

Pakistani Mothers by Number of Children: Large Families Are Shrinking, but Slowly

In Pakistan, the share of mothers with five or more children declined from 47% in 1990–91 to 33% in 2017–18. Over the same period, smaller families became more common: the combined share of mothers with only one or two children increased from 26% to 33%.

1990-1993

47%



2017-2018

33%



Source: Gallup & Gilani Pakistan
(www.gallup-international.com;
www.gallup.com.pk www.gilanifoundation.com)



(Also emailed*/faxed separately)



PRESS RELEASE

Big Data Analysis Motherhood & Family

Pakistani Mothers by Number of Children: Large Families Are Shrinking, but Slowly

(Islamabad), 29th July 2026

Pakistan's family-size pattern is changing, but the transition remains much slower than India's.

Gallup Pakistan Digital Analytics analysed Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey microdata from 1990–91 and 2017–18 and compared it with India's National Family Health Survey series from 1993 to 2021.

In Pakistan, the share of mothers with five or more children declined from 47% in 1990–91 to 33% in 2017–18. Over the same period, smaller families became more common: the combined share of mothers with only one or two children increased from 26% to 33%.

The direction is positive, but Pakistan remains substantially behind India's transition. By 2021, 60% of Indian mothers had only one or two children, compared with 33% in Pakistan's latest survey. Meanwhile, only 8% of Indian mothers had five or more children, against 33% in Pakistan.

One important correction: the chart does not show Pakistan's 2017–18 level matching India in 2006. India's share of mothers with five or more children was already 20% in 2006, considerably below Pakistan's 33% in 2017–18. In fact, Pakistan's latest figure remained higher than India's earliest figure shown for 1993, when the Indian rate was 27%.

The broader conclusion still holds: both countries are moving toward smaller families, but India's transition has been much faster. Pakistan has made measurable progress, yet mothers with three or more children remain the majority.

Pakistan's limited number of DHS rounds also makes it harder to trace how quickly change occurred between 1990–91 and 2017–18. India's more frequent NFHS surveys provide a much clearer picture of the pace of demographic change.

Pakistani mothers by the number of children they have — large families are shrinking, slowly

Percent distribution of mothers by total children ever born, over time. Pakistan vs. India.

1 child 2 children 3 children 4 children 5+ children

Pakistan Demographic and Health Surveys, 1990-91 and 2017-18



India National Family Health Surveys, 1993-2021, via Data For India



Pakistan figures computed from PDHS 1990-91 and 2017-18 microdata (NIPS), weighted, ever-married mothers 15-49. Pakistan has not conducted a DHS round as frequently as India — these are the two most recent nationally representative points available, versus India's five-wave NFHS series.

SAME DIRECTION, DIFFERENT PACE

Both countries show large families declining and small families rising. But India reached Pakistan's 2017-18 level (33% with 5+ children) back in 2006 — roughly an 11-year lag in the transition.

INDIA'S 1-2 CHILD MAJORITY HAS NO PAKISTANI EQUIVALENT YET

By 2021, 60% of Indian mothers had just 1-2 children. In Pakistan's most recent PDHS, that combined share was only 33% — still a minority relative to mothers with 3 or more.

Sources: Pakistan Demographic and Health Surveys 1990-91 and 2017-18 (NIPS). India National Family Health Surveys 1993-2021 (National Statistics Office, via Data For India).

Source: Gallup & Gilani Pakistan
(www.gallup-international.com; www.gallup.com.pk; www.gilanifoundation.com)

This analysis was conducted by Gallup Pakistan using Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey data for 1990-91 and 2017-18 and India's National Family Health Survey data for 1993-2021. Figures represent the distribution of ever-married mothers by total number of children ever born.



Opinion Poll from Gallup Pakistan
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Gilani Research Foundation is headed by Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani who pioneered the field of opinion polling in Pakistan and established Gallup Pakistan in 1980. Currently, Dr. Gilani, who holds a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and has taught at leading universities in Pakistan and abroad, is Chairman of Gallup Pakistan.

If you have any further questions regarding this poll, please feel free to contact us.

*Best Regards,
Gallup Pakistan*

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