



Perceived Qualities of the Potential Mates among the University Students in Kathmandu, Nepal

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Abstract

Unmarried young people are highly concerned with the qualities of their potential mates. The study investigated the importance of various qualities that university level students prefer in selecting their prospective mates. Three theories shed light on this study: evolutionary theory, social exchange theory, and social homogamy theory, all of which are pertinent to individuals' mate selection behavior. A total of 224 students studying in bachelor level programs at Pokhara University's colleges in Kathmandu were surveyed using a self-administered questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive and bivariate level statistics, such as the chi-square test, to test the research hypothesis. The findings of the study indicated that university level students placed the highest importance to the mutual love, care, and support of a potential mate, followed by good health, honesty, intelligence, and a good sense of humor. Chastity, which used to be given top priority, was not given as much value by the respondents in this study. The youths placed relatively low importance to the family structures, family networks, and family social status. Furthermore, respondents did not attach importance to the potential mate's political affiliation. Among the sixteen qualities of a potential mate investigated, based on the modified list from Hill (1945) study to highlight the importance of their mate, about half showed gender variation. The findings were useful for tracing the direction of societal transformation in mate selection among university level students.

Keywords: mate, potential, qualities, Kathmandu, Nepal

Introduction

Potential mate selection or preference is an important life event for youth (Abdullah, 2011; Maliki, 2009; Niaki et al., 2014). It is a crucial life process shaped by individuals' personal perspectives, which are influenced by the family and society related factors (Buss, 1989; Zhan, 2016). Mate selection also depends on various attributes such as health, age, body shape, education, religion, caste, culture, financial status, and occupation (Islam, 2021; Maliki, 2009). Therefore, mate selection among the unmarried is influenced by but not limited to such factors as physical attraction, love, care, understanding, devotion, lifestyles, support, and the potential partner's family background.

Choosing the right kind of life partner is important given the rising rates of marriage dissolution and divorce rates (Amato, 2010;

In the past, selecting an appropriate marriage partner was widely regarded as a family responsibility. However, in the contemporary time,

particularly in the developing world, this responsibility has shifted to the individual concerned Ghimire, & Axinn, 2013 Niaki et al., 2014). Traditionally, parents, kin, and relatives were proactive and had a decisive role in identifying suitable life partners for their children. In contrast, this role today has transitioned into that of facilitators or well wishers, with limited authority for final decision making. Although a wide range of attributes and qualities are desired by individuals while selecting a potential mate, this study examines the sixteen behavioral characteristics originally proposed by Hill, 1945, adapted to the contemporary Nepali context and shaped by ongoing societal transformation. Most prior studies found that youth valued intangible qualities more than tangible ones (Maliki, 2009; Niaki et al., 2014; Todosijević et al., 2003) when selecting potential life partners. Intangible means that they were attracted to the behavioral, moral, and ethical side of the potential mate more often than any other external attributes like body shape, size, education,

occupation, income, and wealth. It suggests that they are in search of a person having human value and virtue rather than his/her command over resources as well as external features like body size, shape and complexion.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study bases the triple theoretical lenses of evolutionary theory, social exchange theory and social homogamy theory; in order to figure out the respondent's mate preferences and analyze the gender variation in their choices. Evolutionary theory (Cohen et al., 2002; Zhan, 2016) explains the mate selection from an evolutionary perspective. Men and women are the counterparts in the family setting, often complementing each other in reproduction and family formation. This theory sees them together as complementary; one tries to compensate for the other's lack of skills or resources, making it easier for survival, child rearing, and family formation for both of them. With this mentality in mind, a boy searches for a girl who cooks well if he does not like to do so. The girl, on the other hand, searches for a boy who has a good education, provides good health, and wealth to fulfill the resources needed to lead a comfortable life after marriage. The social exchange theory) expresses that the mate selection process is something like buying others' qualities by using qualities that the other party values. It is guided by the intention, such as commodity exchange in the marriage market, where everyone tries to maximize returns and minimize losses. For example, a wealthy boy is often searching for a beautiful girl, and vice versa. It is with the intention that each thinks that he/she can exchange one's attribute with the other side which he/she values. Social homogamy theory (Islam, 2021; Mäenpää, 2015) stresses that boys and girls seek mates with similar socioeconomic status. The homogeneity in terms of age, education, caste, culture, religion, wealth, and resources is aimed at minimizing conflicts arising from a mismatch in their socio-economic condition. Hence, it suggests that people normally do not like to cross the border in finding out their mate, which is constrained by their resources, demography, geography, culture, etc. These three theories shed light on how the mentality of the people in general is shaped by the factors around them while searching for their long term potential partners.

Research Methodology

The key research questions addressed in this study are: what is the perceived level of importance given to the attributes suggested by Hill (1945) measured on a five point Likert scale, and later on customized into a three point Likert scale. Is there a gender variation in such qualities as preferred by the respondents? Hill (1945) identified eighteen interpersonal and behavioral qualities of a potential mate (Conley, 2007). Among those, two qualities which were deemed irrelevant in the Nepali context were removed, while others were retained after adjusting to the Nepali context. To answer the above research questions empirically, this study employed descriptive and inferential research designs (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, & Creswell, 2017creswell2017research). It is based on a study of unmarried university level students who were in their third year or above at the time of data collection in Kathmandu city. The reason this study was conducted in the Kathmandu Valley is that most colleges affiliated with Pokhara University are located in Kathmandu Metropolitan City. Of the 65 affiliated colleges of Pokhara University, at least 30 are located solely in the Kathmandu Valley (Pokhara University

Annual Report 2025/2026). Students from almost all districts of Nepal are moving to Kathmandu city in order to pursue quality higher education.

This study was carried out in the college setting as was done in almost all of the past studies in several country contexts (Amuasi, & Alhassan, 2022; Farooq, & Arshad, 2017; Lin et al., 2022 Lin, et al., 2022; Rafiee, 2023 Rafiee, 2023) taking data from the students studying at university level representing various disciplines. In particular, this study followed a multistage sampling technique for the sample selection. In the first stage, colleges offering programs in science or management were segregated, and two colleges from each cluster were selected using a simple random sampling method. Cosmos College and Noble College from the science cluster, while Medhavi College and Camad College from the management cluster were selected randomly. In the second stage, relevant programs were selected purposively based on management and science based streams. Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and Bachelor of Hotel Management (BHM) from the management stream; whereas Bachelor of Science in Nursing (B. Sc. Nursing) and Bachelor of Engineering in Civil (BE Civil) were selected for ease of dealing with the relevant program coordinators. Then, at the third level, the semester or classes were conveniently selected based on their third year or at least sixth semester, for which the active classrooms were available at the time of data collection. Hence, following this procedure, a final sample size of 224 students was obtained. We are however, aware of the deficiency of these convenience and purposive sampling methods as having limited generalizability (Babbie, 1989 Babbie, 1989; Cohen et al., 2002 Cohen et al., 2002) of the findings which are applicable to the college setting of the students. The collected data were first cleaned to ensure the clarity and consistency of the responses. Then descriptive statistics such as frequency, percent, mean, standard deviation, and the chi-square test were employed as inferential statistics to investigate the two research questions stated above.

The questionnaire set consisted of an initial declaration of research objectives and a request for respondents' participation, with assurances of anonymity, voluntariness, and confidentiality. The initial part of the questionnaire secured the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. The main questionnaire set consisted of Likert-type five-point rating scale questions. The criteria, as developed by Hill, 1945 Hill (1945) with adjustments in the present Nepali context, have been adopted in designing the questionnaire. The options were presented as a five point Likert scale, e.g., highly unimportant, unimportant, neutral, important, highly important. The respondents picked one option among five scales and put tick marks for each criterion given on the list, which were later converted into a three point Likert scale, e.g., important, neutral, and unimportant. The questionnaire set initially designed was pretested in a similar classroom setting of Bachelor of Development Studies (BDEVS) students in the constituent college of Pokhara University. The students were proactive and enthusiastic in providing feedback and inputs, which were incorporated to reform the questionnaire set. The Chronback alpha value for the importance given to the human and behavioral qualities was 0.718; ensuring the internal consistency of the provided responses (Creswell, & Creswell, 2017 Creswell Creswell, 2017).

Findings

The findings of the present study are presented in three distinct sections. The first section of the study consisted of the socio-demographic profile of the respondent students. The second section consisted of the descriptive statistics of the study variables, while the third section

consisted of the cross tabulations and chi-square statistics of the study, leading to the segregation of gender variation in the responses.

Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

This section discusses the socio-demographic characteristics of the student respondents, which provides a picture of the kinds of respondents. The respondents were all university level, unmarried students affiliated to colleges of Pokhara University located in Kathmandu city. This section provides further information regarding their streams of study, age, gender, caste, religion and their living arrangements at the time of data collection.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

Description	Frequency	Percent
Kind of Program		
Management	114	50.9
Science	110	49.1
Sex of respondents		
Female	119	53.1
Male	105	46.9
Age groups		
19 years	7	3.1
20 years	28	12.5
21 years	44	19.6
22 years	56	25.0
23 years	59	26.3
24 years	23	10.3
25 years	7	3.1
Caste/ethnicity		
Brahmin Chhetri Newar and other advantaged castes	168	75.0
Disadvantaged Janajatis	34	15.2
Dalit and Others	22	9.8
Religion		
Hindu	200	89.3
Buddhist	14	6.3
Christian Islam and other	10	4.4
Currently living in		
Own house	78	34.8
Rented house	123	54.9
Hostel and other	23	10.2
Currently living with		
Own parent	112	50.0
Relatives	34	15.2
Single	36	16.1
Other	42	18.8
Total	224	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

based and management related programs. The science based programs were engineering and health sciences within the Faculty of Science and Technology of Pokhara University, while the management related programs consisted of Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and Bachelor of Hotel Management (BHM) from the Faculty of Management Studies of Pokhara University. The gender disaggregation revealed that 53 percent of respondents were female and 47 percent were male. It was due to the fact that there was a majority of female students in some programs like BBA and some health science programs such as Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSc. Nursing) were exclusively female represented, which made the female proportion a little higher than the male counterparts.

The respondent's age ranged from 19 to 25 years, with 23 year old students representing 26 percent in all, while 22 year old students represented 25 percent. Hence, 22 and 23 year old students accounted for more than half of all respondents. Caste and ethnic composition of the respondent students revealed that 75 percent were Brahmin Chhetri, Newar, and other advantaged castes like Thakuri, Shahi, Dasnami, and others, while the disadvantaged Janajatis like Tamang and Gurung stood second with 15 percent of the total sample size. Dalits and other unidentified castes were third with 10 percent inclusion in the sample. Our sample represented the students roughly 90 percent Hindu, six percent Buddhist, and the rest a mix of Christian, Muslim, Bon, and other unidentified religions. Regarding the respondents' living arrangements, including residence and accompanying persons, the majority 55 percent came from different parts of Nepal and lived in rented houses. Thirty five percent of the students commuted from their homes, while others lived in private hostels and other arrangements. Fifty percent of all the students accompanied their parents while lesser percentages lived with their relatives, single and various other arrangements. Hence, the sample size was a mix of different programs, gender, caste and representing various localities of the country.

The Perceived Qualities of the Potential Mate

This section provides information on how much importance a marriageable age respondent would place on such perceived qualities, such as the human and ethical aspects of a potential mate. There were altogether 16 attributes regarding the importance unmarried students would rate, as proposed by Hill (1945). There were certain modifications as well as amendments based on the time, culture, and context of the present Nepali society. There are certain qualities a prospective mate would seek, such as mutual love, morality, ethics, support, care, trust, respect, and other parameters (Maliki, 2009; Niaki et al., 2014; Todosijević et al., 2003).

Table 2 states that among the sixteen qualities proposed by the researchers to rank order as their preferences, respondents pointed out mutual love, care, and support (Mean=2.88, SD= 0.46) as the top most quality they would prefer in their mate. Among all other qualities proposed, good health, which came in the second order of preference (Mean=2.87, SD=0.42), of their potential mate. Equally important but came in the third order of the preference was honesty and good sense of humor (Mean=2.85, SD for honesty and intelligence=0.46, SD for good humor=0.40). Similar to the love, care, support, honesty, and intelligence, but more particular to the moral and ethical values of the potential mate were given the importance (Mean=2.82, SD= 0.43). Other qualities of moderate importance assigned were shared interest and hobbies (Mean=2.70, SD=0.57), desire for home

Table 1 presents an almost equal representation of the science

and children (Mean=2.70, SD=0.57), ambition and industriousness (Mean=2.76, SD=0.52), good cook and home keeper (Mean=2.60, SD=0.60), chastity (Mean=2.58, SD=0.65), good looks and physical attractiveness (Mean=2.50, SD=0.59). Furthermore, the network of family and status based qualities of the potential mate were given low importance e. g. strong network of relatives (Mean=2.53, SD=0.70), religious and spiritual (Mean=2.53, SD= 0.65), family social status (Mean=2.40, SD= 0.67), nuclear family (Mean=2.26, SD=0.68). Similar political background (Mean=1.86, SD=0.75) assigning lowest and value below average indicate unimportant quality for the choice of their potential mate. The attributes like desire for home and children, good looks and physically attractive, good cook, honesty and intelligence, religious and spiritual etc. were given moderate importance or above average value. Hence the descriptive statistics of the data provided a scenario that the youths valued moral and ethical side of the qualities like mutual interest, shared love, care, support, honesty, intelligence, industriousness very highly (Maliki, 2009; Maliki, 2009; Niaki et al., 2014; Niaki, et al., 2014; Todosijević et al., 2003; Todosijevic, et al., 2003) in Nepali societal context too. Beside moral attitude, good health of the mate was given high priority. The qualities like ambition and industriousness, physical attraction, chastity were provided moderate importance while the family network, social status, nuclear family were given low importance by the undergraduate level students. The political background the prospective mate's family was not important for establishing relation as a potential mate.

Table 2: Important qualities of a potential mate

Description	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Shared interest and hobbies	220	1.00	3.00	2.70	0.57
Mutual love support and care	220	1.00	3.00	2.88	0.46
Similar political background	220	1.00	3.00	1.86	0.75
Desire for home and children	220	1.00	3.00	2.70	0.57
Good looks and physical attractive	219	1.00	3.00	2.50	0.59
Good health	219	1.00	3.00	2.87	0.42
Chastity	220	1.00	3.00	2.58	0.65
Ambition and industriousness	218	1.00	3.00	2.76	0.52
Good cook and home keeper	220	1.00	3.00	2.60	0.60
Honesty and intelligence	220	1.00	3.00	2.85	0.46
Strong network of relatives	219	1.00	3.00	2.53	0.70
Good humour	219	1.00	3.00	2.85	0.40
Religious and spiritual	220	1.00	3.00	2.53	0.65
Moral and ethical values	220	1.00	3.00	2.82	0.43
Nuclear family	220	1.00	3.00	2.26	0.68
Social status	220	1.00	3.00	2.40	0.67

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Note: The number below 224 is due to non-response.

Gender Variation on the Qualities of the Potential Mate

This section of the study discusses the gender relations for humans and the personal value of the potential mate. Several empirical findings emphasized the male and female desirable qualities of the potential mate (Aryal, & Sharma, 2026; Furnham, 2009; Walter, et al., 2020). Hence, this section analyzes sex variation in the quality preference of the potential mate among college level students in Kathmandu city.

Table 3: Gender differences in the importance given to the qualities of the potential mate

Description	Category	Female	Male	Total	Chi-sq. value	P value
Shared interest and hobbies	Unimportant	1(0.5)	12(5.5)	13(5.9)	15.4	0.000
	Neutral	17(7.7)	22(10.0)	39(17.7)		
	Important	101(45.9)	67(30.5)	168(76.4)		
Mutual love support and care	Unimportant	2(0.9)	9(4.1)	11(5.0)	6.5	0.038
	Neutral	2(0.9)	3(1.4)	5(2.3)		
	Important	115(52.3)	89(40.5)	204(92.7)		
Similar political background	Unimportant	42(19.1)	36(16.4)	78(35.5)	0.123	0.941
	Neutral	50(22.7)	44(20.0)	94(42.7)		
	Important	27(12.3)	21(9.5)	48(21.8)		
Desire for home and children	Unimportant	8(3.6)	4(1.8)	12(5.5)	1.2	0.534
	Neutral	21(9.5)	22(10.0)	43(19.5)		
	Important	90(40.9)	75(34.1)	165(75.0)		
Good looks and physically attractive	Unimportant	3(1.4)	8(3.8)	11(5.0)	9.5	0.008
	Neutral	57(26.0)	30(13.7)	87(39.7)		
	Important	58(26.5)	63(28.8)	121(55.3)		
Good health	Unimportant	3(1.4)	4(1.8)	7(3.2)	2.4	0.297
	Neutral	5(2.3)	9(4.1)	14(6.4)		
	Important	110(50.2)	88(40.2)	198(90.4)		
Chastity	Unimportant	6(2.7)	14(6.4)	20(9.1)	8.7	0.012

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Description	Category	Female	Male	Total	Chi-sq. value	P value
	Neutral	24(10.9)	29(13.2)	53(24.1)		
	Important	89(40.5)	58(26.4)	147(66.8)		
Ambition and industriousness	Unimportant	3(1.4)	6(2.8)	9(4.1)	8.5	0.014
	Neutral	12(5.5)	23(10.6)	35(16.1)		
	Important	102(46.8)	72(33.0)	174(79.8)		
Good cook and home keeper	Unimportant	5(2.3)	8(3.6)	13(5.9)	13.9	0.001
	Neutral	23(10.5)	40(18.2)	63(28.6)		
	Important	91(41.4)	53(24.1)	144(65.5)		
Honesty and intelligence	Unimportant	2(0.9)	8(3.6)	10(4.5)	7.5	0.024
	Neutral	4(1.8)	8(3.6)	12(5.5)		
	Important	113(51.4)	85(38.6)	198(90.0)		
Strong network of relatives	Unimportant	9(4.1)	17(7.8)	26(11.9)	4.6	0.098
	Neutral	29(13.2)	21(9.6)	50(22.8)		
	Important	81(37.0)	62(28.3)	143(65.3)		
Good humor	Unimportant	0(0.0)	4(1.8)	4(1.8)	5.4	0.067
	Neutral	15(6.8)	9(4.1)	24(11.0)		
	Important	104(47.5)	87(39.7)	191(87.2)		
Religious and spiritual	Unimportant	12(5.5)	7(3.2)	19(8.6)	0.69	0.708
	Neutral	35(15.9)	31(14.1)	66(30.0)		
	Important	72(32.7)	63(28.6)	135(61.4)		
Moral and ethical values	Unimportant	0(0.0)	4(1.8)	4(1.8)	5.6	0.060
	Neutral	20(9.1)	12(5.5)	32(14.5)		
	Important	99(45.0)	85(38.6)	184(83.6)		
Nuclear family	Unimportant	12(5.5)	17(7.7)	29(13.2)	4.4	0.181
	Neutral	55(25.0)	50(22.7)	105(47.7)		
	Important	52(23.6)	34(15.5)	86(39.1)		
Family social status	Unimportant	7(3.2)	16(7.3)	23(10.5)	8.1	0.017
	Neutral	43(19.5)	42(19.1)	85(38.6)		
	Important	69(31.4)	43(19.5)	112(50.9)		
Total		119(54.1)	101(45.9)	220(100)		

Source: Field survey, 2024. Note: The total percentages below 100 are due to non-response.

Table 3 indicated that among the sixteen customary qualities of the potential mate that were asked to the respondents, eight qualities had clear gender variation, while the other eight qualities did not have statistically significant gender differences. Among those having statistically significant gender variation at a five percent level of significance of chi-square value were: shared interest and hobbies, mutual love, care and support, good looks and physical attraction, chastity, ambition and industriousness, good cook and home keeper, honesty and intelligence, and mate's family's social status. On the other hand, qualities such as similar political backgrounds, good health, strong networks of relatives, good humor, religious and spiritual values, moral and ethical values, and nuclear family did not show statistically significant results at the five percent level of significance for the chi-square test. In case of shared interest and hobbies, more female than male were of the opinion that it was an important quality for his/her mate (chi-square=15.5, $p=0.00$). It was evident that both male and female valued it, but more

female than male considered it as an important quality. Mutual love, support, and care were given importance by both boys and girls, but girls predominated over the boys (chi-square=6.5, $p=0.038$), which was statistically significant. The gender variation was clear in the quality of physical features and attractiveness with more girls being neutral towards it and more boys thought it as an important quality (chi-square=9.5, $p=0.008$) of their mate. Chastity was considered crucially important in the past but not much in this study (Conley, 2007). In the present study, more boys than girls thought it unimportant, while more girls than boys thought it important, indicating gender variation (chi-square=8.7, $p=0.012$) in their responses. Both boys and girls thought ambition and industriousness were important qualities, but more girls than boys thought them important qualities (chi-square=8.5, $p=0.014$). More males than females thought that being a good cook and a home keeper was an important quality of their mate; however, more girls than boys thought it as an important quality (chi-square=13.9, $p=0.001$). This finding evidenced changing

gender expectations among Nepali students regarding their future mate, in that boys do not view their mate as limited to being a housekeeper. In contrast, girls expected their mates to help them in cooking and other household chores. It also indicated that the gradual loosening of the expectations proposed by the evolutionary theory applies to household matters. Honesty and intelligence were also considered essential qualities of the potential mate, but more girls than boys were of the opinion that this was an important quality (chi-square=7.5, $p=0.024$). The qualities which were not statistically significant of the chi-square value at the five percent level of significance were similar political background (chi-square=0.123, $p=0.931$), desire for home and children (chi-square 1.2, $p=0.534$), good health (chi-square=2.4, $p=0.297$), strong network of relatives (chi-square=4.6, $p=0.098$), good sense of humor (chi-square=5.4, $p=0.067$), religion and spiritual (chi-square=0.69, $p=0.709$), moral and ethical values (chi-square=5.6, $p=0.06$), nuclear family (chi-square=4.4, $p=0.181$). The statistically not significant values portrayed that the gender agreement may be in either direction of their responses, e.g., important, neutral, or unimportant. Both boys and girls think these qualities important, neutral or unimportant where there was not clear cut gender segregation in the statistical term.

Discussion

This research investigated the sixteen perceived qualities associated with mate selection based on the modified list of Hill (1945), as perceived by unmarried undergraduate students in the urban setting of Nepal. It also examined the gender differences in the importance assigned to these qualities for the mate selection process. The study primarily applied quantitative data collected from college level students in their class room setting. It was grounded on the three theoretical perspectives related to the mate selection behavior of the individuals: evolutionary theory (Conley, 2007; Zhan, 2016), social exchange theory (Alavi et al., 2014; Conley, 2007; Maliki, 2009) and social homogamy theory (Islam, 2021; Mäenpää, 2015). The research addressed two research questions (1) what level of importance do respondents assign to various customary mate selection criteria; and (2) what gender differences exist in such responses. These research questions were examined within the context of university level class room settings in Nepal, guided by the aforementioned theoretical frameworks.

Evolutionary theory (Conley, 2007; Zhan, 2016) explains mate selection from the perspective of human evolution. The high importance assigned to the shared interest and hobbies, mutual love, care and support, honesty and integrity, as well as good health, desire for home and children, and competence in domestic roles (e.g., being a good cook and home maker), suggests that the relevance of evolutionary theory remains strong in Nepal. However, due to the ever changing gender expectations in Nepali society, the applicability of this theory is gradually weakening in the mate selection process. The statistically significant differences in the responses provided by the boys and girls for the importance of the qualities like shared interest and hobbies, mutual love, care and support, good looks and physically attractive, chastity, good cook and home keeper, ambition and industriousness, honesty and intelligence, family social status provide empirical support for the applicability of social exchange theory (Alavi et al., 2014; Conley, 2007; Maliki, 2009). The findings also indicate that both male and female participants tend to seek partners with specific and well defined attributes, making the mate selection process increasingly complex over time. Furthermore, the relatively lower importance assigned to the factors

such as political background, family networks, family status, and family structure provided empirical evidence of the weakening of the social homogamy theory (Islam, 2021; Mäenpää, 2015) towards the recent time. As these findings are based on data collected in the classroom setting, further research using community samples would be valuable for validating and strengthening this study's findings.

The above results show that mutual love, care, and support are the most important qualities, followed by good health. In the global context, it has been established that when forming long term relationships, prospective partners tend to value intangible or internal qualities more than external ones (Maliki, 2009; Niaki et al., 2014; Todosijević et al., 2003). Good health, which was given high importance, meant that it had several advantages in an individual's personal and conjugal life, which is the main sign of reproductive viability and earning capacity (Conley, 2007; Niaki et al., 2014). Good health, or the absence of diseases and deformities, indicates a pleasant personality, workable, earning capacity, and life ability, which marriageable age individuals expect the potential mate to possess. Honesty and intelligence, as well as a good sense of humor, came third in the overall importance given to the list of personal qualities. While chastity was highly valued by men in the past, it is considered less important nowadays. This time, men do not necessarily expect to marry a woman who is a virgin (Conley, 2007; Walter et al., 2020). Similarly, qualities such as political affiliations, family structure, and the social standing of the potential mate were given less importance by the respondents. Similar political background was considered unimportant by the respondents, both boys and girls, by assigning below average points for this quality of the potential mate. The logical explanation for this finding is that youths valued the moral, ethical, and behavioral qualities more often than other qualities (Maliki, 2009; Niaki et al., 2014; Todosijević et al., 2003), while affiliation with a certain political faction of their intended mate mattered less in the marital relationship.

Gender differences in the potential mate selection criteria are well documented empirical findings in the context of several other countries and cultural contexts (Aryal, & Sharma, 2026; Buss, & Shackelford, 2008; Eastwick et al., 2014; Furnham, 2009; Walter et al., 2020). Every society assigns gender specific roles and expectations to its male and female members, and these social norms are reflected in individuals' mate selection preferences. Gender variation in the quality of potential mate is evident for shared interests and hobbies, mutual love, support and care, good looks and physical attractiveness, chastity, ambition and industriousness, good cook and home keeper, honesty and intelligence, and family social status. In contrast, no significant gender differences in the responses were observed to the similar political backgrounds, desire for home and children, good health, strong networks of relatives, good humor, religious and spiritual, moral and ethical values, and nuclear family. These findings suggest that where gender differences exist, men and women assign differing levels of importance to the specific mate qualities. Conversely, the absence of gender differences indicates that both men and women place similar levels of importance on those particular mate qualities in a potential partner.

This study was carried out in the college setting as was done in most all of the past studies in other country contexts (Alavi, et al., 2014; Amuasi, & Alhassan, 2022; Farooq, & Arshad, 2017; Lin et al., 2022; Niaki et al., 2014; Rafiee, 2023), taking data from the students in the class room setting. Nepali students are more likely to share their romantic orientation openly outside their parental home. Therefore, this study

needs to be further verified and corroborated by similar studies with respondents in the same age groups in various household and community settings.

Conclusion

Undergraduate level students tended to prefer their prospective mates who could offer them love, care, and support, followed by those with pleasant, physically attractive personalities. They also valued morality, honesty, and integrity, as well as the traits such as a desire for home and children, interest in cooking and household responsibilities, chastity, and industriousness. In contrast, relatively less importance was placed on social networks, social status, and family structures, while political affiliation was considered unimportant. Regarding gender differences, the findings revealed gender variations in the importance assigned to shared interests and hobbies, mutual love, care, and support, physical appearance, chastity, ambition and industriousness, domestic skills, honesty, intelligence, and the social status of the potential mate. However, no significant gender differences were observed in the importance given to similar political backgrounds, desire for home and children, good health and strong family networks, sense of humor, religious and spiritual orientation, moral and ethical values, and other spiritual qualities. Overall, the findings suggest that interpersonal behavior and emotional bonding are the most highly valued qualities in selecting a life partner. The study underscores an important shift in selecting a life partner among the college level students, reflecting broader patterns of societal transformation.

Declarations

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Ethical approval and consent to participate

Due ethical procedure applicable to the social science research were adopted.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

Data are available on reasonable requests to the corresponding author.

Use of AI

AI was not used for the preparation and writing of this manuscript. We confirm that this paper's content was entirely human-generated.

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