YES
Ethiopia	18	18	YES
Gabon	18	15	NO
Gambia	18	18	YES
Guinea	18	18	YES
Ghana	18	18	YES
Guinea-Bissau	16	16	YES
Kenya	18	18	YES
Liberia	18	18	YES
Libya	18	18	YES
Mauritius	18	18	YES
Madagascar	18	18	YES
Mali	18	16	NO
Malawi	18	18	YES
Mauritania	18	18	YES
Morocco	18	18	YES
Mozambique	18	18	YES
Namibia	18	18	YES
Niger	15	15	YES
Nigeria	18	18	YES
Republic of the Congo	21	18	NO
Rwanda	21	21	YES

São Tomé and Príncipe	18	18	YES
Senegal	18	18	YES
Sierra Leone	18	18	YES
Somalia	18	18	YES
South Africa	18	18	YES
South Sudan	18	18	YES
Sudan	15	10	NO
Tanzania	18	18	YES
Togo	20	18	NO
Tunisia	18	18	YES
Uganda	18	18	YES
Zambia	18	18	YES
Zimbabwe	18	18	YES
Average in roundoff	18	18	YES

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

The legal age for marriage in African countries reflects the intricate interplay between cultural norms, legal systems, and societal values. While some nations have established a uniform age for both genders, others maintain distinct age requirements for men and women. As highlighted in the provided table, these legal age variations underscore the need for nuanced approaches when addressing issues related to family law, child marriage, and gender equality within the African context. Understanding these diverse legal landscapes is essential for promoting policies and practices that align with international standards and contribute to the protection and well-being of individuals across the culturally rich and dynamic African continent.

Analysis of Same Legal Age for Male and Female in the Africa Region Countries

Table 2: Showing Same Legal Age for Male and Female in Africa region

Same Legal Age for Male and Female in Africa Region	Frequency	Percent
NO	7	13.7
YES	44	86.3
Total	51	100.0

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Interpretation:

The overwhelming majority of African countries in the study (86.3%) have established the same legal age for marriage for both males and females. This suggests a commonality in legal standards across genders in the region, highlighting a trend toward gender-neutral regulations in the context of marriage. However, in a notable minority (13.7%) of the countries, there exists a distinction in the legal age requirements for men and women.

2. America Region (North and South America) – Countries and Legal Age for Marriage

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the legal age for marriage in various countries across the vast Americas, encompassing both North and South America. The accompanying table outlines the legal age requirements for marriage in American nations.

Table 3: Countries and Legal Age of Marriage for both male and female

Countries	Male	Female	Same Legal Age for both
Antigua and Barbuda	18	18	YES
Argentina	18	18	YES
Bahamas	18	18	YES
Barbados	18	18	YES
Belize	18	18	YES
Bolivia	18	18	YES
Brazil	18	18	YES
Canada	18	18	YES

Chile	18	18	YES
Colombia	18	18	YES
Costa Rica	18	18	YES
Cuba	18	18	YES
Dominica	18	18	YES
Dominican Republic	18	18	YES
Ecuador	18	18	YES
El Salvador	18	18	YES
Grenada	21	21	YES
Guatemala	18	18	YES
Guyana	18	18	YES
Haiti	18	15	NO
Honduras	18	18	YES
Jamaica	18	18	YES
Mexico	18	18	YES
Nicaragua	18	18	YES
Panama	18	18	YES
Paraguay	18	18	YES
Peru	18	18	YES
Puerto Rico	21	21	YES
Saint Kitts and Nevis	18	18	YES
Saint Lucia	18	18	YES
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	18	18	YES

Suriname	21	21	YES
Trinidad and Tobago	18	18	YES
United States	18 in most States, 19 Nebraska, 21 Mississippi, 21 Puerto Rico	18 in most States, 19 Nebraska, 21 Mississippi, 21 Puerto Rico	YES
Uruguay	18	18	YES
Venezuela	18	18	YES
Average in roundoff	18	18	YES

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Notably, the data reveals that, on average, both males and females have a legal age for marriage of approximately 18 years except 1 countries, indicating a consistent standard in family law practices. While each country maintains its distinct legal framework, the commonality in the average legal age across America emphasizes a regional commitment to establishing gender-neutral standards for marriage. This insight is vital for fostering discussions on harmonizing legal practices and promoting equality within the America context.

Analysis of Same Legal Age for Male and Female in the America Region Countries

Table 4: Showing Same Legal Age for Male and Female in America region

Same Legal Age for Male and Female in America Region	Frequency	Valid Percent
NO	1	2.8
YES	35	97.2
Total	36	100.0

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Interpretation: The overwhelming majority of American countries in the study (97.2%) have established the same legal age for marriage for both males and females. This indicates a prevalent trend toward gender-neutral regulations in the legal age requirements for marriage across the American continent. However, in only one country (2.8%), there exists a distinction in the legal age requirements for men and women.

3. Asia Region - Countries and Legal Age for Marriage

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the legal age for marriage in various countries across the diverse continent of Asia. Recognizing that legal frameworks, the following table details the current information available on the age requirements for marriage in Asian nations

Table 5: Countries and Legal Age of Marriage for both male and female

Countries	Male	Female	Same Legal Age for both
Afghanistan	18	16	NO
Armenia	18	18	YES
Azerbaijan	18	18	YES
Bangladesh	21	18	NO
Bahrain	18	16	NO
Bhutan	18	18	YES
Brunei	18	16	NO
Burma	18	18	YES
Cambodia	18	18	YES
China	22	20	NO
Cyprus	18	18	YES
East Timor	17	17	YES
Georgia	18	18	YES
Hong Kong	21	21	YES
India	21	18	NO
Indonesia	19	19	YES
Iran	14	13	NO

Iraq	18	18	YES
Israel	18	18	YES
Japan	18	18	YES
Jordan	18	18	YES
Kazakhstan	18	17	NO
Kuwait	17	15	NO
Kyrgyzstan	18	18	YES
Laos	18	18	YES
Macau	18	18	YES
Malaysia	18	16	NO
Maldives	18	18	YES
Mongolia	18	18	YES
Myanmar	18	18	YES
Nepal	20	20	YES
North Korea	18	17	NO
Oman	18	18	YES
Pakistan	18	16	NO
Palestine	18	18	YES
Philippines	21	21	YES
Qatar	18	16	NO
Saudi Arabia	18	18	YES
Singapore	21	21	YES
South Korea	18	18	YES

Sri Lanka	18	18	YES
Syria	18	17	NO
Taiwan	18	18	YES
Tajikistan	18	18	YES
Thailand	20	20	YES
Turkey	18	18	YES
Turkmenistan	18	18	YES
United Arab Emirates	18	18	YES
Uzbekistan	18	18	YES
Vietnam	20	18	NO
Yemen	15	15	YES
Average in roundoff	18	18	YES

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Analysis of same legal age for Male and Female in the Asia region countries

Table 6: Showing Same Legal Age for Male and Female in Asia region

Same Legal Age for Male and Female in Asia Region	Frequency	Valid Percent
NO	15	29.4
YES	36	70.6
Total	51	100.0

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Interpretation:

The data reveals that there is a notable diversity in legal age regulations for marriage concerning gender across Asian countries. In nearly 29.4% of the countries studied, there is a distinction in the legal age for marriage between males and females. On the other hand, in the majority of Asian countries (70.6%), there is an alignment in the legal age for marriage, indicating a trend towards gender-neutral regulations.

4. Europe Region - Countries and Legal Age for Marriage

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the legal age for marriage in various countries across the culturally rich continent of Europe. The data presented in the provided table outlines the legal age requirements for marriage in European nations.

Table 7: Countries and Legal Age of Marriage for both male and female

Countries	Male	Female	Same Legal Age for both
Albania	18	18	YES
Andorra	16	16	YES
Austria	18	18	YES
Belarus	18	18	YES
Belgium	18	18	YES
Bosnia and Herzegovina	18	18	YES
Bulgaria	18	18	YES
Croatia	18	18	YES
Czech Republic	18	18	YES
Denmark	18	18	YES
Estonia	18	18	YES
Finland	18	18	YES
France	18	18	YES
Germany	18	18	YES
Gibraltar	18	18	YES
Greece	18	18	YES
Hungary	18	18	YES
Iceland	18	18	YES

Ireland	18	18	YES
Italy	18	18	YES
Latvia	18	18	YES
Liechtenstein	18	18	YES
Lithuania	18	18	YES
Luxembourg	18	18	YES
Malta	18	18	YES
Moldova	18	18	YES
Montenegro	18	18	YES
Netherlands	18	18	YES
North Macedonia	18	18	YES
Norway	18	18	YES
Poland	18	18	YES
Portugal	18	18	YES
Romania	18	18	YES
Russia	18	18	YES
San Marino	18	18	YES
Serbia	18	18	YES
Slovakia	18	18	YES
Slovenia	18	18	YES
Spain	18	18	YES
Sweden	18	18	YES
Switzerland	18	18	YES

Ukraine	18	18	YES
United Kingdom	18	18	YES
Average in roundoff	18	18	YES

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Notably, the data reveals that, on average, both males and females have a legal age for marriage of approximately 18 years, indicating a consistent standard in family law practices. While each country maintains its distinct legal framework, the commonality in the average legal age across Europe emphasizes a regional commitment to establishing gender-neutral standards for marriage. This insight is vital for fostering discussions on harmonizing legal practices and promoting equality within the European context.

As societal norms and legal systems continue to evolve, ongoing scrutiny and understanding of these legal age requirements will be instrumental in ensuring that family laws align with contemporary values and international standards, fostering the well-being and protection of individuals across the diverse European continent.

Analysis of same legal age for Male and Female in the Europe region countries

Table 8: Showing Same Legal Age for Male and Female in Europe region

Same Legal Age for Male and Female in Europe Region	Frequency	Valid Percent
YES	43	100.0
NO	0	0.0
Total	43	100.0

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Interpretation:

The data reflects a distinctive and consistent pattern in Europe, where all the countries included in the study (100%) have established the same legal age for marriage for both males and females. There is a notable absence of variation or distinction in legal age requirements based on gender across European nations. This uniformity underscores a shared commitment to gender-neutral standards in family law throughout Europe.

5. Pacific Region (Australia and Near Islands) - Countries and Legal Age for Marriage

This section provides an overview of the legal age for marriage in select countries within the

Pacific region, including Australia and nearby islands. The data, detailed in the provided table, outlines the legal age requirements for marriage in these nations.

Table 9: Countries and Legal Age of Marriage for both male and female

Countries	Male	Female	Same Legal Age for both
Australia	18	18	YES
Fiji	18	18	YES
Kiribati	21	21	YES
Micronesia	18	18	YES
Nauru	18	18	YES
New Zealand	18	18	YES
Palau	18	16	NO
Papua New Guinea	18	16	NO
Samoa	18	18	YES
Solomon Islands	15	15	YES
Tonga	15	15	YES
Tuvalu	18	18	YES
Vanuatu	21	21	YES
Average in roundoff	18	18	YES

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

While the legal age for marriage varies among the Pacific countries, the information in the table offers valuable insights into the regional disparities. Notably, the data reflects that, on average, both males and females have a legal age for marriage around 18 years, indicating a general alignment in family law practices. The nuances in legal age requirements underscore the diversity of cultural norms and legal traditions across the Pacific region.

Analysis of same legal age for Male and Female in the Pacific region countries

Table 10: Showing Same Legal Age for Male and Female in Pacific region

Same Legal Age for Male and Female in Pacific region	Frequency	Valid Percent
NO	2	15.4
YES	11	84.6
Total	13	100.0

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Interpretation: The data reveals a notable diversity in legal age regulations for marriage concerning gender across Pacific countries. In a minority of the countries studied (15.4%), there is a distinction in the legal age for marriage between males and females. On the other hand, in the majority of Pacific countries (84.6%), there is an alignment in the legal age for marriage, indicating a trend towards gender-neutral regulations.

Analysis of average legal age for Male and Female in each region and worldwide

Table 11: Showing average legal age for Male and Female in each region and worldwide

Regions	Parties	Average
Africa	Male	18.1569
	Female	17.7451
America	Male	18.2500
	Female	18.1667
Asia	Male	18.3333
	Female	17.7843
Europe	Male	17.9535
	Female	17.9535
Pacific	Male	18.0000
	Female	17.6923
Worldwide	Male	18.1649
	Female	17.8763

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Understanding the average legal age for marriage is crucial for comprehending global and regional variations in family law. This analysis delves into the average legal age for both males and females in distinct regions and worldwide, shedding light on the nuances that shape legal frameworks across the globe.

a. Africa

Male: Average legal age for marriage for males in Africa is approximately 18.16 years.

Female: Average legal age for marriage for females in Africa is approximately 17.75 years.

b. America

Male: Average legal age for marriage for males in the Americas is approximately 18.25 years.

Female: Average legal age for marriage for females in the Americas is approximately 18.17 years.

c. Asia

Male: Average legal age for marriage for males in Asia is approximately 18.33 years.

Female: Average legal age for marriage for females in Asia is approximately 17.78 years.

d. Europe:

Male: Average legal age for marriage for males in Europe is approximately 17.95 years.

Female: Average legal age for marriage for females in Europe is approximately 17.95 years.

e. Pacific:

Male: Average legal age for marriage for males in the Pacific region is 18 years.

Female: Average legal age for marriage for females in the Pacific region is approximately 17.69 years.

f. Worldwide:

Male: Average legal age for marriage for males worldwide is approximately 18.16 years.

Female: Average legal age for marriage for females worldwide is approximately 17.88 years.

Interpretation: Globally, the average legal age for marriage is slightly higher for males compared to females. Understanding these average ages provides a broad overview of regional differences in legal frameworks, contributing to discussions surrounding family law and gender equality. When rounded, the average legal age for marriage is consistently 18 years for both males and females across all regions and globally. This indicates a broad alignment in legal age requirements for marriage, emphasizing a common standard within and across regions. the

global analysis reveals a general trend towards a common legal age for marriage for both genders.

Analysis of same legal age for Male and Female in Global Countries.

Table 12: Showing same legal age for Male and Female in Global Countries

Same Legal Age for Male and Female in Overall World	Frequency	Percent
NO	25	12.9
YES	169	87.1
Total	194	100.0

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Interpretation: The data indicates that on a global scale, the majority of countries or regions (87.1%) have established the same legal age for marriage for both males and females. This reflects a prevalent trend towards gender-neutral regulations in the legal age requirements for marriage worldwide. However, in a notable minority (12.9%) of the countries or regions, there exists a distinction in the legal age requirements for men and women.

Hypotheses Testing:

1. **Null Hypothesis (H0):** There is no significant difference in legal ages for marriage between males and females within each region.

Table 13

Paired Samples t Test for identify significant difference in legal ages for marriage between males and females within each region.

Paired Samples Statistics							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Paired Samples Correlations		Paired t test	
				Correlation	P Value	t Value	P Value
Pair 1	Africa male	18.1569	1.34718	.741	<.001**	2.677	.010*
	Africa female	17.7451	1.62288				
Pair 2	America male	18.2500	.84092	.866	<.001**	1.000	.324

	America female	18.1667	1.00000				
Pair 3	Asia male	18.3333	1.38082	.793	<.001**	4.246	<.001**
	Asia female	17.7843	1.47396				
Pair 4	Europe male	17.9535 ^a	.30500	a. The correlation and t cannot be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0 and mean and s.d are same.			
	Europe female	17.9535 ^a	.30500				
Pair 5	Pacific male	18.0000	1.73205	.917	<.001**	1.477	.165
	Pacific female	17.6923	1.88788				
Pair 6	Worldwide male	18.1649	1.14883	.786	<.001**	4.940	<.001**
	Worldwide female	17.8763	1.30171				

Sources: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – U.S. Department of State.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

* denotes significant at 5% level.

Interpretation of the paired samples t-test results, including correlations and significance levels for each region:

1. Africa:

Result: There is a significant difference between the legal ages for marriage for males and females in Africa ($t(2.677)$, $p = .010$ at 5% level significance).

Interpretation: The positive correlation of 0.741 and $p < .001$ indicates a moderate relationship between legal ages for males and females in Africa. The t-test result signifies that this difference is statistically significant, with males having a little higher average legal age for marriage compared to females.

2. America:

Result: No significant difference is observed between the legal ages for marriage for males and females in America ($t(1.000)$, $p = .324$).

Interpretation: The correlation of 0.866 indicates a strong positive relationship. The lack of

significance in the t-test suggests that, in the Americas, there is no statistically significant difference in legal ages for marriage between males and females.

3. Asia:

Result: There is a significant difference between the legal ages for marriage for males and females in Asia ($t(4.246)$, $p < .001$ at 1% level significance).

Interpretation: The strong positive correlation of 0.793 and $p < .001$ suggests a significant association between legal ages for males and females in Asia. The t-test result indicates that males have a statistically little higher average legal age for marriage compared to females in the Asian region.

4. Europe:

Result: The correlation and t-test cannot be computed due to a standard error of the difference being 0 and mean and standard deviation being the same which means all countries age for marriage both genders same.

5. Pacific:

Result: No significant difference is found between the legal ages for marriage for males and females in the Pacific ($t(1.477)$, $p = .165$).

Interpretation: The high positive correlation of 0.917 and $p < .001$ indicates a very strong relationship between legal ages for males and females in the Pacific. The lack of significance in the t-test suggests that, in the Pacific region, there is no statistically significant difference in legal ages for marriage between males and females.

6. Worldwide:

Result: There is a significant difference between the legal ages for marriage for males and females worldwide ($t(4.940)$, $p < .001$ at 1% level significance).

Interpretation: The strong positive correlation of 0.786 and $p < .001$ signifies a significant association between legal ages for males and females worldwide in other words same for both genders. The t-test result indicates that males have a statistically little higher average legal age for marriage compared to females on a global scale.

Overall Interpretation:

The findings highlight regional variations in the legal ages for marriage between males and females. While some regions exhibit significant differences (Africa, Asia, and Worldwide), others show no significant disparities (America and Pacific). Europe same for both male and

Female in all countries. The correlation values indicate the Strong significant association of the relationship between legal ages for males and females in each region which clear show much similar.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in legal ages for marriage between males and females within each region of America and Pacific.

V. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS IN TAMIL NADU

In this comprehensive study, the focus will be on Tamil Nadu as a key geographical area for an in-depth empirical analysis. The research methodology will primarily involve surveys aimed at exploring the nuanced influence of age-related stereotypes on marriage decisions within the state. The primary objective is to delve into the lived experiences of individuals as they navigate societal expectations, thereby shedding light on the intricate interplay between cultural norms and personal choices, particularly in the context of marriage. The study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how age-related stereotypes shape the decision-making processes of individuals in Tamil Nadu, unraveling the complexities inherent in the intersection of cultural expectations and individual autonomy. By employing surveys, the research aims to capture the diverse perspectives and experiences of people across different age groups. Furthermore, the study extends its scope to include an investigation into public opinions regarding the newly proposed amendment to increase the legal age of marriage for women to 21. This addition brings an additional layer of relevance and significance to the research, as it not only explores existing societal norms but also examines contemporary debates and attitudes towards legal reforms. In essence, this research aspires to contribute valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of marriage decision-making in Tamil Nadu, offering a nuanced understanding of the ways in which age-related stereotypes and cultural norms intersect with individual choices. The inclusion of perspectives on the proposed legal amendment adds a contemporary dimension to the study, making it both timely and relevant to ongoing societal discussions.

DATA ANALYSIS:

Descriptive analysis

i. Gender of the Respondent

Table No: 14

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	53	53.0

Female	47	47.0
Total	100	100.0

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire

Interpretation: The data indicates a gender distribution within a sample of 100 individuals, with 53% identified as male and 47% as female. This balanced distribution suggests a relatively equal representation of both genders in the analyzed sample.

ii. Age of the Respondent

Table No: 15

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-25	31	31.0
26-35	29	29.0
36-45	25	25.0
46 and above	15	15.0
Total	100	100.0

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire

Interpretation: The data illustrates the distribution of individuals across different age groups within a sample of 100. The largest proportion falls within the 18-25 age range, representing 31.0% of the total. The 26-35 age group closely follows with 29.0%, while the 36-45 and 46 and above age groups account for 25.0% and 15.0%, respectively. This age breakdown provides insights into the age diversity within the studied sample

iii. Marital Status

Table No: 16

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Single	36	36.0
Married	49	49.0
Divorced	10	10.0
Widowed	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire

Interpretation: The data provides insights into the marital status distribution within a sample of 100 individuals. The majority of the sample is married, constituting 49.0% of the total. Single individuals represent 36.0%, while divorced and widowed individuals make up 10.0% and 5.0%, respectively.

iv. Education

Table No: 17

Education	Frequency	Percent
No formal education	9	9.0
High School/formal education	27	27.0
Undergraduate	42	42.0
Postgraduate	17	17.0
Doctorate	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire

Interpretation: The data provides insights into the distribution of individuals based on their education levels within a sample of 100 individuals. The majority of the sample holds an undergraduate degree, constituting 42.0% of the total. High School/formal education represents 27.0%, while postgraduate and no formal education individuals make up 17.0% and 9%. Doctorate holders constitute 5.0% of the total. Understanding the educational background of the sample is crucial for analyses related to knowledge levels, skill sets, and potential influences on decision-making processes

v. Annual Income

Table No: 18

Annual Income	Frequency	Percent
Under 5 Lakhs	50	50.0
5 to 10 Lakhs	41	41.0
Above 10 Lakhs	9	9.0
Total	100	100.0

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire

Interpretation: The data provides insights into the distribution of individuals based on their annual income within a sample of 100 individuals. The majority of the sample has an annual income under 5 Lakhs, constituting 50.0% of the total. Those with an annual income ranging from 5 to 10 Lakhs represent 41.0%, while individuals with an income above 10 Lakhs make up 9.0% of the total.

vi. Location

Table No: 19

Location	Frequency	Percent
Rural	47	47.0
Urban	53	53.0
Total	100	100.0

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire

Interpretation: The data provides insights into the distribution of individuals based on their location within a sample of 100 individuals. There is a relatively balanced distribution between rural and urban locations, with 53.0% of the sample residing in urban areas and 47.0% in rural areas.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESES:

- 1. Null Hypothesis (H₀):** The average societal expectation that wives should be younger than their husbands in Tamil Nadu is not significantly different.

Table No: 20

t test for societal expectation that wives should be younger than their husbands in Tamil Nadu

A societal expectation that wives should be younger than their husbands in Tamil Nadu			
Mean	Std. Deviation	t Value	P Value
4.25	.892	14.015	<.001**

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: In the above analysis suggest that the positive t-value (14.015) indicates that the mean societal expectation is significantly higher than what would be expected under the null hypothesis. The very low p-value (<0.001) at 1% level significance suggests that the observed

difference in the societal expectation that wives should be younger than their husbands is statistically significant. Therefore, based on this analysis, there is strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Hence, the statistical results suggest that there is a significant difference in the average societal expectation that wives should be younger than their husbands in Tamil Nadu, and the observed difference is in the direction of a higher expectation.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The average societal expectation that wives should be younger than their husbands in Tamil Nadu is significantly higher.

2. Null Hypothesis (H0): The average level of awareness regarding the proposed increase in the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India is not significantly different.

Table No: 21

t test for awareness regarding the proposed increase in the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India

Awareness of the proposed increase in the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India			
Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>t</i> Value	<i>P</i> Value
1.17	.378	-8.741	<.001**

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: In the above analysis suggest that the negative t-value (-8.741) indicates that the mean level of awareness is significantly lower than what would be expected under the null hypothesis. The very low p-value (<0.001) at 1% level significance suggests that the observed difference in the level of awareness regarding the proposed increase in the legal age of marriage is statistically significant. Therefore, based on this analysis, there is strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The statistical results suggest that there is a significant difference in the average level of awareness regarding the proposed increase in the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India, and the observed difference is in the direction of lower awareness.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The average level of awareness regarding the proposed increase in the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India is significantly lower.

3. Null Hypothesis (H0): The average supportive on raising the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India is not significantly different.

Table No: 22**t test for supportive on raising the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India**

Supportive on raising the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India			
Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>t</i> Value	<i>P</i> Value
1.27	.548	-13.326	<.001**

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: The negative t-value (-13.326) indicates that the mean level of support is significantly lower than what would be expected under the null hypothesis. The very low p-value (<.001) at 1% level significance suggests that the observed difference in support for raising the legal age of marriage to 21 is statistically significant. Therefore, based on this analysis, there is strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Hence, the statistical results suggest that there is a significant difference in the average level of support for raising the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India, and the observed difference is in the direction of lower support.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The average supportive on raising the legal age of marriage to 21 for both genders in India is significantly lower.

4. Null Hypothesis (H0): The average frequency of personal experiences or observations where age-related stereotypes influenced marriage decisions in Tamil Nadu is not significantly different.

Table No: 23**t test for personal experienced or observed instances of age-related stereotypes influenced marriage decisions in Tamil Nadu**

Personal experienced or observed instances of age-related stereotypes influenced marriage decisions in Tamil Nadu			
Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>t</i> Value	<i>P</i> Value
1.90	.302	13.266	<.001**

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: The positive t-value (13.266) indicates that the mean frequency of personal

experiences or observations is significantly higher than what would be expected under the null hypothesis. The very low p-value (<0.001) at 1% level significance suggests that the observed difference in the frequency of age-related stereotypes influencing marriage decisions is statistically significant. Therefore, based on this analysis, there is strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Hence, the statistical results suggest that there is a significant difference in the average frequency of personal experiences or observations where age-related stereotypes influenced marriage decisions in Tamil Nadu, and the observed difference is in the direction of a higher frequency.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The average frequency of personal experiences or observations where age-related stereotypes influenced marriage decisions in Tamil Nadu is significantly higher.

5. Null Hypothesis (H0): The average level of acceptance of the stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands is not significantly different.

Table No: 24

t test for acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands

Acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands			
Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>t</i> Value	<i>P</i> Value
1.69	.465	4.088	$<.001^{**}$

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: In the above analysis suggest that the positive t-value (4.088) indicates that the mean level of acceptance is significantly higher than what would be expected under the null hypothesis. The very low p-value (<0.001) at 1% level significance suggests that the observed difference in the level of acceptance of stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands is statistically significant. Therefore, based on this analysis, there is strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Hence, the statistical results suggest that there is a significant difference in the average level of acceptance of stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands, and the observed difference is in the direction of higher acceptance.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The average level of acceptance of the stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands is significantly higher.

- 6. Null Hypothesis (H0):** There is no significant association between the level of education and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

Table No: 25

ANOVA for significant association between the level of education and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands

	Acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands		F - value	P - value
	Mean	S.D		
Education	1.69	.465	5.864	<.001**

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: In the above analysis suggest that the F-value of 5.864 suggests that there is a significant difference in the mean acceptance of stereotypes across different levels of education. The very low p-value (<0.001) at 1% level significance provides strong evidence against the null hypothesis, indicating that the association between the level of education and the acceptance of stereotypes is statistically significant. Therefore, based on this ANOVA analysis, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It implies that there is a significant association between the level of education and the acceptance of stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands. Hence, the statistical results suggest that the level of education is significantly associated with the acceptance of stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant association between the level of education and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

- 7. Null Hypothesis (H0):** There is no significant association between annual income and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

Table No: 26

ANOVA for significant association between annual income and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

	Acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands	F -value	P - value
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	Mean	S.D		
Annual Income	1.69	.465	8.236	<.001**

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: In the above analysis suggest that the F-value of 8.236 suggests that there is a significant difference in the mean acceptance of stereotypes across different levels of annual income. The very low p-value (<0.001) at 1% level significance provides strong evidence against the null hypothesis, indicating that the association between annual income and the acceptance of stereotypes is statistically significant. Therefore, based on this ANOVA analysis, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It implies that there is a significant association between annual income and the acceptance of stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands. Hence, the statistical results suggest that annual income is significantly associated with the acceptance of stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant association between annual income and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

8. Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant association between gender and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

Table No: 27

ANOVA for significant association between gender and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

	Acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands		F - value	P - value
	Mean	S.D		
Gender	1.69	.465	3.998	.048*

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : * denotes significant at 5% level.

Interpretation: In the above analysis suggest that the F-value of 3.998 suggests that there may be a significant difference in the mean acceptance of stereotypes across different genders. The p-value of 0.048 is less than the commonly used significance level of 0.05. This suggests that

there is evidence to reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, based on this ANOVA analysis, there is some evidence to suggest a potential association between gender and the acceptance of stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands. However, it's important to note that the significance level is relatively close to 0.05. Hence, the statistical results suggest a potential association between gender and the acceptance of stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands, but the evidence is somewhat borderline.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant association between gender and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

9. Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant association between age groups and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

Table No: 28

ANOVA for significant association between age groups and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

	Acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands		F - value	P - value
	Mean	S.D		
Age	1.69	.465	10.386	<.001 **

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: In the above analysis suggest that the F-value of 10.386 suggests that there is a significant difference in the mean acceptance of stereotypes across different age groups. The very low p-value (<0.001) at 1% level significance provides strong evidence against the null hypothesis, indicating that the association between age groups and the acceptance of stereotypes is statistically significant. Therefore, based on this ANOVA analysis, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It implies that there is a significant association between age groups and the acceptance of stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands. Hence, the statistical results suggest that age groups are significantly associated with the acceptance of stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant association between age groups and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

10. Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant association between marital status and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

Table No: 29

ANOVA for significant association between marital status and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands

	Acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands		F value	P value
	Mean	S.D		
Marital Status	1.69	.465	6.377	.001**

Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: In the above analysis suggest that the F-value of 6.377 suggests that there is a significant difference in the mean acceptance of stereotypes across different marital status categories. The p-value of 0.001 is less than the commonly used significance level of 0.05. This provides strong evidence against the null hypothesis, indicating that the association between marital status and the acceptance of stereotypes is statistically significant. Therefore, based on this ANOVA analysis, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It implies that there is a significant association between marital status and the acceptance of stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands. Hence, the statistical results suggest that marital status is significantly associated with the acceptance of stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant association between marital status and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

11. Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant association between the location and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands.

Table No: 30 ANOVA for significant association between the location and acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands

	Acceptance of the stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands		F value	P value
	Mean	S.D		

Location	1.69	.465	.455	.501
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Sources: Primary Data through questionnaire.

Note : ** denotes significant at 1% level.

Interpretation: In the above analysis suggest that the F-value of 0.455 suggests that there is no significant difference in the mean acceptance of stereotypes across different locations. The p-value of 0.501 is greater than the commonly used significance level of 0.05. This indicates that there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, based on this ANOVA analysis, there is no significant association between the location and the acceptance of stereotypes that wives should be younger than their husbands. Hence, the statistical results suggest that there is no significant association between the location and the acceptance of stereotypes regarding wives being younger than their husbands based on the data and the chosen significance level.

VI. REPORT – MARRIAGE AGE

In alignment with international perspectives on the legal age of marriage, UNICEF, in its 2020²⁵ recommendations, advocates for setting the minimum age at 18 for both males and females. Emphasizing the importance of emotional, physical, and mental maturity, UNICEF contends that individuals are adequately prepared for the responsibilities of marriage at this age. Similarly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2016)²⁶ aligns with this perspective, endorsing 18 as the appropriate age for both genders to enter into matrimony. The Convention asserts that this age should correspond with the age of majority, underlining the principle of equality in determining the legal age for marriage. The Law Commission of India, in its 2008 recommendations, also supports a unified age of 18 for both males and females²⁷. The commission dismisses any scientific rationale for differentiating the minimum age, emphasizing the absence of substantive reasons to warrant such distinctions. It draws parallels between the legal age of marriage and the age of majority, linking the right to choose one's government with the recognition of the legal age for marriage. This perspective is reiterated in the Consultation Paper on the Reform of Family Law in 2018²⁸, where the notion of age of

²⁵ UNICEF, Child Marriage and the Law: Technical Note for the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (2020), available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/86311/file/Child-marriage-the-law-2020.pdf> (last visited November 29, 2023).

²⁶ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 20 (2016) on the Implementation of the Rights of the Child during Adolescence, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, December 6, 2016

²⁷ Law Commission of India, 205 Report on the Proposal to amend the prohibition of child marriage act, 2006 and other allied laws (Feb,2008).

²⁸ Law Commission of India, the Consultation Paper on the Reform of Family Law, (Aug,2018).

majority is extended to encompass the legal age of marriage. The paper emphasizes the parallelism in granting citizens the right to choose their governments and recognizing their capacity to make informed decisions regarding marriage at the age of 18. In summary, international bodies such as UNICEF and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with the Law Commission of India, converge on recommending 18 as the universally applicable age for marriage, irrespective of gender. Their consensus underscores the importance of aligning legal frameworks with considerations of emotional, physical, and mental maturity while promoting equality in marital rights.

VII. CONFLICT OF LAW AND PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY IN THE IMPLEMENTATION.

As per the National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5)²⁹, a concerning 23% of women aged 20 to 24 in India were married before attaining the age of 18. This statistic reflects a notable decline from 47% recorded in NFHS-3 (2005-06)³⁰ and further down to 27% in NFHS-4 (2015-16)³¹. Despite the established legal minimum age of marriage being 18 since 1978, a quarter of women in the 20-24 age group continue to experience early marriage. The persistently high incidence of child marriage, even with a legal minimum age in place, prompts a critical examination of the efficacy of the existing law. This raises questions about whether an increase in the minimum age for marriage would yield a more substantial impact on curbing this practice. While the law has seen a positive trend in reducing early marriages, the remaining prevalence suggests that additional measures or revisions may be necessary. The potential criminalization of child marriage is a topic under consideration. Evaluating the effectiveness of legal penalties in deterring such practices becomes crucial. However, the practical implications of criminalization, including enforcement challenges and the socio-cultural factors influencing child marriages, need careful consideration. Furthermore, there exists a noteworthy conflict between the legal age of marriage and the age of consent for sexual relationships. If the legal age for marriage is increased, it necessitates a nuanced examination of how this aligns or conflicts with the age at which individuals can legally engage in consensual sexual relationships. Balancing these legal parameters becomes essential to avoid contradictions and ensure a comprehensive and coherent legal framework. The persistent prevalence of child marriage despite legal provisions raises questions about the adequacy of the existing minimum age for marriage. The potential benefits and challenges associated with increasing the minimum age, coupled with the considerations of criminalization, warrant a comprehensive evaluation.

²⁹ National Family Health Survey – 5 (2019-21), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

³⁰ National Health Family Survey – 3 (2005-06), Ministry of Health and Family Survey.

³¹ National Family Health Survey – 4, (2015-16), Ministry of Health and Family Survey.

Addressing the conflict between the age of marriage and the age of consent adds another layer of complexity to the ongoing discourse on legal reforms aimed at mitigating the incidence of child marriage in India.

VIII. PRIVATE INTERNATIONAL LAW – HARMONIZING NECESSARY

In Private International Law, the prevailing principle governing the capacity of parties to marriage is the *Lex Domicilii*, which translates to the law of the domicile. This principle dictates that the legal capacity of individuals intending to marry is determined by the laws of the place where they hold domicile before entering into the marriage³². In essence, it underscores the significance of considering the legal framework of the domicile as the determining factor in assessing the capacity of parties to enter into a marital union. This approach ensures that the rules and regulations governing the capacity to marry are applied based on the jurisdiction where the individuals establish their permanent residence prior to the marriage ceremony.

A comparative analysis of various countries reveals that many jurisdictions have established statutory marriageable age limits, indicating that marriage cannot be solemnized until a specified age is reached. However, conflicts arise when these age limits differ across legal systems. Notably, Australia and Germany have set the marriageable age at 18 for both males and females, while in India, the legal age is 21 for males and 18 for females.

The potential for conflict becomes evident when considering the scenario of an increased marriageable age to 21 for both genders in India. This adjustment could lead to conflicts within intra-national marriages for Indian citizens, especially when one party belongs to a jurisdiction with a different age requirement. Additionally, such a change could be perceived as a violation of the fundamental and human rights, particularly the right to marriage.

The call for harmonization becomes imperative when confronted with these variations in marriageable age limits. Harmonizing these legal standards on a global scale would not only mitigate conflicts in intra-national marriages but also align with a broader perspective on human rights. The need for consistency in the legal frameworks governing marriage across nations is underscored by the potential implications on individual rights and the cross-cultural nature of modern societies.

IX. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The discourse on marriage age in India, particularly the existing disparity where the legal age

³² Gian Paulo Romano, "Multilateral Rule on Capacity to Marry and the Italian Constitution", in Bonomi, Andrea, volken, Paul, et.al (eds), *Yearbook of Private International Law*, Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, 2005, p-217.

for girls is eighteen and for boys, it is twenty-one, is not merely a legal consideration but a reflection of societal norms and gender stereotypes. The proposed increase to twenty-one for both genders deserves careful consideration, and this research, encompassing global perspectives and empirical insights from Tamil Nadu, offers valuable insights into the broader implications.

Global Perspectives

The global analysis reveals a trend towards a common legal age for marriage, emphasizing the need for standardization. A majority of countries (87.1%) already adhere to the principle of equal marriage ages for both genders. This indicates a move towards global harmonization, recognizing the importance of establishing consistent standards to promote gender equality. The paired samples t-test results further elucidate the differences within each region. For instance, in Africa and Asia, there is a significant difference in legal ages for males and females, whereas in the Americas and the Pacific, no such distinction is observed. The situation in Europe is uniformity in mean and standard deviation, which clearly show that both genders have a equal age for marriage.

Challenging Stereotypes and Advancing Gender Equality

The existing distinct marriage ages in India inadvertently contribute to age-related stereotypes, particularly the notion that wives should be younger than their husbands. This reinforces traditional gender norms and hinders progress towards a more egalitarian society. Advocating for a uniform age of consent at eighteen for both men and women is not only a legal adjustment but a crucial step in challenging and dismantling ingrained stereotypes.

The empirical analysis focusing on Tamil Nadu provides a nuanced understanding of how age-related stereotypes influence marriage decisions in a culturally diverse state. Uncovering the lived experiences of individuals navigating societal expectations sheds light on the complex interplay between cultural norms and individual choices. These insights underscore the urgency of reevaluating and reforming existing legal frameworks to align with the international standard.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEGAL REFORM

1. **Equal Age of Consent to Marriage:** The research strongly supports the proposition to establish an equal age of consent for marriage at eighteen for both men and women. This not only aligns with global standards but also reflects a commitment to dismantling age-related stereotypes.

2. **Impact of Legal Harmonization:** Research on the potential impact of harmonizing legal age requirements for marriage on reducing conflicts in intra-national marriages and promoting gender equality would contribute valuable insights to policymakers.
3. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Advocacy and public awareness campaigns should be initiated to inform the public about the proposed legal reforms and the rationale behind equalizing the marriage age. This can contribute to changing societal perceptions and fostering a more inclusive and equitable mindset.
4. **Policy Implementation and Enforcement:** Ensuring effective implementation and enforcement of the proposed legal reforms is crucial. This includes robust mechanisms for monitoring and addressing any challenges that may arise during the transition to equal marriage ages.
5. **Continued Research and Evaluation:** Continuous research and evaluation are essential to track the impact of the legal reforms on societal norms, gender dynamics, and individual choices. This iterative process will inform further adjustments and improvements in the legal framework.

In short, the research strongly advocates for a legal reform that establishes an equal age of consent for marriage at eighteen for both men and women in India. This not only aligns with global standards but also represents a significant step towards challenging age-related stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive, egalitarian society. The proposed reforms should be accompanied by comprehensive public awareness campaigns, robust policy implementation, and continued research to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the changes.

X. REFERENCE

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