

RESEARCH ARTICLE

DUAL-CITY MARRIAGES IN INDIA: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC EXAMINATION OF WORK-RELATED SEPARATION AMONG COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the evolving phenomenon of dual-city marriages in India, wherein married couples maintain separate residences due to work-related commitments. With increasing urban migration, career specialization, and employment mobility, this form of marital arrangement is becoming more common, particularly among educated, working professionals. Using a structured online questionnaire, this study investigates the socio-economic, emotional, and psychological consequences of dual-city living among married couples. Key variables assessed include demographic profiles, duration and reasons for separation, financial burdens and benefits, family perceptions, emotional well-being, parenting challenges, and coping strategies. The findings aim to identify patterns of stress, resilience, and adaptation, while also evaluating the adequacy of institutional support (e.g., flexible work arrangements, transfer policies). The study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how couples in contemporary India navigate love, livelihood, and long-distance living, and offers recommendations for employers, policymakers, and mental health practitioners to better support dual-city couples.

KEYWORDS

Dual-City Marriages, Work-Related Separation, Socio-Economic Impact, Emotional Well-Being, Gender Roles, Urban Families in India, Work-Life Balance

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern India, the traditional contours of marriage and family are being reshaped by growing professional aspirations and spatial mobility. A rising number of couples, particularly in urban, educated, dual-career households, are embracing a form of marital arrangement known as dual-city marriage, wherein spouses live in separate cities due to work obligations. While this phenomenon has existed in some form for decades particularly among military personnel or government employees it has gained widespread visibility in the post-liberalization era, as more couples pursue individual careers across geographically dispersed urban centers (Rao and Rao, 2012).

Historically, Indian marriages emphasized physical co-residence, shared familial responsibilities, and joint decision-making within a larger kinship framework (Ramu, 1988). However, modern couples increasingly negotiate their marital roles in ways that accommodate individual autonomy, career progression, and economic mobility (Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004). With more women entering the professional workforce and asserting career continuity, dual-city arrangements have become a pragmatic compromise, though not without emotional and logistical complexities (Niranjana, 2010).

1.1 Rise of Professional Mobility, Dual-Income Households, and Spatial Separation

The demand for geographic mobility in the contemporary Indian labor market has risen sharply, particularly in sectors like information technology, academia, government services, and healthcare. India's urban economic hubs such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Delhi NCR, and Mumbai offer specialized job opportunities, but these are often concentrated in

different cities for each spouse, thereby complicating co-location (Deloitte, 2017). In many cases, career trajectories diverge, forcing couples to live apart while striving to balance marriage and personal ambition.

Simultaneously, the emergence of dual-income nuclear families has significantly altered the socio-economic logic of marriage. The dual-income model not only improves household financial security but also supports higher standards of living, education, and healthcare (Niranjana, 2010). However, it often introduces new challenges, such as increased expenditure on travel, rent, and childcare, and strains on emotional intimacy and family cohesion (Banerjee, 2020).

Empirical evidence suggests that emotional stress, anxiety, loneliness, and marital dissatisfaction are common among dual-city couples. A recent NIMHANS study reported that nearly 55% of long-distance married individuals experienced elevated psychological stress, while 45% reported emotional detachment and communication fatigue (Singh, 2022). Despite technological solutions such as video calls, text messaging, and planned visits, the absence of shared physical space often results in unmet emotional needs and disruptions in parenting and domestic roles (Indian Express, 2023).

1.2 The Indian Cultural Context and Emotional Challenges

In Indian society, marriage is not merely a private union but a socially regulated institution rooted in cultural norms, familial expectations, and ritual obligations. The idea of living apart due to work even when consensual is often met with resistance from extended families who value traditional models of co-residence (Uberoi, 2006). In many cases, women bear the brunt of this pressure, being expected to compromise on their careers to uphold familial unity.

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Moreover, qualitative narratives from Indian couples in long-distance marriages reveal the emotional toll of such arrangements. One participant in a Reddit forum shared: *"We meet only for a few days a month. Initially, it was exciting to focus on our careers, but now we feel like roommates rather than partners"* (Reddit, 2024). These accounts align with academic findings that geographic separation can lead to erosion of emotional closeness, disruption in shared routines, and challenges in decision-making (Rao and Rao, 2012).

Despite these struggles, couples often adopt a variety of coping mechanisms, including digital intimacy, scheduled visits, shared calendars, emotional check-ins, and long-term planning for eventual reunification (Banerjee, 2020). However, the availability and effectiveness of these strategies vary widely based on individual resilience, organizational support, and societal context.

1.3 Purpose and Scope of the Study

This study focuses on dual-city marriages in India with two primary objectives:

- To examine the socio-economic and emotional implications of dual-city living among married, working couples.
- To evaluate the coping mechanisms and institutional support systems that mitigate the challenges arising from work-related marital separation.

Through quantitative data collected via a structured online questionnaire, the study aims to offer insights into how contemporary Indian couples navigate love, labor, and distance. It also seeks to inform policymakers, employers, and mental health professionals about the emerging needs of dual-city households in an era of rapid mobility and changing family structures.

In the rapidly transforming socio-economic landscape of India, traditional marital norms centered on cohabitation are increasingly being challenged by modern professional realities. The growing demand for career mobility, the expansion of metropolitan job markets, and the rise in dual-income households have resulted in an emerging trend: dual-city marriages. These are marital arrangements where spouses live in different cities primarily due to work-related commitments. While this phenomenon is not entirely new, its frequency and complexity have intensified in the wake of liberalization, urban migration, and gendered transformations in labor participation (Radhakrishnan, 2009; Uberoi, 2016).

Dual-city marriages often involve educated, urban, professional couples who prioritize both partners' career growth, financial stability, and aspirations. However, such spatial separation introduces multiple layers of strain emotional, logistical, financial, and social. This arrangement, though practically functional, can undermine the emotional connectedness of the couple, create parenting challenges, add financial burdens, and subject the couple to familial or societal pressures rooted in traditional expectations. Despite these challenges, there exists a paucity of systematic, empirical research focused on how dual-city married couples in India navigate these complexities. This gap needs urgent attention, particularly given the changing character of urban Indian families.

1.4 Justification for the Study

This study is necessary for several interrelated reasons. First, the rising prevalence of dual-city marriages among working professionals, especially in Tier I and Tier II cities, marks a significant shift in marital and family structures in India. The country's socio-cultural landscape, shaped deeply by familial proximity and gendered labor roles, offers unique challenges for such arrangements (Banerjee, 2020).

Second, existing research is skewed towards either Western commuter marriages or traditional cohabiting Indian couples. There is a glaring gap in literature that critically examines how Indian dual-city couples cope with structural and emotional disruptions, particularly within the context of a collectivist society that often stigmatizes such deviations.

Third, the institutional frameworks (both government and private) have not evolved to support such couples adequately. Most HR systems still assume the presence of a spouse in the same city, leading to inadequate support for transfers, spousal employment, remote work, or psychological counselling.

Fourth, the impact on children's upbringing, family dynamics, and overall mental well-being remains underexplored and poorly understood. This study, therefore, serves not only to fill academic gaps but also to inform policymakers, educators, organizational leaders, and mental health professionals.

1.5 Research Objectives

- To examine the socio-economic and emotional implications of dual-city living among married working couples in India.
- To evaluate the coping mechanisms and institutional support systems that influence the quality, sustainability, and long-term decision-making in dual-city marriages.

1.6 Research Questions

This study seeks to explore the following research questions in depth:

- **What socio-economic factors** (career advancement, financial constraints, lack of opportunities in the same city, etc.) influence couples to opt for dual-city living arrangements?
- **How does prolonged spatial separation** impact emotional intimacy, marital satisfaction, and psychological well-being among dual-city couples?
- **What are the financial dynamics** of dual-city marriages do they lead to improved financial security or increased burdens due to duplicated living costs (rent, travel, childcare)?
- **What coping strategies** (frequent communication, scheduled visits, counseling, support from family or friends) do couples employ to maintain emotional stability and manage daily logistics?
- **How do existing institutional policies** (e.g., HR policies, transfer norms, childcare provisions, mental health support) affect the ability of dual-city couples to sustain their arrangements?
- **How do family members and societal norms** perceive dual-city marriages, and to what extent do these perceptions shape or constrain couples' decisions to continue or terminate such arrangements?

1.7 Hypotheses

To guide the quantitative and qualitative analysis of survey responses, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

- **H1:** Dual-city living has a statistically significant negative impact on the emotional well-being and marital satisfaction of couples.
- **H2:** Couples who maintain consistent communication and scheduled visits report higher marital satisfaction than those who do not.
- **H3:** Dual-income couples living in separate cities experience higher financial strain due to additional living and travel costs, despite higher total household income.
- **H4:** Support from extended families and institutional mechanisms (e.g., flexible job transfers, remote work options) significantly reduces stress and improves marital sustainability.
- **H5:** The presence of children in dual-city marriages is associated with higher reported stress levels and increased desire for future reunification.

These hypotheses will be tested using both quantitative data from the questionnaire and qualitative thematic analysis of open-ended responses.

1.8 Significance and Scope of the Study

This study is significant in several key areas:

- **Sociological and Psychological Insights:** It expands the literature on urban Indian marital patterns by focusing on a non-traditional yet increasingly common phenomenon. The findings will add depth to the understanding of modern Indian families, work-life balance, emotional labor, and gender dynamics in marriage (Desai and Andrist, 2010).
- **Policy Relevance:** The study has the potential to influence organizational HR policies, government transfer policies, and social welfare programs. It may offer insights for designing spousal accommodation mechanisms, parental leave policies, and telecommuting options suited for such couples.
- **Gender and Family Studies:** It allows a nuanced understanding of how dual-city living challenges gender roles, especially in parenting, emotional labor, and career prioritization within marriages.
- **Educational and Counselling Use:** The findings may be of practical use to marital counsellors, therapists, career coaches, and educators who are working with individuals or couples experiencing dual-city separation.

The scope of the study will be limited to urban, educated, working-class

married individuals (from sectors like IT, healthcare, education, government, and private firms) residing in Indian cities. It excludes rural and unmarried populations, though the insights may inform broader societal conversations about changing family dynamics in India.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Existing Studies on Work-Related Marital Separation

The study of marital separation due to work obligations has a long history in sociology, family studies, and psychology. Early research in the United States and Europe used the term *commuter marriages* to describe couples who live apart for occupational reasons but maintain their marital commitment (Gross, 1980; Gerstel and Gross, 1984). These studies suggested that commuter marriages were often driven by aspirations for dual careers, limited geographic job mobility, and the desire to maintain financial independence. Scholars emphasized that while commuter marriages offered professional opportunities and personal growth, they often required complex negotiations around household responsibilities, emotional intimacy, and long-term family planning (Gerstel and Gross, 1984; Stafford, 2005).

Later research expanded into psychological dimensions, examining the impact of long-distance living on marital satisfaction and well-being. Guldner and Swensen, for example, found that couples in long-distance marriages reported lower levels of daily intimacy but also developed innovative communication strategies, often becoming more deliberate in their expressions of affection (Guldner and Swensen, 1995). Stafford highlighted the paradox that some long-distance couples reported higher relationship satisfaction than geographically cohabiting couples, attributing this to more conscious investment in communication, trust-building, and goal-setting (Stafford, 2010).

Beyond Western contexts, scholars have studied *split-family households* created by international labor migration, especially in Asia and Latin America. Parreñas documented the experiences of Filipino transnational families, noting how migration led to “care deficits” at home and gendered burdens on women who remained behind (Parreñas, 2005). Similar findings were observed in China, where migrant workers’ families often lived apart, leading to altered parental roles and intergenerational caregiving structures (Tsong and Liu, 2009). These studies broaden the scope of understanding by illustrating that physical absence, whether across nations or cities, creates structural and emotional disruptions that reshape marriage and family roles.

However, there is limited exploration of *intra-national dual-city marriages*, particularly in India. Unlike transnational migration, where separation is often tied to economic survival, dual-city arrangements in India are increasingly linked to professional aspirations, urban mobility, and career advancement within the middle and upper-middle classes. This distinct context requires a focused investigation of socio-economic, cultural, and emotional dynamics.

2.2 Socio-Economic and Emotional Dimensions of Dual-Career Couples

Dual-career households, in which both spouses actively pursue professional careers, have become a defining feature of contemporary urban families. Barnett and Hyde argued that the expansionist approach to family life where both partners balance career and domestic roles provides significant benefits, including enhanced financial stability, psychological fulfilment, and gender equality in opportunities (Barnett and Hyde, 2001). In India, the dual-income model has been closely tied to aspirations for upward mobility, improved quality of life, and greater investments in children’s education and healthcare (Banerjee, 2020).

Despite these benefits, the dual-career model often introduces new financial and emotional strains when careers demand residence in separate cities. The cost of maintaining two households, frequent travel, childcare arrangements, and reduced shared time contribute to heightened financial pressure (Niranjana, 2010). A NIMHANS study reported that individuals in long-distance marriages experienced high levels of psychological stress, with loneliness and communication fatigue being key challenges (Singh, 2022).

Emotionally, long-distance couples face an erosion of daily intimacy and shared routines, which are central to marital cohesion. Research shows that physical absence weakens non-verbal and spontaneous expressions of care, which digital communication cannot fully replicate (Holmes, 2006; Stafford, 2010). Moreover, partners often struggle with misaligned schedules, communication gaps, and unmet emotional needs, which may result in conflict or detachment (Indian Express, 2023). At the same time, however, some couples report increased resilience and maturity, learning

to manage conflict more constructively and prioritizing quality time during reunions (Stafford, 2005). Thus, the socio-economic and emotional dimensions of dual-career couples are complex, often involving a delicate balance of costs and benefits.

2.3 Gender Roles and Marital Expectations in Indian Society

Marriage in India continues to be deeply embedded in cultural traditions, kinship structures, and social expectations. Historically, Indian marriages emphasized co-residence, joint family systems, and clearly defined gender roles, with men serving as providers and women as caretakers (Ramu, 1988; Uberoi, 2006). These norms created strong expectations of women prioritizing familial obligations over individual aspirations.

The liberalization of India’s economy in the 1990s and the subsequent entry of more women into professional careers challenged these traditional patterns. Scholars such as noted that urban, educated women increasingly sought continuity in their careers after marriage, reshaping gender dynamics within households (Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004). Yet, the persistence of patriarchal norms continues to constrain women’s choices. Research shows that when faced with dual-city living, women are more often expected to make career sacrifices or relocate to maintain family unity, whereas men’s careers are prioritized (Radhakrishnan, 2009).

The emotional labor of sustaining marital and familial ties during separation also disproportionately falls on women. Niranjana observed that women in dual-career households frequently assume responsibility for emotional check-ins, coordination of family routines, and maintenance of extended family relations, even when physically apart (Niranjana, 2010). These asymmetries highlight how dual-city marriages, while appearing progressive, can reproduce traditional gender hierarchies under new forms.

At the societal level, dual-city marriages often face stigma, as they diverge from the dominant cultural model of cohabitation. Extended families may question the stability of such unions, and in many cases, women are subjected to greater scrutiny for pursuing separate living arrangements (Uberoi, 2016). Thus, the Indian context adds unique cultural pressures to the already complex experience of dual-city marriages.

2.4 Gaps in Literature on Indian Dual-City Couples

Despite increasing visibility, dual-city marriages in India remain under-researched. Most existing scholarship has focused on either *Western commuter marriages* or *Indian cohabiting couples* navigating dual careers within the same city (Gerstel and Gross, 1984; Stafford, 2005; Desai and Andrist, 2010). Research that does address marital separation in India has been largely limited to specific occupational groups, such as military families or government employees with transferable jobs (Rao and Rao, 2012).

What is missing is a systematic investigation of urban, educated professionals in sectors such as IT, academia, healthcare, and private corporations’ groups that increasingly experience dual-city arrangements due to competitive and specialized labor markets. There is also limited exploration of how socio-economic status, gender, and class intersect to shape coping mechanisms and emotional well-being in these marriages. While Western studies have highlighted the potential for resilience and intentional intimacy in long-distance marriages, there is little evidence on whether similar patterns are observed in India, where family involvement and cultural stigma play a stronger role (Stafford, 2010).

Additionally, institutional frameworks such as human resource policies, transfer norms, childcare provisions, and mental health support remain underexamined in the Indian context. Existing organizational structures often assume cohabitation, leaving dual-city couples without adequate systemic support (Banerjee, 2020). Finally, while some studies acknowledge the emotional toll of long-distance living, the impact on children’s upbringing, parental decision-making, and extended family dynamics in India remains poorly understood.

This literature gap justifies the present study, which seeks to analyze the socio-economic, emotional, and cultural dimensions of dual-city marriages in India while highlighting coping strategies and institutional responses. By doing so, it aims to contribute to both academic debates and policy conversations about the evolving nature of marriage and family in urban India.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study seeks to capture the multifaceted impact of dual-city marriages on couples, families, and society. At its core, *dual-city living* is treated as the independent variable, representing work-

related marital separation where spouses maintain separate residences due to professional obligations. This phenomenon generates a series of socio-economic and emotional consequences that are central to the study's focus. The framework positions these outcomes as dependent variables, while also acknowledging the moderating influence of family expectations, coping mechanisms, and institutional support systems.

Financial and emotional well-being forms one of the central axes of the framework. On the one hand, dual-city living can contribute positively to household income, as both partners often pursue independent careers that collectively enhance financial stability and support upward mobility. On the other hand, it simultaneously imposes additional financial burdens, such as the maintenance of two households, travel expenses for regular visits, and childcare costs. Alongside these material concerns, the emotional toll of prolonged separation manifests in heightened stress, loneliness, and diminished marital satisfaction. Research suggests that while technology-mediated communication provides a partial substitute for daily intimacy, the absence of physical co-presence often erodes relational closeness and shared routines, thereby undermining emotional well-being.

Family dynamics constitute another key dimension of the framework. In the Indian cultural context, marriage is not only a private relationship between two individuals but also a socially regulated institution embedded in kinship networks and collective expectations. Dual-city arrangements challenge these traditional norms of co-residence and are often perceived with scepticism by extended families. The presence of children further complicates this dynamic, as parenting responsibilities frequently become unevenly distributed, creating stress for both spouses. Women, in particular, are often subjected to pressure to compromise on career ambitions in order to uphold the ideal of familial togetherness. As such, dual-city living reshapes the fabric of family life in ways that extend beyond the immediate couple, influencing intergenerational relations and cultural perceptions of marital stability.

Coping strategies and institutional responses are positioned in the framework as crucial moderating factors that shape the extent of stress or resilience experienced by dual-city couples. At the micro level, couples often adopt deliberate coping strategies such as scheduled visits, frequent digital communication, and long-term planning for eventual reunification. These strategies, however, vary in effectiveness depending on individual resilience and relational commitment. At the macro level, institutional mechanisms such as flexible human resource policies, spousal transfer schemes, remote work opportunities, and counseling services can significantly alleviate the challenges posed by geographical separation. When such organizational support is absent, couples may find themselves more vulnerable to emotional fatigue and strained family dynamics.

The conceptual framework thus illustrates the interconnections between dual-city living, its socio-economic and emotional impacts, and the moderating influences that shape these outcomes. While the independent variable of dual-city living directly influences financial stability, emotional intimacy, and family cohesion, the presence of supportive coping mechanisms and institutional responses can buffer these negative effects. At the same time, cultural expectations and familial pressures may exacerbate stress, especially in societies like India where marriage is deeply embedded in collective ideals of cohabitation and togetherness. In this sense, the framework underscores that the sustainability of dual-city marriages is not determined solely by the couple's choices, but also by the larger socio-cultural and institutional environments in which they are situated.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive, cross-sectional design to examine the socio-economic, emotional, and cultural consequences of dual-city marriages in India. The descriptive design was chosen because it enables the researcher to systematically capture the lived realities of participants without manipulating any variables. The cross-sectional approach, in turn, allowed for data collection from a large and diverse sample at one point in time, thus providing a comprehensive snapshot of how work-related separation influences married couples across different regions and occupational sectors in India.

4.1 Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of dual-city living. The questionnaire was developed in English, given that the target population primarily consisted of educated, urban professionals with adequate proficiency in the language.

4.1.1 The questionnaire was divided into five major sections

- **Demographic Profile** – included questions on age, gender, marital duration, educational qualifications, employment sector, income bracket, and state of residence.
- **Nature of Marital Separation** – captured the duration of dual-city living, reasons for separation, and frequency of spousal visits.
- **Socio-Economic Implications** – focused on financial aspects such as income security, additional costs (housing, travel, childcare), and household savings.
- **Emotional and Psychological Dimensions** – examined stress, loneliness, communication patterns, marital satisfaction, and coping strategies.
- **Institutional and Familial Support** – assessed employer policies, transfer options, counseling services, and societal/family perceptions.

While most questions were closed-ended to facilitate quantitative analysis, several open-ended questions invited participants to share personal narratives, thereby adding depth to the findings. The questionnaire was disseminated via Google Forms (online surveys), email questionnaires, and telephonic interviews, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity. This mixed approach was particularly important given the geographical dispersion of participants and varying levels of comfort with technology.

4.1.2 Sampling and Participants

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to ensure that only those individuals who were directly experiencing dual-city marriages were included. The criteria for inclusion were:

- Respondents had to be **legally married**.
- Either spouse had to be **living in a different city due to employment reasons**.
- Respondents had to be **employed in state government, central government, or private sector organizations**.

A total of 800 respondents from 10 states of India participated in the study. This ensured both geographical spread and occupational diversity.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by State

State/Region	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Karnataka	120	15.0
Maharashtra	110	13.8
Telangana	100	12.5
Delhi NCR	90	11.3
Tamil Nadu	80	10.0
West Bengal	70	8.8
Kerala	70	8.8
Gujarat	60	7.5
Uttar Pradesh	55	6.9
Andhra Pradesh	45	5.6
Total	800	100.0

Source: Researcher data Collection 2025

The sample also reflected an **occupationally diverse composition**. Participants included state government employees who frequently face intra- and inter-state transfers, central government employees whose postings often disrupt family co-residence, and private-sector professionals, particularly in IT, healthcare, and education, whose career opportunities are concentrated in specific urban hubs.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY STATE

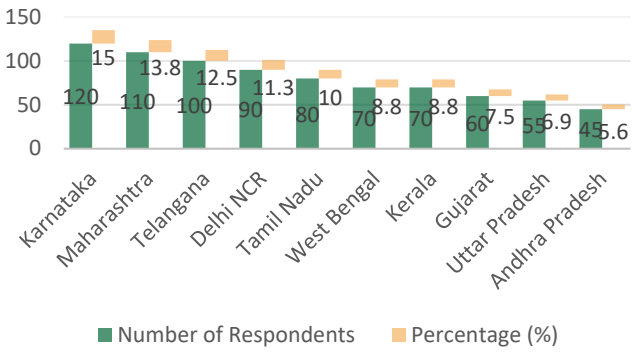


Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Employment Sector

Employment Sector		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
State Employees	Government	280	35.0
Central Employees	Government	240	30.0
Private-Sector Employees		280	35.0
Total		800	100.0

Source: Researcher data Collection 2025

This balanced representation ensures that the study captures sector-specific challenges: for instance, rigid transfer norms in government employment versus competitive mobility and performance pressures in the private sector.

4.1.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period using three primary modes:

- Google Forms (Online Surveys):** This mode yielded the majority of responses, especially from private-sector professionals and younger participants who are digitally active.
- Email Questionnaires:** This approach proved particularly effective with central and state government employees who preferred formal communication channels.
- Telephonic Interviews:** These were conducted with participants who had limited internet access or who expressed a preference for verbal interaction. Telephonic interviews also provided richer qualitative insights, as respondents were able to elaborate more freely on personal experiences.

Distribution of Respondents by Employment Sector

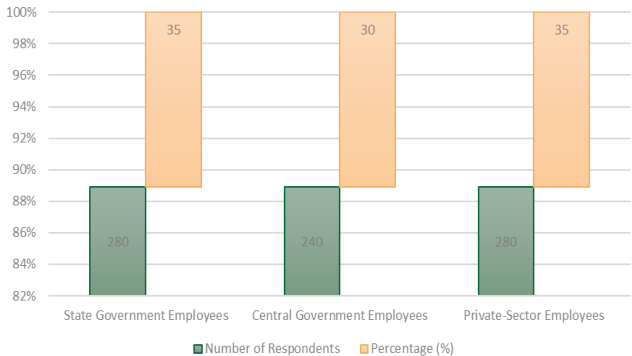
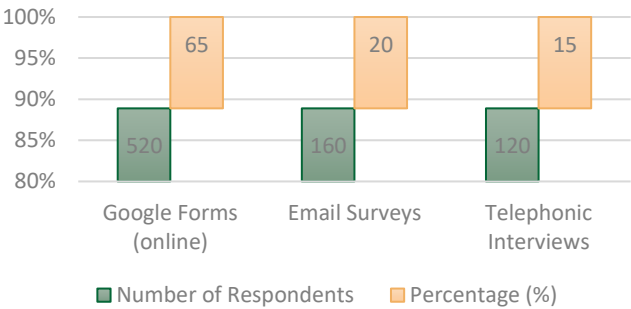


Table 3: Mode of Data Collection

Mode of Data Collection	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Google Forms (online)	520	65.0
Email Surveys	160	20.0
Telephonic Interviews	120	15.0
Total	800	100.0

Source: Researcher data Collection 2025

Mode of Data Collection



This multi-modal strategy not only ensured broader participation but also enriched the dataset by capturing both structured survey responses and detailed narrative accounts.

4.2 Data Analysis

The study employed a mixed-methods analytical approach. Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations. These tools provided insights into patterns across demographics, financial implications, emotional well-being, and institutional support systems. For instance, cross-tabulation helped in identifying sectoral differences for example, whether government employees reported higher stress levels due to rigid transfer norms compared to private-sector employees.

Qualitative responses from open-ended questions and telephonic interviews were analyzed through thematic coding. Responses were systematically reviewed, and recurring themes such as “communication fatigue,” “financial strain,” “parenting challenges,” and “resilience through support systems” were identified. This enabled the researcher to complement the quantitative findings with contextual depth, providing a holistic understanding of the dual-city marriage phenomenon.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical standards throughout the research process. All participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose, scope, and objectives of the study prior to their participation. Informed consent was obtained electronically for Google Forms and email surveys, and verbally recorded during telephonic interviews. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without providing a reason.

To ensure confidentiality, no personally identifying details were collected beyond basic demographics, and responses were anonymized during analysis and reporting. Data were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. These measures ensured compliance with established ethical guidelines, protecting the privacy, dignity, and autonomy of all participants.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from 800 respondents across 10 states of India, representing state government, central government, and private-sector employees engaged in dual-city marital arrangements. The analysis is structured thematically to address the research questions and hypotheses outlined earlier. Results are presented through descriptive

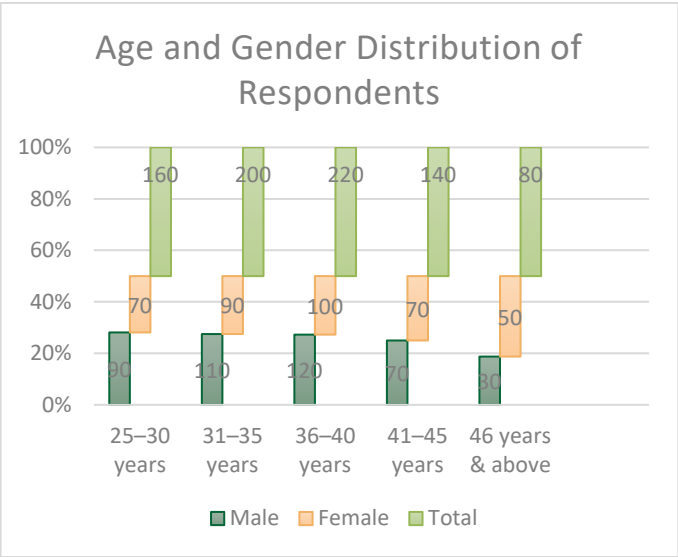
statistics (frequencies, percentages) along with narrative interpretations, offering both clarity and contextual understanding.

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile reveals that dual-city marriages are most prevalent among younger and middle-aged professionals, reflecting the career-driven stage of life when geographical mobility is highest.

Table 4: Age and Gender Distribution of Respondents				
Age Group	Male	Female	Total	Percentage (%)
25–30 years	90	70	160	20.0
31–35 years	110	90	200	25.0
36–40 years	120	100	220	27.5
41–45 years	70	70	140	17.5
46 years & above	30	50	80	10.0
Total	420	380	800	100.0

Source: Researcher data Collection 2025



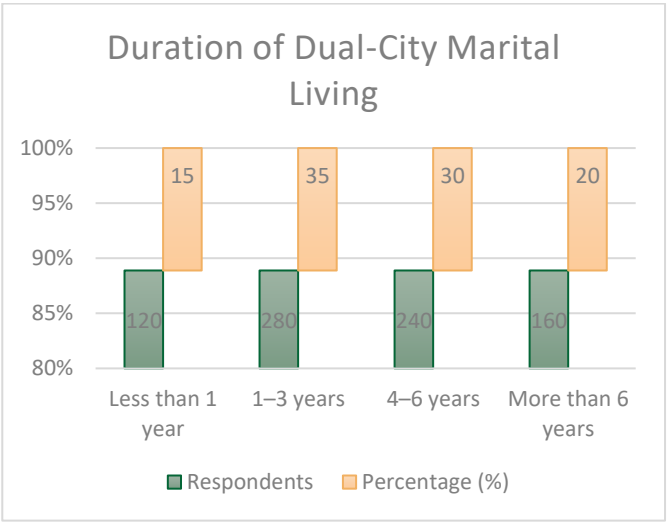
The largest proportion of respondents belonged to the 31–40 years age bracket (52.5%), which coincides with the peak career advancement phase. Gender distribution was nearly balanced (52.5% male, 47.5% female), ensuring that the experiences of both men and women are adequately represented in the study.

5.2 Duration and Nature of Separation

The findings show that dual-city arrangements are not temporary but often extend over years, sometimes spanning the majority of a couple's married life.

Table 5: Duration of Dual-City Marital Living		
Duration of Separation	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 year	120	15.0
1–3 years	280	35.0
4–6 years	240	30.0
More than 6 years	160	20.0
Total	800	100.0

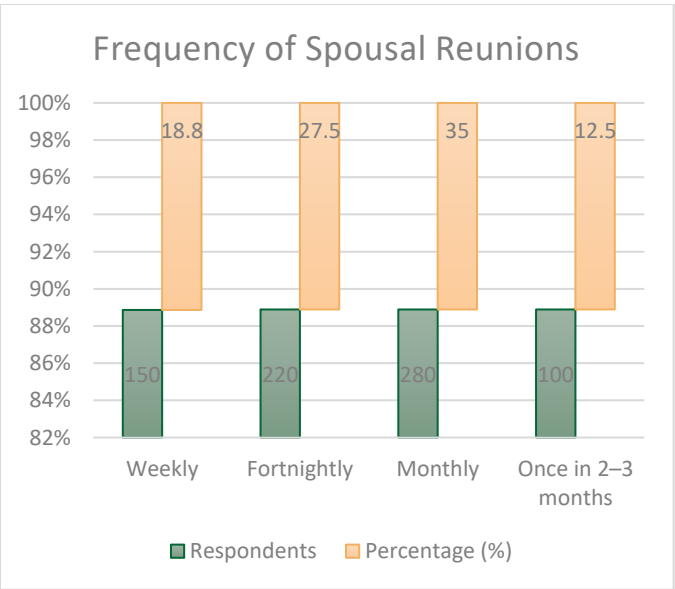
Source: Researcher data Collection 2025



A majority (65%) reported separation of over one year, and nearly 20% had lived apart for more than six years, showing how deeply entrenched such arrangements have become for career-driven couples.

Table 6: Frequency of Spousal Reunions		
Frequency of Visits	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Weekly	150	18.8
Fortnightly	220	27.5
Monthly	280	35.0
Once in 2–3 months	100	12.5
Rarely (few times/year)	50	6.2
Total	800	100.0

Source: Researcher data Collection 2025



The majority (35%) could only manage monthly reunions, underscoring the emotional cost and logistical effort required. A small segment (6.2%) reported meeting only a few times per year, highlighting the extremities of separation.

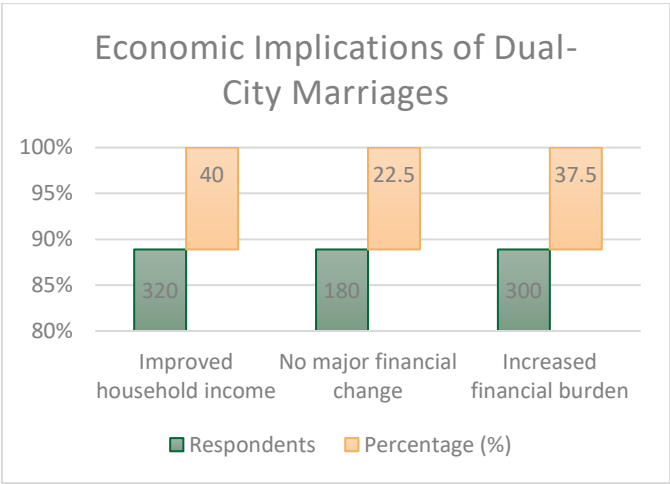
5.3 Socio-Economic Impact

Dual-city marriages affect household finances in complex ways while total income often increases due to dual careers, this is offset by duplicated expenses.

Table 7: Economic Implications of Dual-City Marriages

Economic Outcome	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Improved household income	320	40.0
No major financial change	180	22.5
Increased financial burden	300	37.5
Total	800	100.0

Source: Researcher data Collection 2025



The data suggest a paradoxical effect: while 40% enjoyed improved income security, 37.5% felt burdened by higher living costs, indicating that financial gains are frequently negated by additional expenses.

5.4 Emotional and Psychological Impact

The psychological consequences of separation emerged as one of the most critical findings, reflecting stress, loneliness, and strains on marital satisfaction.

Table 8: Reported Emotional and Psychological Challenges

Challenge Experienced	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Stress and anxiety	280	35.0
Loneliness	220	27.5
Communication fatigue	150	18.8
Parenting-related stress	100	12.5
No significant issues	50	6.2
Total	800	100.0

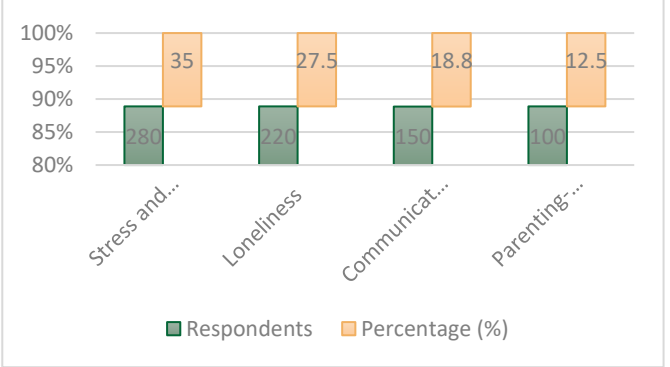
Source: Researcher data Collection 2025

Almost three-fourths of participants reported stress, loneliness, or communication fatigue, highlighting the strain of absence in marital life. Parenting-related stress was particularly significant among respondents with school-going children.

Table 10: Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Couples

Coping Mechanism	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Frequent communication (calls, texts, video)	400	50.0
Scheduled visits	200	25.0

Reported Emotional and Psychological Challenges



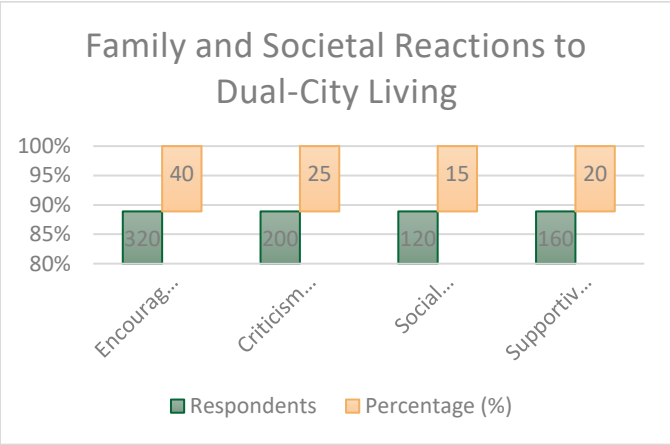
5.5 Family and Societal Perceptions

The role of family and society remains crucial in shaping the experiences of dual-city couples in India, given the collectivist nature of social life.

Table 9: Family and Societal Reactions to Dual-City Living

Reaction/Perception	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Encouraged to reunite	320	40.0
Criticism from extended family	200	25.0
Social stigma or gossip	120	15.0
Supportive and understanding	160	20.0
Total	800	100.0

Source: Researcher data Collection 2025



A large segment (40%) reported being pressured to reunite, reflecting strong societal preference for co-residence. Only 20% reported supportive attitudes, underscoring the limited acceptance of non-cohabiting marriages in Indian culture.

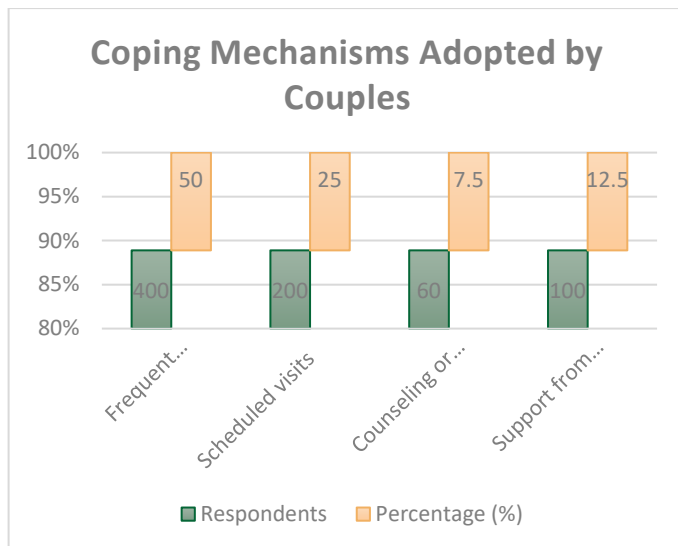
5.6 Coping Mechanisms

Couples developed various coping mechanisms, ranging from reliance on technology to deliberate planning of quality time together.

Table 10 (Cont): Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Couples

Coping Mechanism	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Counseling or therapy	60	7.5
Support from family/friends	100	12.5
Long-term reunification plans	40	5.0
Total	800	100.0

Source: Researcher data Collection 2025



The majority (50%) relied on frequent digital communication, showing the centrality of technology in sustaining emotional intimacy. However, the low uptake of counseling (7.5%) points to cultural barriers in seeking professional help.

5.7 Perceived Institutional Support

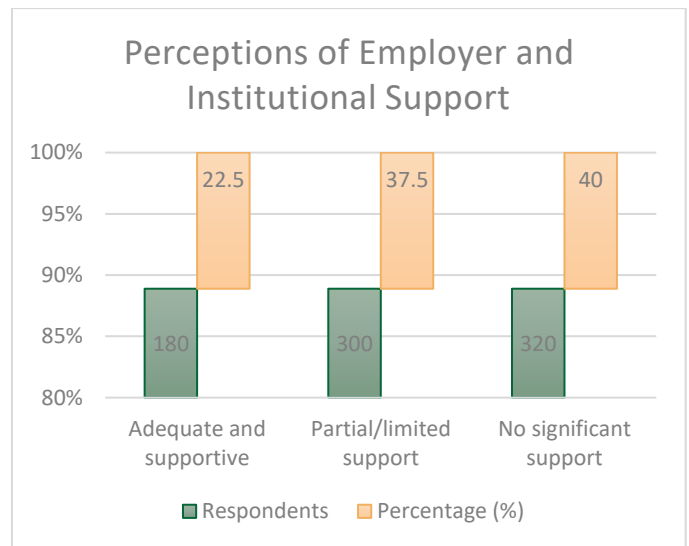
The adequacy of institutional support (HR policies, transfer norms, remote work options) was a significant determinant of marital sustainability.

Table 11: Perceptions of Employer and Institutional Support		
Perceived Support Level	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Adequate and supportive	180	22.5
Partial/limited support	300	37.5
No significant support	320	40.0
Total	800	100.0

Source: Researcher data Collection 2025

Nearly 40% reported no significant support from their employers, while only 22.5% felt adequately supported, highlighting critical policy gaps in addressing the challenges of dual-city families.

The analysis reveals a paradoxical reality of dual-city marriages in India. On one hand, these arrangements provide professional mobility, career advancement, and enhanced income security. On the other, they impose substantial financial, emotional, and social costs. Stress, loneliness, and communication fatigue are widespread, while societal and familial pressures reinforce traditional ideals of cohabitation. Coping strategies remain primarily personal, with limited institutional support. These findings underscore the need for systemic interventions at organizational and policy levels to sustain the growing trend of dual-city marital arrangements in urban India.



6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal the multifaceted nature of dual-city marriages in India, highlighting both their enabling aspects and their emotional, social, and institutional challenges. Examining the responses of 800 participants across ten states, the analysis captures how couples navigate professional aspirations, financial trade-offs, cultural expectations, and family responsibilities while physically apart. This section interprets the findings in light of existing literature, underscores cultural and gendered nuances, and outlines implications for couples, families, and organizations.

6.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

The study found that dual-city marriages are increasingly a long-term arrangement rather than a temporary compromise. Nearly 20% of respondents reported living apart for more than six years. For example, one central government officer shared during a telephonic interview: *"I have been posted in the Northeast for five years while my wife continues to work in Hyderabad. We decided to continue this way until her retirement benefits are secured. It is difficult, but we prioritize stability."* Such accounts illustrate how professional security often outweighs the desire for cohabitation, resulting in prolonged separations.

Financially, while many couples experienced improved household income due to dual salaries, others struggled with duplicated costs. A state government employee from Tamil Nadu noted: *"Even though both of us earn well, paying for two houses, frequent train journeys, and daycare for our child leaves us with very little savings."* This paradox reflects the dual-edged nature of financial outcomes: career advancement can enhance income but simultaneously escalate expenses.

Emotionally, stress, loneliness, and communication fatigue were reported by nearly three-fourths of respondents. One private-sector professional explained: *"We talk every day, but after long working hours, the conversations are reduced to routine check-ins. It feels like we are managing a schedule rather than a relationship."* Such testimonies align with earlier literature that long-distance marriages often weaken daily intimacy and spontaneity (Stafford, 2005).

6.2 Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings resonate strongly with global research. In Western commuter marriages, scholars like Gerstel and Gross emphasized how couples often traded emotional closeness for professional gain (Gerstel and Gross, 1984). Similar dynamics emerged in this study, though in India, cultural scrutiny adds another layer of complexity.

Transnational family studies emphasized how economic mobility often comes at the cost of emotional togetherness (Parreñas, 2005). In India, dual-city marriages replicate this tension domestically. Unlike migrant families driven by survival economics, however, Indian dual-city couples are often urban professionals chasing career aspirations. For example, an IT professional from Bengaluru explained: *"My wife and I both work in MNCs but in different cities. Giving up either job means losing international career prospects. We decided to live apart until one of us gets an overseas opportunity."* This highlights how professional ambition, rather than survival, drives the Indian context.

Domestic scholarship also aligns with these findings. Rajadhyaksha and Smita described the "double burden" faced by Indian women balancing work and family, which was evident here (Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004). Niranjana noted that emotional labor disproportionately falls on women a pattern reinforced by respondents' experiences in this study (Niranjana, 2010).

6.3 Cultural Nuances in the Indian Marital Setup

Marriage in India continues to be framed not merely as a private relationship but as a social contract within kinship structures. The study revealed that 40% of couples faced pressure to reunite, while 25% endured criticism from extended family. This reflects Uberoi's argument that marital arrangements are judged against community expectations of cohabitation and stability (Uberoi's, 2006).

For instance, a female respondent working in the private banking sector recounted: *"My in-laws often say that a 'real marriage' is when husband and wife live under one roof. They blame me for choosing my career over family, though my husband supports my decision."* Such examples illustrate the persistent cultural resistance to non-cohabiting marriages.

Another respondent, a government school teacher, explained: *"When I attend weddings or family functions alone, relatives whisper about our relationship. They assume we are not on good terms, when in reality, we talk every day."* This reflects how social gossip and moral policing amplify emotional burdens for couples in dual-city marriages.

6.4 Gendered Experiences of Separation

The study highlights significant gendered asymmetries. Women were more frequently expected to compromise their careers for the sake of marital co-residence. A female respondent from Delhi NCR remarked: *"My promotion required me to stay in the city, but my husband was transferred to another state. His family insisted I quit my job and move with him, but I decided otherwise. This decision is still seen as selfish."*

Men, on the other hand, were less likely to be criticized for prioritizing careers. A male participant candidly stated: *"Everyone told my wife to adjust because I cannot give up my central government posting. It is considered more important than her private job."* Such examples confirm Radhakrishnan's observation that women remain the "default sacrificers" in Indian marriages (Radhakrishnan's, 2009).

Parenting challenges also revealed gender asymmetries. Women were often judged for being "absent mothers," whereas men's absences were normalized. A working mother from Maharashtra explained: *"When I miss a school event, people say I am neglecting my child. But when my husband is away for work, it is seen as duty."* These double standards reinforce traditional gender hierarchies even within dual-career households.

6.5 Implications for Dual-Career Couples, Families, and Organizations

The findings have several important implications. For couples, sustainability of dual-city living depends on structured communication, planned reunions, and emotional resilience. Couples who deliberately scheduled weekly calls or used digital intimacy tools reported higher satisfaction than those who communicated irregularly. For instance, one couple described creating a shared online calendar to mark virtual dinner dates and family routines, which helped them maintain a sense of togetherness.

For families, the findings highlight the need to adapt cultural perceptions of marital stability. As dual-city marriages become more common in urban India, families must recognize them as legitimate arrangements rather than "incomplete marriages." Counselling interventions could also include extended families to ease intergenerational tensions.

For organizations, the lack of employer support (reported by 40% of respondents) underscores the need for policy innovations. Flexible postings, spousal accommodation schemes, remote work opportunities, and organizational counselling services could significantly reduce the stress of dual-city couples. For instance, a private IT company in Hyderabad has already piloted a "dual-location posting" scheme that allows couples to choose from regional hubs a model that could be scaled up. Similarly, government transfer policies could incorporate spousal priority postings, minimizing forced separations.

The discussion demonstrates that dual-city marriages in India embody a contradictory reality: they enable couples to pursue professional growth and financial stability while simultaneously exposing them to emotional strain, cultural stigma, and institutional neglect. Unlike Western commuter marriages, Indian couples must navigate not only the logistics of distance but also societal judgment and gendered pressures. The study thus underscores the need for a multi-level response from couples practicing intentional coping strategies, to families reconfiguring cultural expectations, to organizations and policymakers developing structural support systems.

Dual-city marriages reflect the changing face of Indian society, where traditional ideals of cohabitation increasingly clash with modern professional imperatives. They force us to rethink not just what it means to be married, but also how family, work, and society interact in an era of rapid mobility and globalization.

The purpose and scope of this study are rooted in the lived realities of couples who find themselves pulled in different directions by the demands of work and the pull of family life. Dual-city marriages are no longer isolated cases but part of the changing rhythm of Indian urban life. Yet, unlike in Western countries where commuter marriages have been studied for decades, Indian research has remained largely silent on this subject. This silence is striking because Indian marriages are rarely just about two individuals; they are deeply tied to family expectations, cultural ideals, and community judgments. Exploring this issue in India is therefore not only timely but also essential, as it sheds light on how professional ambition collides with cultural traditions in everyday lives.

The objectives of the study to understand financial pressures, emotional well-being, gendered experiences, and the role of institutions proved highly relevant once the voices of respondents were heard. Many couples admitted that what looked like financial progress on paper often felt hollow in practice. One central government employee shared: *"Yes, our combined salary is higher, but after paying rent for two homes, train tickets, and babysitting fees, we sometimes feel poorer than before."* This validates the objective of examining the economic dimension. Equally, the objective of studying emotional well-being was justified, as respondents spoke candidly about loneliness and stress. A private-sector professional explained: *"We speak every night, but it feels like we are checking boxes, not really talking."* Such testimonies highlight how absence reshapes even the most ordinary aspects of marriage.

The hypothesis that financial burdens, emotional strain, and unequal gender expectations would shape these marriages was borne out clearly. Women, in particular, voiced feelings of being judged more harshly. One respondent noted: *"When my husband misses our daughter's school function, people say he is busy with duty. When I miss it, they say I'm failing as a mother."* This double standard confirms the gendered hypothesis and reflects the deeply emotional undercurrents that statistics alone cannot capture. At the same time, the hypothesis that couples would find coping mechanisms was also validated, as many described creative solutions such as setting aside weekly 'virtual family dinners' or marking anniversaries with surprise visits to soften the impact of distance.

The research questions asked about how couples manage separation, what support they receive, and how they cope were not just academic prompts but deeply personal inquiries. They gave respondents the space to voice frustrations, hopes, and strategies. Answers revealed not only the resilience of couples but also the shortcomings of institutions. Nearly 40% felt their employers offered no help at all. As one respondent put it: *"Our office talks about work-life balance in slogans, but when I asked for a transfer closer to my spouse, it was dismissed as a personal problem."* Such voices show why the research questions were necessary they uncover the emotional truths hidden beneath official policies and statistics.

In essence, the study's purpose, scope, objectives, hypotheses, and research questions stand justified because they connect directly to the lived struggles and coping strategies of real families. By grounding the analysis in stories of financial strain, emotional distance, family pressures, and institutional neglect, the study ensures that these marriages are seen not as abstract cases but as deeply human experiences that reflect the broader transformation of Indian society.

7. CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the phenomenon of dual-city marriages in India through a comprehensive analysis of the lived experiences of 800 respondents across ten states. The results underscore the multiple layers of complexity inherent in these arrangements, where economic security, career advancement, and personal aspirations intersect with emotional vulnerability, cultural expectations, and institutional inadequacies. Far from being rare or exceptional, dual-city marriages are increasingly becoming a recognizable feature of India's urban social fabric, particularly among middle-class and professional households.

7.1 Summary of Key Insights

The findings reveal that dual-city marriages are often prolonged rather than temporary. For many couples, separations extended beyond three years, with one-fifth of respondents reporting more than six years of living apart. Such figures suggest that dual-city living is not merely a transitional arrangement but, in many cases, an enduring reality shaped by the demands of modern employment sectors such as government services, multinational corporations, banking, healthcare, and education.

Financial outcomes were revealed to be paradoxical in nature. On the one hand, dual salaries offered many couples enhanced income stability and upward social mobility, enabling investments in housing, education, and lifestyle. On the other hand, these gains were frequently undermined by the duplicated costs of maintaining two households, paying for travel, and arranging childcare. Thus, what appeared as a financial advantage often translated into a mixed outcome where economic progress was offset by hidden or indirect costs.

The emotional and psychological toll of separation emerged as perhaps the most profound aspect of the findings. The majority of respondents reported stress, loneliness, and communication fatigue, with parents of young children facing an additional burden of guilt and societal judgment. Technology-enabled communication, though invaluable, was perceived as both a lifeline and a limitation. Couples could remain connected through phone calls and video conferencing, yet many expressed that digital intimacy could not fully substitute for physical presence, spontaneous interaction, or shared family routines.

The role of family and society was another important dimension. Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported facing pressure from parents or in-laws to reunite, criticism from extended kin, or social gossip. Such responses affirm that, despite modernization, marriage in India continues to be embedded within collective frameworks where individual choices are subject to communal scrutiny.

Gender dynamics were sharply evident in the findings. Women were more often expected to abandon careers for the sake of co-residence, while men's absences were normalized as professional duty. Mothers who lived away from children faced harsher moral judgments compared to fathers, exposing entrenched patriarchal attitudes that continue to shape perceptions of marital roles.

7.2 Broader Implications on Urban Society and Work-Life Balance

The study's results carry wide-ranging implications for the changing contours of urban Indian society. Dual-city marriages signal the gradual redefinition of the family unit in response to globalization, increased job mobility, and the expansion of the service economy. They highlight the growing tension between professional imperatives and traditional family ideals.

On the one hand, these marriages embody aspirations of mobility, independence, and gender equality, as both partners pursue careers without compromising on professional opportunities. On the other hand, they expose the fragility of work-life balance in contexts where structural and cultural support systems remain underdeveloped. The persistence of stigma around dual-city living also reveals how slowly Indian society is adapting to diverse forms of marital arrangements.

At a broader societal level, the phenomenon reflects the dilemmas of urbanization. As cities increasingly function as economic hubs requiring specialized labor, geographical fragmentation of families has become a by-product of modernization. Families are learning to negotiate emotional intimacy across distance, often redefining what it means to "live together." In doing so, marriage is less about physical cohabitation and more about shared effort, resilience, and adaptability.

From a work-life balance perspective, the findings highlight the gap between the realities of dual-career households and the limited institutional provisions available to support them. Rigid transfer policies, inadequate spousal accommodation schemes, and the absence of flexible

working arrangements deepen the challenges faced by dual-city couples. Unless organizations and policymakers respond to these realities, the long-term consequences may include reduced marital satisfaction, compromised parenting, and diminished employee well-being, all of which could affect productivity and retention in the workforce.

7.3 Closing Reflections on Changing Definitions of Family and Marriage

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study lies in how it illuminates the shifting definitions of marriage and family in contemporary India. Traditionally, marriage has been equated with physical cohabitation, shared households, and continuous companionship. However, the experiences of dual-city couples show that marriage is increasingly being negotiated in more fluid terms. Emotional commitment, technological connectedness, and shared long-term goals often serve as substitutes for daily physical presence.

This raises important questions about how Indian society conceptualizes marital stability. Is a marriage less stable if spouses do not live together under the same roof, or can stability also be defined through trust, communication, and mutual respect? Should family structures evolve to legitimize such arrangements, or should couples continue to carry the burden of defending their choices against traditional expectations? These are questions that extend beyond individual households and call for broader societal reflection.

In conclusion, dual-city marriages reflect the paradox of modern Indian life: they are products of ambition and mobility, yet they are accompanied by stress, stigma, and institutional neglect. They embody both the promise of progress and the weight of tradition. As they become more common, they compel us to rethink not only what it means to be married but also how families, organizations, and societies must adapt to the evolving realities of twenty-first century life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenges faced by dual-city couples in India cannot be addressed by individuals alone; they require coordinated responses at multiple levels within households, workplaces, and policymaking frameworks. The study's findings suggest that sustainable solutions should combine personal coping strategies, organizational flexibility, and policy innovation, while also encouraging further research into this growing social reality.

For Couples

For couples, the foremost requirement is to move from unstructured communication to more intentional and planned interaction. While many couples in the study reported daily phone calls or video chats, these often became limited to routine check-ins. Instead, couples could schedule dedicated time for meaningful conversations, shared virtual activities like family meals or online games, or even storytelling sessions with children through video calls. Such practices help preserve emotional closeness despite geographical distance. Alongside communication, it is important for couples to engage in long-term planning, setting realistic timelines for eventual reunification whether through career adjustments, retirement decisions, or relocation. A clear plan, even if several years away, reduces uncertainty and creates a sense of shared purpose. Couples also need to share responsibilities equally in matters of finances, childcare, and family coordination, rather than leaving the burden on one partner. In this way, dual-city marriages can move from survival mode to a more stable, cooperative arrangement.

For Employers

Employers both in government and the private sector must recognize dual-city marriages as part of the modern workforce reality. In government service, one immediate and feasible step would be to expand spousal transfer policies. Currently, many postings are decided rigidly by administrative needs, with little attention to marital circumstances. By introducing a transparent system of spousal posting priority, particularly in education, health, and administrative services, governments can reduce long-term separations without disrupting efficiency. In the private sector, especially in IT and finance where multiple office hubs exist, companies can adopt dual-location flexibility, allowing employees to choose the branch closest to their spouse's city. Another practical step is to provide organizational counselling services or wellness programs tailored to employees in commuter marriages. This would normalize the challenges faced by such families and reduce stigma around seeking help. Finally, greater use of hybrid and remote work options, already tested during the pandemic, could make it easier for couples to balance careers without long-term separation.

For Policymakers

At the policy level, there is an urgent need to bring the concerns of dual-city families into the framework of urban and labor policies. Governments could introduce spousal employment provisions that allow qualified partners of state or central employees to be considered for positions in the same region, minimizing forced separations. In addition, recognizing the financial strain highlighted in this study, policies could provide tax concessions, travel subsidies, or family housing allowances for employees who maintain households in different cities. Affordable and frequent transport options between major urban centres would also ease the practical difficulties of separation. Importantly, national family policies should explicitly acknowledge dual-city marriages as a distinct category, just as migrant worker families are recognized, ensuring that their needs are considered in programs relating to childcare, education, and healthcare.

For Researchers

The academic community also has a vital role in deepening the understanding of dual-city marriages. At present, scholarship in India is sparse, with most studies focusing on Western commuter marriages or transnational families. Future research should move towards longitudinal studies, tracking couples over time to examine how prolonged separations shape marital stability, parenting, and career growth. Comparative research across states and professional sectors within India could also shed light on how regional cultures or job structures influence these experiences. Moreover, targeted studies on the gendered dynamics of separation would provide a more nuanced picture of how men and women negotiate unequal expectations. Finally, case studies of organizations that have successfully introduced spousal support policies or flexible postings could generate models that other institutions might replicate.

Closing Note on Recommendations

Dual-city marriages are no longer exceptions; they are becoming a significant feature of India's urban social landscape. To sustain them, couples need to adopt intentional strategies for communication and planning; employers must revise rigid structures and offer wellness support; policymakers should recognize these families in policy frameworks; and researchers must continue to generate evidence that guides interventions. Taken together, these steps can transform dual-city marriages from being perceived as fragile compromises into legitimate, adaptive arrangements suited to the realities of twenty-first-century professional life.

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