

Original Research

Received 20 May 2026

Revised 30 June 2026

Accepted 14 July 2026

Natural Resources for Human Health 2026, Vol. 6 (7s): 377–384

KEYWORDS:

Marital Rape, Genetic Stagnation, underdeveloped, Natural attitude, humankind.

Marriage and Social Stagnation: Investigating the Costs of an Enduring Institution

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ABSTRACT: Marriage is the most ethical, outstanding, recognized social institution till date from where man started to make agriculture. It is also debatable from its evolution, because it is not natural tendencies of human being to attach with wedlock which is unlike phenomenon in other species of planet. That's why it was most debatable and today, also it is questionable and complicated because of uncertainty about its origin and purpose. The root cause of the evolution of marriage stills not certain, so questions relating created doubt and debate among various scholars around the world. Some scholars claim that marriage is sacred institution; other one claims that it is the religious and political imperatives to constrain individuals from their natural freedoms. The primary premise of this article that the marriage was the biggest mistake of the mankind, because it changes the course of humanity in different direction and due to that serious damage happened to the present society. Many Scholars have argued that the institution of marriage has been profoundly influenced by the religious doctrine and political necessity, often serving to reinforce existing hierarchies and cultural conventions. The present article aims to examine and empirically demonstrate the potential negative impact of the institution of marriage on the advancement of humankind. It seeks to establish correlations between marriage and indicators of societal stagnation, drawing upon empirical data and a synthesis of scholarly perspectives. Furthermore, the study explores the interaction of relevant social variables to test the hypothesis proposed by the researcher, analyzing how entrenched marital structures may influence social, cultural, and economic dynamics, thereby contributing to broader patterns of societal degradation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Yuval Noah Harari present in his book that agriculture is the “Biggest fraud of mankind” or “history biggest fraud” arguing that it did not lead to human happiness or freedom, instead it led to the harder life of the humankind.¹ Marriage also is the one of the human development happened after the establishment of the agriculture. The theory of marriage² suggests that when humans began practicing agriculture, the need to control and cultivate land became central to life. Men, in many societies,

¹ Harari, Y. N., *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (H. Frenkiel trans., Harper 2015) (original work published 2011).

² Bryceson, D. F. (1996). Deagrarianization and rural employment in sub-Saharan Africa: A sectoral perspective. *World Development*, 24(1), 97–111. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(95\)00119-W](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(95)00119-W); see also Boserup, E. (1965). *The conditions of agricultural growth: The economics of agrarian change under population pressure*.

started claiming ownership of land they farmed. As land ownership became important, ideas like property rights, possession, and inheritance gradually took shape. Over time, marriage and family structures evolved in ways that reflected these new social and economic realities, linking personal relationships to the ownership and transfer of property. The concept of marriage is closely linked to the idea that property should pass to one's legal heirs. With the advent of agriculture, people were forced to settle in one place, which was a significant change from the earlier way of life, where humans moved frequently in search of food. This shift disrupted the natural mobility of humans and may have had negative effects on overall human development, as permanent settlement created new social and economic pressures that shaped family structures and relationships.

Man lost his freedom after marriage; several scholars have examined how marriage can limit personal freedom. **Jack Goody (1973)**, for example, notes that in agrarian societies, marriage often tied individuals to family duties and the management of inherited property, which constrained their independence.³ Similarly, **Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969/1949)** argues that marriage functions as a network of alliances between families, restricting personal choice because people are expected to follow established social and familial rules.⁴ **Friedrich Engels (1884)** also highlights that marriage, especially when connected to property and inheritance, can limit freedom by binding individuals to societal and family expectations.⁵ Discrimination exists in many forms in today's society, affecting marginalized groups, women, and children. However, is it accurate to say that marriage is responsible for these inequalities? While the institution of marriage has reinforced traditional gender roles, property rules, and social hierarchies, discrimination and injustice stem from a broader set of social, cultural, economic, and legal factors. Marriage, **Fineman** argues, has become a largely irrelevant institution, which's primary and important functions and goals can and are being met elsewhere.⁶ Marriage reflects or perpetuates certain inequalities, but it is only one part of a larger system that produces and maintains social disadvantage. The famous anarchist Emma Goldman argued that marriage is not primarily an expression of love but an economic arrangement that often limits the freedom of both partners, especially women. She criticized the way women frequently gave up their independence permanently when entering marriage.⁷ Goldman also highlighted the social stigma placed on sexual activity and child-rearing outside of marriage, showing how these norms reinforce control over personal choices and maintain societal pressures.⁸ Goldman insisted that true love is naturally free and cannot be controlled by laws, societal rules, or financial pressures. She highlighted examples of women raising children through love-based, voluntary arrangements, showing that such relationships can create healthier family dynamics and promote genuine human growth. Ultimately, she imagined a society where love, not marriage, forms the foundation of human relationships, fostering freedom, equality, and authentic companionship.⁹

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Material

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to examine and describe various aspects of the research problem. The study draws upon both primary and secondary sources of information, including questionnaires, case studies, government reports, books, research articles, legal documents, policy documents, and official statistical data. These sources provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and help the researchers examine the issue from different perspectives.

The qualitative component of the study facilitates a deeper understanding of the research problem. The views and findings presented in previous studies are examined and considered to develop a well-informed understanding of the present research topic.

2.2 Sample Collection

³ Goody, J. (1973). *The development of the family and marriage in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969). *The elementary structures of kinship* (J. H. Bell, J. R. von Sturmer, & R. Needham, Trans.). Beacon Press. (Original work published 1949).

⁵ Engels, F., *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (H. L. J. Tutte trans., International Publishers 1884).

⁶ M. Fineman, The Autonomy Myth. See also N. D. Polikoff, 'Why Lesbians and Gay Men Should Read Martha Fineman' (2000) 8 *American University Journal of Gender Social Policy and Law* 167–176.

⁷ Goldman, E. (2012). *Anarchism and other essays*. Duke Classics. (Original work published 1910).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

For the purpose of the study, 51 respondents were selected. Among them, 22 respondents were married, 28 were unmarried, and 1 respondent was in a committed relationship. With regard to gender, the sample consisted of 31 women and 20 men. The respondents were selected to obtain diverse perspectives relevant to the objectives of the study.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The relevant information was collected through a structured questionnaire circulated among the selected respondents using Google Forms. The responses received through the questionnaire constituted the primary data for the study. The collected information was organised and prepared for further analysis in accordance with the objectives of the research.

2.4 Analytical Methods

The study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

2.5 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were systematically examined, organised, and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Appropriate statistical techniques were employed to analyse the responses and identify significant patterns within the data. The analysis focused on the dependent and independent variables identified in accordance with the objectives and purpose of the study.

Survey Findings: Perceptions and Detrimental Aspects of Marriage

1. Detrimental aspects of marriage for individuals

Response	Count	Percentage
Other (custom answers)	17	33.3%
Loss of individual autonomy	8	15.7%
Emotional or physical abuse risk	4	7.8%
Societal pressure	4	7.8%
Financial burden	3	5.9%

2. Importance of re-evaluating marriage

Response	Count	Percentage
Very important	22	43%
Moderately important	17	33%
Slightly important	7	14%
Not important	5	10%

Interpretation: A strong majority believes marriage should be socially re-evaluated.

3. Has marriage become outdated?

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	23	45%
No	18	35%
Unsure	10	20%

Interpretation: Opinion is divided, with slightly more respondents believing marriage is outdated.

4. Does marriage restrict freedom (especially for women)?

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	27	53%
No	16	31%
Unsure	8	16%

Interpretation: More than half perceive restrictions on autonomy.

5. Pressure to marry causes mental distress?

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	36	71%
No	10	20%
Unsure	5	9%

Interpretation: This is one of the strongest consensus findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marriage and Society

The current social structure of society is organized into multiple layers, hierarchies, and stratifications.¹⁰ These divisions influence people's access to resources, opportunities, and social status, shaping relationships and interactions across different groups. Modern society is shaped by the social practices of the past, with marriage historically viewed as a fundamental institution for human beings. This belief, which took root thousands of years ago, has had a lasting impact on how communities are organized. One might wonder: if the idea of marriage had never emerged, could society have developed without the layers of discrimination, inequality, and social hierarchies that exist today? This perspective encourages us to examine how long-standing institutions influence social divisions and the distribution of power.

The study emphasizes that an individual's choice of partner and the social circles they belong to have a significant influence on their personal development and behavior. Relationships formed through marriage can either encourage social stability or, in some cases, reinforce patterns of misconduct, depending on the character and background of the spouse.¹¹ The development of an individual must be understood as part of a larger social structure that encompasses the entire world. Every person's growth is shaped not in isolation, but through their interaction with the wider social, cultural, and economic systems that define human civilization. Before reflecting on society as a whole, it is essential to place the individual at the center of understanding. When individuals experience freedom and happiness, society as a collective can also be regarded as free and content. A society's moral and emotional well-being depends upon the freedom and happiness of its members. When individuals live with dignity, autonomy, and contentment, the broader social order may justly be described as free, just, and harmonious.¹² Empirical observation suggests that a freer social environment, unrestrained by rigid institutional constructs such as marriage, might have facilitated the emergence of a more equitable and humanitarian society, one in which social demarcations and discriminatory hierarchies would have been significantly reduced or altogether absent. There exists a correlation between the injustices and forms of discrimination faced by society and the historical evolution of the concept of marriage. For instance, *Amato and Booth's* longitudinal studies on marital quality and gender roles found that traditional marital arrangements correlate with lower

¹⁰ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 926.; See also, Andersen, L. H., Andersen, S. H., & Skov, P. (2010). Partners in crime? On the causal effect of marrying a delinquent vs. a law-abiding spouse. In Proceedings of the International Sociological Association World Congress. Gothenburg, Sweden: International Sociological Association.

¹¹ Andersen, L. H., Andersen, S. H., & Skov, P. (2010). Partners in crime? On the causal effect of marrying a delinquent vs. a law-abiding spouse. In Proceedings of the International Sociological Association World Congress. Gothenburg, Sweden: International Sociological Association.

¹² Mill, J. S. (1859). *On liberty*. London: John W. Parker and Son. See also, Rousseau, J.-J. (1762). *The social contract* (G. D. H. Cole, Trans.). London: J. M. Dent & Sons.

autonomy and higher emotional stress among women.¹³ Similarly, the *World Health Organization's Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence* (2005) documented that women in marital or cohabiting relationships were more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse compared to those outside such arrangements.¹⁴ In Indian Society marriage is the tool to maintain caste and religious structure.¹⁵ Ultimately, marriage has become a social instrument for maintaining the status quo that has persisted for centuries. Its underlying purpose, in many traditional societies, is to ensure that relationships remain confined within caste and religious boundaries. Marriages that occur outside these boundaries are often viewed as transgressions or even sins, while intra-caste unions are celebrated as virtuous and respectable. In such a social framework, there is little room for love, individual choice, or personal autonomy. Instead, marriage operates as a socially sanctioned mechanism that legitimizes discrimination and reinforces inherited hierarchies. The findings of the empirical study *India Human Development Survey-II (IHDS-II)* conducted by **Sonalde Desai and Veena Kulkarni** reveal that caste continues to play a decisive role in shaping marital choices in India. So it concluded that through marriage exploitation and discrimination were purported in the past and it still continuing.

Marriage and Love

In the history of humankind, love has been a permanent and natural phenomenon, whereas marriage is a social adjustment. It is well known that marriage may not create love, and love does not require external recognition such as marriage. Love is an inherent human emotion, present from birth, while marriage is a social construct created by humans to propagate a specific philosophy of desire. Love represents the purest form of relationship between consenting individuals, fulfilling both emotional and physical needs and ensuring the continuation of generations; an arrangement guaranteed by the laws of nature. In contrast, marriage is an artificial relationship often confined by distinctions of race, colour, religion, caste, and other social parameters. Plato, in his *Symposium*, described love as the soul's memory of its eternal beauty, a force that elevates humanity toward truth.¹⁶ It knows no caste, class, or religion; it defies race and nationality.¹⁷ It flourishes in freedom and withers in confinement.¹⁸ The most enduring question before humanity is whether marriage, as a social institution, has ever been able to honour the purity of love that deep, unspoken emotion which arises freely within the human heart, untouched by law or tradition. One important premise about marriage is that societies with higher divorce rates are often considered more progressive and developed. The reason behind is that greater importance is given for individual decision making, freedom, and autonomy rather than autocratic values and tradition norms. A higher divorce rate also indicates that individuals are economical independent, and the upbringing of children not dependent is not solely dependent on single spouse within the marriage. For example in USA divorce rate among individuals is 2.3% divorces per 1000 people, In India the rate of divorce is below 1%.¹⁹ In the United States, marriage is generally motivated not by customary or traditional obligations but by individual preference, personal autonomy, and romantic choice. Pew research Center survey shows that 93% of married Americans say Love is a very important reason to get married, and 84% of unmarried Americans say the same.²⁰ The Study reports that "less than 5% of IHDS respondents had a primary role in choosing their husbands in India."²¹

Marriage and Marital Rape

One of the drawback of institution of marriage is violation of individual autonomy, extend in resulting crime like rape on own partner becomes regular phenomenon, even though it is not recognized from ancient world to the modern society. In Society sexual consent is not paramount than the institution of marriage. Legal system barely mentioned this as a crime, Marital rape

¹³ Paul R. Amato & Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval* 112–18 (Harvard Univ. Press 1997).

¹⁴ World Health Org., *WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women* 25–30 (2005).

¹⁵ Sonalde Desai & Veena Kulkarni, *India Human Development Survey-II (IHDS-II)*, Nat'l Council of Applied Econ. Research & Univ. of Md. (2015).

¹⁶ Plato, *Symposium* 210a–212b (Benjamin Jowett trans., Dover Publ'ns 2001).

¹⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* 88–90 (Macmillan 1931).

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 473–76 (Hazel E. Barnes trans., Wash. Square Press 1956).

¹⁹ Nat'l Ctr. for Health Statistics, Nat'l Vital Statistics Sys., *Provisional Number of Divorces & Annulments and Rate: United States, 2000–2023*, at 1 tbl. (2024), <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/marriage-divorce/national-marriage-divorce-rates-00-23.pdf>

²⁰ D'Vera Cohn, *Love and Marriage*, Pew Research Ctr. (Feb. 13, 2013), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2013/02/13/love-and-marriage/>

²¹ Raka Banerji, Martin Desai & Sonalde Desai, *Gender Scripts and Age at Marriage in India*, 61 *Population & Dev. Rev.* (PMC) (2008).

refers to "forcible sexual assault or violence by one spouse towards the other"²² as discussed by the authors, and is defined as "the act of sexual intercourse with a spouse without his/her spouse's consent".²³ Sir Matthew Hale in *History of the Pleas of the Crown* (1736) stated that a husband cannot be guilty of 'a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given herself in this kind unto her husband which she cannot retract'.²⁴ The **National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21)** reports that nearly 30% of ever-married women in India have faced some form of spousal violence, including sexual abuse, yet fewer than 10% sought help from legal or institutional sources, reflecting persistent stigma and limited legal recourse.²⁵ Empirical research in America by Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes which is published by US Department of Justice, survey explored the physical and sexual violence within intimate relationships, including marital rape.²⁶ The findings revealed that approximately 7.7% of women reported being raped by an intimate partner at some point in their lives, demonstrating that marital or partner-related sexual assault is a significant and underreported issue.²⁷ The report also highlighted the long-term psychological, physical, and economic consequences of such violence, including higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), injury, and loss of work productivity.²⁸ The **Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)**, published annually by the **Office for National Statistics (ONS)**, consistently records that between 20% and 25% of women who report sexual assault identify the perpetrator as a spouse or partner.²⁹ Empirical research conducted by **Liz Kelly and Jo Lovett** for the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU), further document that victims of marital rape experience deep psychological trauma, social isolation, and limited access to justice due to stigma and systemic disbelief.³⁰ In United Kingdom Marital rape is considered one of the most underreported Crimes. Even in a developed country like the United Kingdom³¹, where laws against marital rape exist, many individuals still struggle to exercise their full autonomy and bodily freedom within marriage. If such challenges persist in nations with stronger legal protections, the situation in developing countries like India, where marital rape remains outside the scope of criminal law becomes even more concerning.

Marriage and Genetic stagnation

In the history of human evolution, early humans tended to mate with different partners across various localities, carrying diverse genetic traits that promoted variety in breeding. However, with the advent of agriculture and settled life, consanguineous marriages gradually became prevalent. It resulted in continuous cross-cousin mating, a common form of prescribed marriage, can increase homozygosity but also slow down the loss of gene diversity due to genetic drift.³² Patterns of assortative mating³³, where individuals tend to choose partners who share similar genetic traits or social characteristics, have shown remarkable persistence throughout the twentieth century, particularly in relation to educational attainment and physical attributes such as height.³⁴ Conversely, Negative assortative mating increases the likelihood of genetic diversity, as it occurs when individuals select partners who possess different genetic traits from their own. Genetic stagnation arising from restrictive marriage customs can substantially affect genetic diversity and overall population health. Endogamous traditions, where individuals marry within a defined social, religious, or ethnic community tend to reduce genetic variation and heighten the risk

²² Michelle J. Anderson, *Marital Immunity, Intimate Relationships, and Improper Inferences: A New Law on Sexual Offenses by Intimates*, 54 *Hastings L.J.* 1465, 1468–69 (2003).

²³ Debanjan Banerjee & T.S. Sathyanarayana Rao, *The Dark Shadow of Marital Rape: Need to Change the Narrative*, 4 *J. Psychosexual Health* 1 (2022).

²⁴ Sir Matthew Hale, *History of the Pleas of the Crown 1736 vol 1* P R Glazebrook (ed), (Professional Books Ltd, London 1971) 629.; See also, *Love and Marriage ,Looking for Love in the Legal Discourse of Marriage* Book Author(s): Renata Grossi Published by: ANU Press, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13www3x>.

²⁵ Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Gov't of India, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) 2019–21: India Report* 423–25 (2021).

²⁶ Patricia Tjaden & Nancy Thoennes, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey* 18–22 (U.S. Dep't of Justice 2000).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Office for Nat'l Stat., *Crime Survey for England and Wales: Domestic Abuse, Sexual Assault and Stalking* 8–10 (2023).

³⁰ Liz Kelly, Jo Lovett & Linda Regan, *A Gap or a Chasm? Attrition in Reported Rape Cases* 25–29 (Home Off. Research Study 293, 2005).

³¹ Section 1 of sexual offence Act 2003 which penalizes marital rape and in several judgements, it reiterated that marriage is not considered as defence in rape crime.

³² Michael Krawczak & Robert H. Barnes, *How obedience of marriage rules may counteract genetic drift*, 1 *J. Community Genet.* 23 (2010).; see also Daniel J. Cotter, Alissa L. Severson & Noah A. Rosenberg, *The effect of consanguinity on coalescence times on the X chromosome*, 140 *Theor. Popul. Biol.* 32 (2021).

³³ Matthew O. Jackson & D. M. de la Croix, *Assortative Mating, Inequality, and Growth*, 92 *Review of Economic Studies* 378 (2020).

³⁴ Dalton C. Conley, et al., *Assortative Mating and the Genetics of Human Traits*, 355 *Science* 909 (2017).

of hereditary disorders linked to inbreeding. This phenomenon has been observed in several populations, including the Gujarati Patels in India, where long-standing marital practices have contributed to distinct genetic substructures, limited gene flow, and greater genetic similarity within the group.³⁵ Inbreeding elevates the risk of recessive genetic disorders, particularly in populations with high rates of consanguinity, which exhibit extensive runs of homozygosity (ROH).³⁶

The persistence of endogamous marriage traditions may have inadvertently hindered the natural evolution of humankind by limiting genetic variation, thereby reducing the possibility of the emergence of new or more advanced genetic traits within the human species. The decline of humankind's genetic and evolutionary potential may not be immediately apparent today, yet within the deeper layers of history, we may have already lost crucial aspects of our biological diversity and advancement. Yet, countless potential heroes those who might have contributed profoundly to the progress of humanity were lost in the womb of time, their existence unrealized due to the restrictive marriage practices that evolved within human society. Endogamous marriages involve unions within the same lineage or community; such homogeneity reinforces similar practices, which in turn sustain uniform traditions. These traditions give rise to hierarchies, and hierarchies perpetuate discrimination based on caste, creed, color, and social behavior. Ultimately, it tends to seem that marriage is the profound reason to have all disparities in the world.

CONCLUSION

Marring being evolved with needs of mankind, relationship is dynamic, people needs change over time, and when needs of marriage will change, the existence of marriage in society became scarce in future. Actually, marriage as concept is not the natural attitudes of mankind; it is created by man for the benefit of man like religion, god and state; same attributes may applicable to the concept of religion. Societal norms and values are shifting, and alternative forms of partnership and family structures are becoming more accepted today, in future we will see the marriage as an exceptional phenomenon; Abolishing marriage would take gender equality seriously by letting individuals themselves bargain for the content of their agreements.³⁷

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³⁵ T. J. Pemberton et al., *Genomic Patterns of Homozygosity in Worldwide Human Populations*, 111 *Proc. Nat'l Acad. Sci. U.S.* 238 (2012).

³⁶ R. Sa et al., *Runs of Homozygosity and Inbreeding in Populations with a High Prevalence of Consanguinity: Implications for Genetic Health*, 23 *Hum. Genomics* 45 (2021).

³⁷ Fineman, 'Meaning of Marriage' 58.

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