



GEN Z AND BEYOND:

A SURVEY FOR EVERY GENERATION



FOREWORD

Toos Daruvala

How do we Zoroastrians across the globe think of ourselves as Zoroastrians? How do we practice the religion and what are our religious beliefs? What are our social beliefs? What role does the local Zoroastrian community play in our lives - how do we engage with each other in our community spaces? What are our attitudes towards the challenges the community faces? What are our views on controversial social and religious matters e.g., mixed marriages, children of mixed marriages? What are our views on philanthropy? On entrepreneurship? What opportunities do we see, and ideas do we have to strengthen the religion and the community for future generations? How do our views on these questions differ - by geography; by gender; by age?

"Gen Z and Beyond - A Survey for Every Generation" was launched to gather data on these questions. It's a first-of-its-kind survey of Zoroastrians -- global, including the major geographies in which the diaspora resides; comprehensive, covering the demographics, behaviors, and attitudes of Zoroastrians; and informative, with a respectable 6% response rate of Zoroastrians over age 18 (~5000 responses globally). The Survey was designed and conducted by the Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies, SOAS, University of London, a respected, neutral UK based research and educational institution (Principal Investigator Dr. Sarah Stewart, Project Manager Dr. Nazneen Engineer, and Analyst Joe Turtle led the project). Data was collected starting July 1, 2021 over an 18-month period, with another three months for analysis and report compilation.

A survey of this scope and ambition is not without challenges. Foremost was getting people to sign up and complete the questionnaire. Initial sign up was slow, possibly due to "survey fatigue", and different regions posed different challenges. Covid 19 made face-to-face communication difficult. Political unrest in Iran meant the SOAS team were unable to visit and promote the Survey there. But we persevered. The boots-on-the-ground strategy in India proved very effective. Parsi media outlets published materials both to promote the project and to counter articles in Parsi newspapers, which erroneously suggested a biased agenda. In North America we had the active support of FEZANA and the regional associations. We were active on social media and benefited from local Ambassadors and word-of-mouth efforts. We made a short promotional film with support from community leaders, priests, and young enthusiasts.

Where to, from here? We have engaged the global Zoroastrian community, for the first time, to rigorously gather data and hear our disparate voices. These comprehensive data and facts, it is hoped, will lead to insights and ideas to inform, and inspire Zoroastrian communities everywhere to develop future projects that will nurture harmony while strengthening and furthering the well-being of our community and religion.

Read on! A summary of the report follows, authored by Nina Mistry; the full ~200-page report can be found on the website <http://www.genzandbeyond.com>.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nina Mistry

“An ounce of information is worth a pound of data, an ounce of knowledge is worth a pound of information, an ounce of understanding is worth a pound of knowledge, and an ounce of wisdom is worth a pound of understanding.” - Russell Ackoff, Professor Emeritus at The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. The *Gen Z and Beyond: A Survey for Every Generation*, brings us tremendous information, fact-based data, invaluable knowledge, in-depth understanding, and the collective wisdom of approximately 5,000 respondents!

This global online Survey was completely anonymous. It was available in English, Gujarati, and Farsi, to participants 18-years and older. One of the unique features of this survey was that it was open to participants with two Zoroastrian parents, a Zoroastrian mother or father, a Zoroastrian grandparent, and / or a Zoroastrian spouse. For clarity, these categories were analyzed separately from respondents with two Zoroastrian parents.

Why does this information, data, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom matter? The answer lies in finding solutions to the challenges and much-debated issues faced by the community. At the very least, the Survey has generated an academically grounded repository of knowledge about the community. Insights from the Survey results enable us to compare Zoroastrian populations world-wide with reference to demographic, behavioral, attitudinal, and aspirational data. This in turn should jump start a dialogue amongst Zoroastrians globally, especially the younger generation, to discuss their feelings and opinions on matters relating to the community and religion.

Diminishing numbers of the Zoroastrian population world-wide is at the front and center of any discussion on the religion. A “small and aging population” was perceived by most respondents as one of the greatest threats to the Zoroastrian religion and identity. Overall, an aging population coupled with a replacement fertility rate below 1 in India is a significant contributing factor to the declining population numbers. This means that the reproductive rate would have to increase by at least 20% just to maintain the current population level. Data from the Survey tells us that only about two-thirds of the respondents had children, and just a little over half of these had two children. While respondents in North America were more likely to have two or more children, possibly causing population numbers to trend upwards in the diaspora, they were not high enough to offset the decline in global numbers. Further, data revealed that the likelihood of having children at a young age was very low and the trend of respondents having only one child consistently across all age groups in South Asia, defeated the initiatives to boost the birth rate. This, compounded with a high level of late or non-marriage exacerbates the problem of fewer children being born which perpetuates a threat to the Zoroastrian religion and identity.

Marriage is an important social and religious duty for many Zoroastrians, but it is also a very controversial subject within the community due to the rise in intermarriage. Survey data tells us that there is a preference to find a Zoroastrian partner, especially amongst the 18-25-year-olds, but nearly half of the respondents in that age group were already in relationships with non-Zoroastrians. Unsurprisingly, this preference diminished with age. Both these factors combine to result in increasing intermarriage rates and a decline of the two-Zoroastrian parent population. The data also indicates that not only is there a rise in intermarriage, but there is a rise in the acceptance of intermarriage, and the acceptance of children of intermarried Zoroastrians, especially in the diaspora.

People’s views on intermarriage and gender are important factors in shaping their sense of identity as Zoroastrians and have a bearing on community discourse. The difference in attitudes towards intermarried Zoroastrian men relative to intermarried Zoroastrian women, when it comes to acceptance of intermarriage and the children of intermarriage, is another cause for debate within the community.

Data from the Survey indicates that women were more likely than men to accept both intermarried Zoroastrian men and women and their children. While less than 6% of the total respondents that participated in the Survey were born of one Zoroastrian parent, interestingly, of these, respondents with a Zoroastrian mother were only about half the number of respondents with a Zoroastrian father.

With respect to raising their children as Zoroastrians, a third of the intermarried respondents were not interested and about 30% of respondents with a sole Zoroastrian parent had not undergone the navjote ceremony. This raised some concern about the loss of transmission of culture and religion due to intermarriage. Additional analysis indicated that respondents with a sole Zoroastrian mother and a sole Zoroastrian father were equally likely to be raised as a Zoroastrian in North America while respondents with a sole Zoroastrian father only were more likely to be raised as a Zoroastrian in South Asia. However, this is not guaranteed to continue in the future since nearly 20% of respondents with a sole Zoroastrian father in South Asia were not raised as a Zoroastrian. An eye-opening finding is that almost a fifth of all the respondents with a Zoroastrian father said that they learnt about the religion from their non-Zoroastrian mother. It is evident that the Survey holds valuable and extensive factual data on the hot button topics of intermarriage and children of intermarried Zoroastrians.

Entrepreneurship is something that has been championed by Zoroastrians in the past and which, combined with philanthropy, is a characteristic for which the community is well known. 16.4% of respondents said they were entrepreneurs which interestingly is consistent with the entrepreneurship rate in the United States, where 16% of the adult workforce are entrepreneurs. An additional sizeable number of respondents said they would like to or may consider becoming an entrepreneur. However, one of the main obstacles identified by respondents across all age groups was “Funding and finances”, with over 70% of respondents aged 18-45 seeing this as the foremost issue when attempting to start a business. One of the most interesting findings related to philanthropy, was that 72.5% of respondents gave to both Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian causes, indicating that they are well integrated into their local communities. This supports the idea that Zoroastrians adapt well to new circumstances and different host communities. They are not torn between their birthplace or place of nationality and current place of residence. Instead, they embrace both and as a result are more likely and willing to contribute to societies where they feel that they belong.

Data showed a socially mobile, highly educated population that identified the following factors to be the most significant in strengthening the community: “Teaching the next generation about Zoroastrian religion and culture” (49.1%), “Education - youth, vocational, scientific, higher education, retraining” (13.2%), and “Entrepreneurship - adding economic, social, and intellectual value to the community” (11.3%). It can be seen from these responses that there is a sharp drop in opinions between the first and second factors, underpinning the perception that to maintain a sense of Zoroastrian identity, people need to learn more about their religion and culture.

In addition to the Summary Report that follows, the Survey includes a lot of additional useful insights that cover education, employment, language, domestic life, migration, religious and cultural beliefs, observances, and practices, priesthood, and socio-religious and ethnic identities, to name a few.

This Survey should be considered a first step in a journey for us to understand our community, develop our strategic priorities, and create outcomes that may further the well-being of our religion and our community as Zoroastrians. We hope that each reader will take something from this body of work that will inform their choices.



GEN Z AND BEYOND: A SURVEY FOR EVERY GENERATION

KEY TAKEAWAYS
FROM THE SURVEY RESULTS

JULY 2023

NINA MISTRY

(WITH INPUT FROM TOOS DARUVALA, EDUL DAVER, DINYAR DEVITRE, AND ARZAN SAM WADIA)

INTRODUCTION

This **SURVEY** is a privately sponsored research project undertaken by SOAS (University of London), led by Dr. Sarah Stewart, Shapoorji Pallonji Institute of Zoroastrian Studies.

DURATION:

July 1, 2021, to April 19, 2023 – An 18-month survey period with a 3-month period for data analysis and report writing.

AIM:

- Gather, provide, and analyze data to inform Zoroastrian communities worldwide on the key topics of –
 - demographics,
 - practice of religion,
 - attitudes towards challenges, and
 - internal debates on social, religious, and economic issues.
- Apply Survey results to help guide initiatives, policy, and support decision-making by community leaders.
- Serve as a valuable archive for future research.

RESPONSES:

One of the unique features of this survey was that it was open to people with two Zoroastrian parents, a Zoroastrian mother or father, a Zoroastrian grandparent, and / or a Zoroastrian spouse. Data from each category was analyzed separately.

There were 4,893 valid responses out of a total 5,003 responses from –

- 4,481 respondents with two Zoroastrian parents,
- 289 respondents with one Zoroastrian parent,
- 19 respondents with one Zoroastrian grandparent, and
- 104 respondents with a Zoroastrian spouse.

FOCUS:

Focus was on regions with largest responses from Zoroastrian populations –

- South Asia (2,379 respondents).
- North America (1,449 respondents).

CHAPTER 1

FAMILY

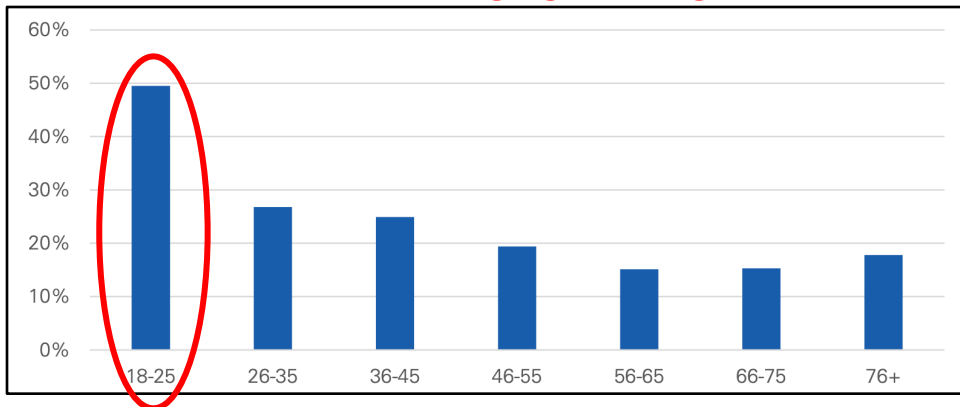
CRITICAL FACTORS:

A notable change in the pattern of traditional family life potentially deprives families of the benefits of an extended family where family members assist with the upbringing of the young as well as with the care of aging parents/relatives. While the resultant loss of transmission of culture and language is a contributing factor, the greatest threat to the Zoroastrian religion is it's diminishing numbers caused by:

- Low Birth Rate: Replacement Fertility Rate is only 0.8.
- Aging population: 31% of Parsis in India are over age 60.
- Unmarried Population: 30% of Parsis in India have never married.
- Rising inter-marriage rate:
 - 1991: South Asia - 19% ; North America - 24%
 - 2010: South Asia - 38% ; North America - 59%
 - Currently: 20.4% of Survey respondents have non-Zoroastrian partners (similar percentages for men and women).

RESPONDENTS WITH A NON-ZOROASTRIAN PARTNER, BY AGE

KEY TAKEAWAY: 18-25 age group highest at 49.5%



RESPONDENTS WITH A NON-ZOROASTRIAN PARTNER, BY *REGION*

KEY TAKEAWAY: Non-Zoroastrian partners in North America 31.3% vs South Asia 10.6%

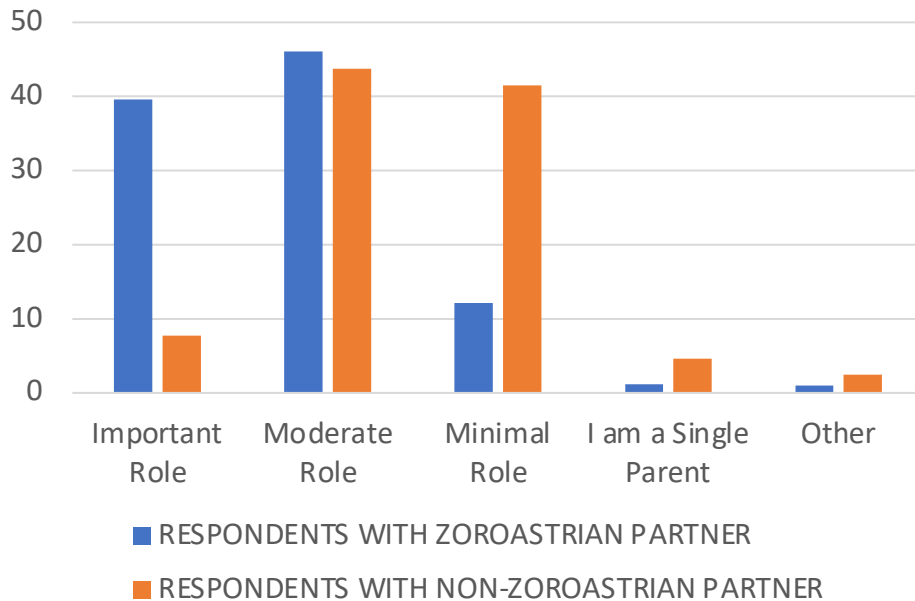
[illegible]

KEY TAKEAWAY: Overall acceptance levels indicate that more than 75% of respondents accepted intermarried Zoroastrian men and women and their children. These acceptance levels did not vary greatly by age.

UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN:

RESPONDENTS WITH BOTH ZOROASTRIAN PARTNERS AND ONE ZOROASTRIAN PARTNER

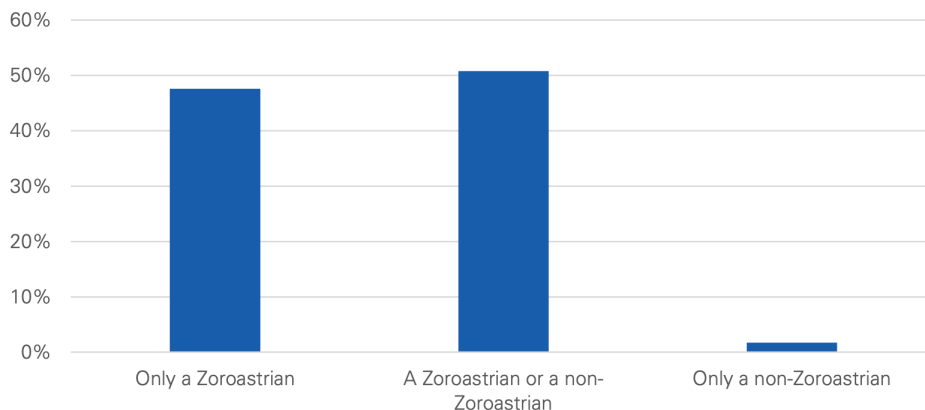
KEY TAKEAWAY: Role in upbringing of children is significantly different. More dominant role when both parents were Zoroastrian, and interestingly, when the father is Zoroastrian, the non-Zoroastrian mother plays an equally important role in the religious and cultural upbringing of the children.



PREFERENCE WHEN LOOKING FOR A PARTNER:

RESPONDENTS PREFERENCE FOR A PARTNER

KEY TAKEAWAY: 52.8% of respondents in the 26-35 age group desire a Zoroastrian partner. As age increases, the preference for a Zoroastrian partner decreases.



NOTEWORTHY NUMBERS:

- **The reproductive rate would have to rise by 20%** simply to maintain the current population level. To quote demographer Chandra Shekar (1948, p. 88), who has studied the Parsi Zoroastrian population in India (where majority of the demographic studies have been undertaken), "The future of the community can be read in its demographic trends."
- **Acceptance of intermarriage in the diaspora has risen to 91% and that of children of intermarried Zoroastrians to 89% compared to Hinnells' (2005) study.** Marriage is an important social and religious duty for many Zoroastrians, but it is also a very controversial subject within the community due to the community's demographic decline and the rise in intermarriage.
- **The likelihood of having children is 69% in the 36-45 age group, and 80% (highest) in the over 45 age group.** The likelihood of having children at a young age is very low. In South Asia, the trend of having only one child remained consistent across all age groups.
- **34% of intermarried Zoroastrians were not raising or did not intend to raise their children as Zoroastrian, compared to 5% of Zoroastrians married within the community.** *Region* did not impact these numbers as intermarried Zoroastrians in North America and South Asia were equally likely to raise their children as Zoroastrian (69.6% vs 68.9%). Furthermore, *gender* did not impact these numbers significantly as intermarried women were only slightly less likely to raise their children as Zoroastrian than men (63.3% vs 68.8%). However, with respect to *age*, 21.7% of intermarried 26-35-year-olds were not raising their children as Zoroastrian, compared to 63.6% of intermarried 76+ year-olds who had not raised them as Zoroastrian indicating that the younger generation were indeed committed to the preservation of the religion.
- **26% of women over age 66 live alone compared to 11% of men in the same age group.** Data from the Survey suggests that this may be because women were generally more likely to outlive their partners.

Inevitably, the way in which Zoroastrianism is lived and practiced has evolved differently within families and within each region. We wonder about the loss, if any, of transmission of culture and language especially in 'transnational relationships', where the older generation is in the country of origin and parents and children have migrated, as well as in the case of intermarriage where the older generation can play a crucial role.

CHAPTER 2

ONE ZOROASTRIAN PARENT, GRANDPARENT, OR SPOUSE

CRITICAL FACTORS:

The issue of intermarriage is observed to be a contentious subject within community discourse. The large increase in intermarriage makes it a more visible target for the community’s concerns. To be better informed on the issue, this Survey was open to people with a Zoroastrian mother or father, a Zoroastrian grandparent, and / or a Zoroastrian spouse. This unique feature of the Survey provides insights from –

- 104 non-Zoroastrian respondents with a Zoroastrian spouse.
- 101 respondents with a Zoroastrian mother, and
- 188 respondents with a Zoroastrian father.

To provide clarity, these categories have been analyzed separately from the rest of our respondents having two Zoroastrian parents.

RESPONDENTS WITH ONE ZOROASTRIAN PARENT, BY *REGION*
KEY TAKEAWAY: There were more respondents with Zoroastrian mothers in North America 33.6% vs South Asia 22.7%.

	Australasia (N=10)	Europe (N=12)	Iran (N=2)	Middle East (N=1)	North America (N=107)	South Asia (N=88)	South East Asia (N=3)	United Kingdom (N=30)	Rest of the world (N=4)
Mother	60.0%	58.3%	50.0%	0.0%	33.6%	22.7%	33.3%	40.0%	50.0%
Father	40.0%	41.7%	50.0%	100.0%	66.4%	77.3%	66.7%	60.0%	50.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

RESPONDENTS RAISED AS A ZOROASTRIAN IN INTERMARRIED FAMILIES

KEY TAKEAWAY: Respondents in North America were equally likely to have been raised as a Zoroastrian whether they had a Zoroastrian mother (75.0%) or father (75.0%), while respondents in South Asia, were more likely to have been raised as a Zoroastrian if they had a Zoroastrian father (81.7%) than if they had a Zoroastrian mother (55.6%). Data suggests that children of Zoroastrian fathers were most likely to be raised as a Zoroastrian in South Asia where patrilineal social norms were more faithfully practiced.

NORTH AMERICA

	Mother (N=32)	Father (N=68)	Total (N=100)
Yes	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%
No	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

SOUTH ASIA

	Mother (N=18)	Father (N=60)	Total (N=78)
Yes	55.6%	81.7%	75.6%
No	44.4%	18.3%	24.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

ETHNICITY OF RESPONDENTS' CURRENT/PREVIOUS PARTNER

KEY TAKEAWAY: Respondents with Zoroastrian mothers were more likely to have non-Zoroastrian partners (79.3%) vs respondents with Zoroastrian fathers (56.1%).

	Mother (N=58)	Father (N=107)	Total (N=165)
Zarthoshty / Iranian Zoroastrian	3.4%	8.4%	6.7%
Irani (descendant of Zoroastrian settlers who migrated to India from approximately the 18th century onwards, living in India or the wider diaspora)	0.0%	2.8%	1.8%
Parsi Zoroastrian (descendant of Zoroastrian settlers who migrated to India from approximately the 10th century onwards, living in India or the wider diaspora)	10.3%	28.0%	21.8%
Mixed-heritage (person with one parent who is Zarthoshty / Iranian Zoroastrian or Irani or Parsi and one parent who is not)	6.9%	4.7%	5.5%
Non-Zoroastrian	79.3%	56.1%	64.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

DID YOU RAISE, OR WILL YOU RAISE YOUR CHILDREN AS ZOROASTRIAN?

KEY TAKEAWAY: Only 63.2% said "Yes".

	Mother (N=90)	Father (N=165)	Total (N=255)
Yes	54.2%	68.6%	63.2%
No	45.8%	31.4%	36.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE GREATEST THREATS TO THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION AND THE IRANIAN / PARSI / IRANI ETHNOCULTURAL IDENTITY? BY *WHICH OF YOUR PARENTS ARE ZOROASTRIAN?*

KEY TAKEAWAY: The #1 factor (64.9%) identified was the “Unwillingness to reform issues of intermarriage and fully accept the children of intermarried Zoroastrian men and women”. Acceptance rate – Zoroastrian mother 77.3% vs Zoroastrian father 58.3%.

The #2 factor (62.2%) identified was the “Small, aging population”. Respondents with Zoroastrian mothers were more likely to say that the greatest threats facing the community were different rules in different Associations and Trusts (18.2% vs 7.4%) and infighting in the community (27.3% vs 23.3%), while respondents with Zoroastrian fathers were more likely to say that the lack of knowledge and understanding about the religion and rituals (29.4% vs 17.0%) and marrying later in life or not marrying at all (19.6% vs 10.2%) were the greatest threats facing the community. (Respondents were able to select up to three responses, hence total percentages are greater than 100%).

	Mother (N=88)	Father (N=163)	Total (N=251)
Small, ageing population	63.6%	61.3%	62.2%
Lack of knowledge and understanding about the religion and rituals	17.0%	29.4%	25.1%
Lack of respect for the authority of priesthood	0.0%	7.4%	4.8%
Different rules in different associations and trusts	18.2%	7.4%	11.2%
Migration to the West and the influence of Western culture	6.8%	9.8%	8.8%
Loss of entrepreneurial spirit	2.3%	2.5%	2.4%
Unwillingness to reform issues of intermarriage and fully accept the children of intermarried Zoroastrian men and women	77.3%	58.3%	64.9%
Apathetic and lethargic population	8.0%	5.5%	6.4%
Marrying later in life or not marrying at all	10.2%	19.6%	16.3%
Marrying outside the community	8.0%	10.4%	9.6%
Parents not passing down religious traditions to children	15.9%	19.0%	17.9%
Increase in atheism / agnosticism / non-religion	5.7%	8.6%	7.6%
In-fighting in the community	27.3%	23.3%	24.7%
Other	3.4%	2.5%	2.8%

NOTEWORTHY NUMBERS:

- Respondents with a Zoroastrian father were more likely to be raised as a Zoroastrian than those with a Zoroastrian mother (76.0% vs 63.7%).
- 29.6% of respondents with a sole Zoroastrian parent had not undergone their navjote ceremony. *Region* did not impact respondents who had a Zoroastrian mother since they were similarly likely to have undergone a navjote ceremony in North America or South Asia (57.6% vs 57.9%). However, a regional difference was noted in respondents with a Zoroastrian father who were far more likely to have undergone a navjote ceremony in South Asia than those in North America (96.9% vs 70.4%). This is not guaranteed to continue in the future as nearly 20% of respondents in South Asia with a sole Zoroastrian father were not raised as a Zoroastrian. *Gender* significantly impacts initiation into the faith as respondents with Zoroastrian fathers were much more likely to have undergone a navjote ceremony than those with Zoroastrian mothers (82.6% vs 46.7%).
- 19.7% of respondents with Zoroastrian fathers learnt about the Zoroastrian religion from their non-Zoroastrian mother. This meant that it was the mother, whether Zoroastrian or not, who played an important role in the Zoroastrian religious and cultural upbringing of their children compared to non-Zoroastrian fathers who played a minimal role.
- 67.4% of non-Zoroastrian spouses were very or moderately integrated into the local community. Those that were not or were minimally involved stated the primary reason for non-participation was that they lived too far away (59.3%).

The single most action cited by 53.2% of respondents to strengthen the community was to teach the next generation about Zoroastrian religion and culture – a call to action to improve the religious and cultural understanding of what it means to be a Zoroastrian and rethink the current approach to teaching the culture and tenets of our religion.

CHAPTER 3

IDENTITY AND INTERACTION

A dynamic transformation in Zoroastrian identity, varying by region, gender, and age, was noted. Data collected about “Expressions of Identity” i.e., the ways in which people identify with and connect to their culture and environment, as well as “Interaction and Involvement”, i.e., their attachment to the community, indicates that –

- ## HOW IMPORTANT ARE "QISSEH-YE SANJAN" AND "SHAHNAMEH" TO YOUR CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY?

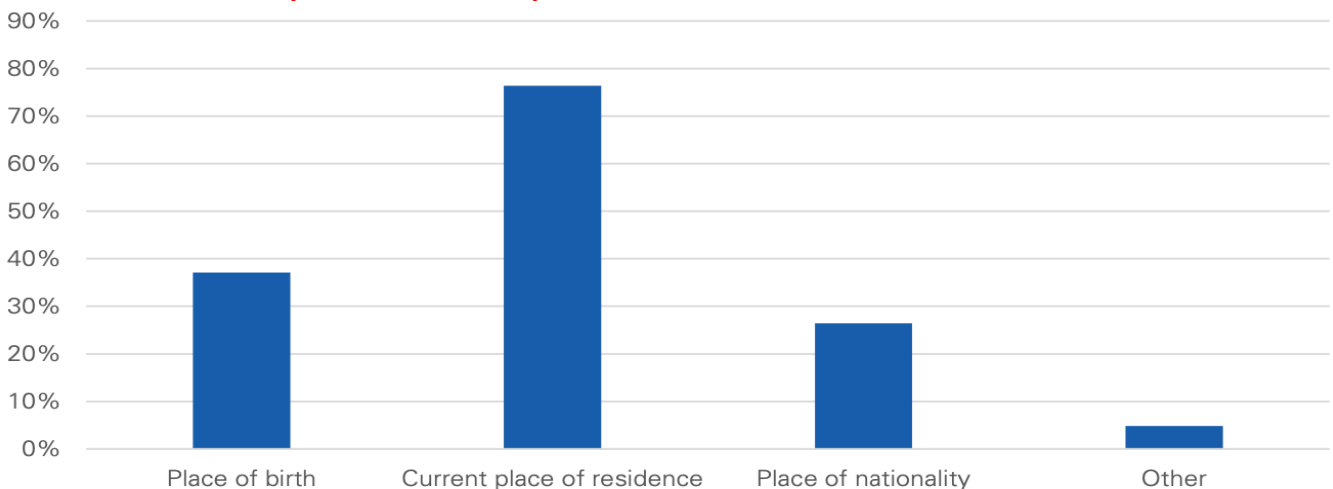
KEY TAKEAWAY: North America 63.5% vs South Asia 79.5%.

"SHAHNAMEH"

[illegible]

WHERE DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR "HOME"?

KEY TAKEAWAY: Respondents were able to select multiple responses, revealing that many had a multi-faceted view of belonging. Of the 1,198 respondents who chose current place of residence, 30.8% also chose place of birth and 22.0% also chose place of nationality. This supports the idea that people do not seem torn between their birthplace or place of nationality and current place of residence but embraced both.



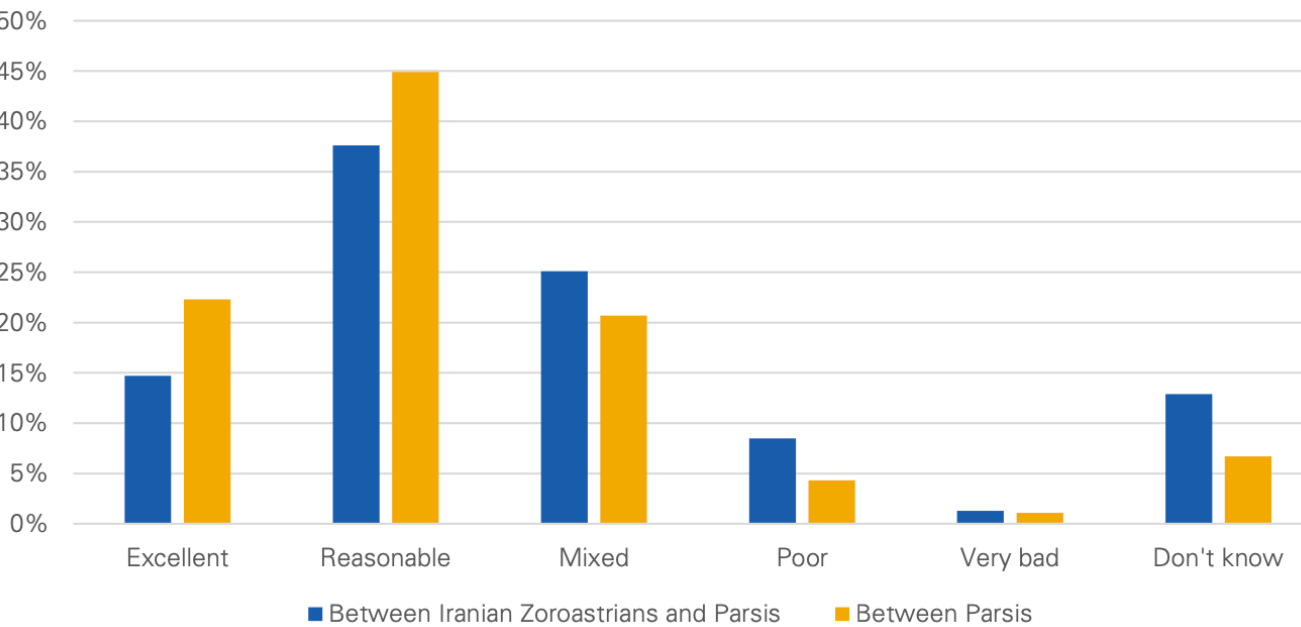
WHERE DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR "HOME"? BY *REGION*

KEY TAKEAWAY: Respondents who had migrated and lived in North America were much more likely to feel at home in their current place of residence than those who had migrated and lived in South Asia (78.5% vs 63.4%). Migrant respondents whose parents had not migrated were more likely to feel at home in their place of birth (41.7% vs 28.2%) compared to respondents whose parents had migrated. Men and women were equally likely to feel at home in their current place of residence (76.8% vs 76.0%).

	Australasia (N=194)	Europe (N=32)	Iran (N=6)	Middle East (N=20)	North America (N=910)	South Asia (N=145)	South East Asia (N=28)	United Kingdom (N=145)	Rest of the world (N=5)
Place of birth	32.0%	53.1%	33.3%	55.0%	37.3%	36.6%	39.3%	42.1%	40.0%
Current place of residence	79.9%	75.0%	33.3%	55.0%	78.5%	63.4%	89.3%	72.4%	60.0%
Place of nationality	24.7%	34.4%	33.3%	40.0%	25.9%	22.1%	25.0%	33.8%	40.0%
Other	4.1%	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	4.1%	9.7%	3.6%	4.8%	20.0%

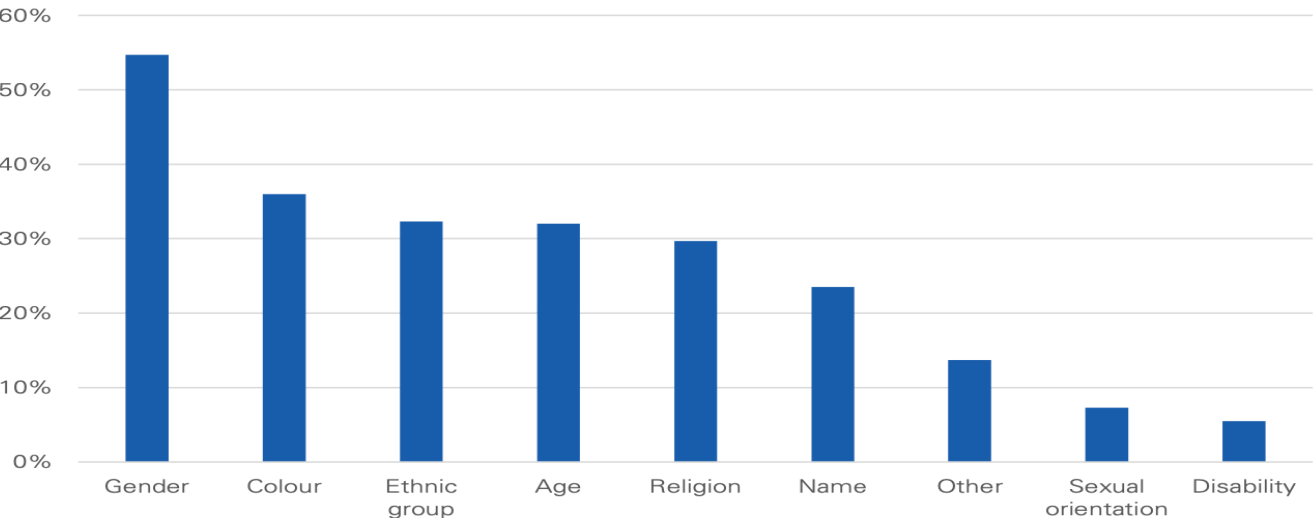
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE INTRA-COMMUNITY RELATIONS AS THEY ARE IN PRACTICE IN THE COMMUNITY?

KEY TAKEAWAY: Respondents in South Asia were much more likely than those in North America to view the relationship between Iranian Zoroastrians and Parsis as excellent (20.9% vs 7.5%), while respondents in North America were more likely than those in South Asia to view the relationship as mixed (29.7% vs 21.7%).



HAVE YOU EVER FACED DISCRIMINATION? IF SO, FOR WHAT REASONS? BY RESPONDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION WITHIN THE ZOROASTRIAN COMMUNITY.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Although 66.2% of respondents didn't feel discriminated against in any place or context, discrimination due to gender is the center of much debate within the community. 11.6% of respondents perceived discrimination due to their gender, 92.4% of whom were women.



NOTEWORTHY NUMBERS:

- No academic research has been done on the Zoroastrian LGBTQ+ community and 92.1% of respondents stated that they were straight or heterosexual. Respondents were generally open about their sexual orientation with family, friends, and even their workplaces, but only 22.5% were completely open with the wider Zoroastrian community. *Region:* Respondents in South Asia were more likely than those in North America to be completely open with the Zoroastrian community (26.8% vs 17.8%), but equally likely (48.8% vs 46.7%) not to be open at all. *Gender:* Women were more likely than men to say they were not open at all with family (38.5% vs 25.5%) as well as with the Zoroastrian community (57.7% vs 45.5%).
- Of the 105 women respondents who said that they experienced gender discrimination at a Zoroastrian place of worship / religious setting, only 52.0% had a non-Zoroastrian spouse or partner. This meant that women respondents who were single (27.6%) or in a relationship with a Zoroastrian (41.3%) also experienced gender discrimination in a Zoroastrian place of worship / religious setting. *Region:* Data suggests that gender discrimination felt by women at a Zoroastrian place of worship / religious setting was similar in North America and South Asia (22.7% vs 25.2%). Younger female respondents were more likely than older female respondents to say they perceived gender discrimination at a Zoroastrian place of worship / religious setting, which suggests that discrimination against women has not diminished over time.
- Respondents in North America were more likely than those in South Asia to always participate in activities and events organized by the local Zoroastrian community (18.0% vs 12.5%). Two-third of these respondents participated to create a sense of belonging and to celebrate / preserve their roots and heritage. Those who participated but did not enjoy said it was because they did not know anyone and felt left out. Younger respondents were more likely to respond in this manner, as well as cite lack of time and distance to events.

People are more likely and willing to contribute to societies where they feel that they belong. While most respondents were well integrated in their host communities, the Survey presents valuable data for local leadership of Zoroastrian communities to reflect on what will engage their members, which age-appropriate activities will appeal most and how best to reach different age groups through relevant print / social media channels.

CHAPTER 4

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Only respondents who have two Zoroastrian parents and have undergone a navjote ceremony (99%) are considered for this section. Their responses indicate that –

- ### DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A PRACTISING OR PARTIALLY PRACTISING ZOROASTRIAN? BY *REGION*

Practice was high across all age groups, but it was lowest among the youngest age group (88.8% for 18-25-year-olds). There were no variations in religious identity due to gender.

[illegible]

KEY TAKEAWAY: “Mother” dominated all age groups. However, role of father and grandparents increased with the younger age group indicating a recent trend and increased family involvement in religious education.

	18-25 (N=421)	26-35 (N=760)	36-45 (N=723)	46-55 (N=736)	56-65 (N=697)	66-75 (N=636)	76+ (N=337)
Mother	81.2%	77.8%	78.7%	71.6%	72.5%	72.6%	72.1%
Father	72.7%	66.3%	61.3%	55.4%	47.5%	47.2%	49.0%
A grandparent or other family member	67.0%	57.8%	60.2%	46.2%	34.9%	30.8%	32.3%
Zoroastrian friend	13.8%	9.7%	9.8%	7.6%	6.9%	4.4%	3.3%
Teacher at group / community religion classes	38.7%	38.0%	33.7%	28.8%	23.0%	17.0%	16.3%
A Mobed / Priest or Mobedyar / Behdin Pasbaan / Assistant Priest	38.5%	35.9%	28.9%	27.7%	27.8%	34.4%	27.3%
Self-taught	8.8%	8.9%	13.0%	13.6%	16.5%	13.4%	15.1%
I was never taught or learnt the prayers	0.5%	0.3%	0.6%	0.5%	0.7%	0.6%	0.9%
Not applicable	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%
Other	0.5%	0.8%	1.1%	1.4%	1.0%	1.4%	2.4%

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF ZOROASTRIAN PRAYERS?

KEY TAKEAWAY: Respondents answering “Yes” and “Mostly” were generally less than / around 25% across all regions, except Iran with 40%.

[illegible]

HOW IMPORTANT ARE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL RITUALS AND PRACTICES TO YOU? BY *REGION*

KEY TAKEAWAY: Zoroastrian rituals and practices were very or quite important to 58.4% of respondents, varying by region - North America 49.6% vs South Asia 65.7%.

	Australasia (N=243)	Europe (N=44)	Iran (N=22)	Middle East (N=68)	North America (N=1243)	South Asia (N=2168)	South East Asia (N=44)	United Kingdom (N=222)	Rest of the world (N=11)	Total (N=4065)
Very important	23.0%	22.7%	50.0%	39.7%	22.6%	36.5%	18.2%	18.9%	27.3%	30.3%
Quite important	31.3%	25.0%	13.6%	25.0%	27.0%	29.2%	29.5%	30.2%	27.3%	28.5%
Moderately important	22.6%	34.1%	22.7%	20.6%	29.6%	22.4%	31.8%	23.4%	18.2%	24.9%
Slightly important	15.6%	15.9%	13.6%	13.2%	15.5%	7.6%	18.2%	18.5%	18.2%	11.5%
Not at all important	7.4%	2.3%	0.0%	1.5%	5.3%	4.3%	2.3%	9.0%	9.1%	4.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IDENTITY? BY *ARE YOU FROM A PRIESTLY FAMILY? **

KEY TAKEAWAY: "Moderate" and "Liberal" responses comprised over 80% for all respondent categories. Interesting to note that respondents who were born into a priestly family were less likely to be conservative (11.3%) than those who married into a priestly family (17.4%) or those who were married into a behdin / layman family (16.7%).

	Yes - I was born into a priestly family (N=885)	Yes - I married into a priestly family (N=178)	No - I was born a behdin / layman (N=2624)	No - I married into a behdin / layman family (N=132)
Conservative	11.3%	17.4%	9.2%	16.7%
Moderate	43.7%	47.8%	45.1%	49.2%
Liberal	44.2%	33.1%	44.4%	33.3%
Other	0.8%	1.7%	1.2%	0.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

*** *RELEVANT SIDE NOTE:*** There appears to be a shortage of full-time priests, especially in India. The Survey asked priests why they did not work as full-time priests in a fire temple or place of worship. 47.8% said that they were not interested as priesthood did not receive the respect and financial remuneration they felt was deserved.

NOTEWORTHY NUMBERS:

- Only 4.6% of respondents worshipped in a fire temple daily and 15.0% worshipped only on special days / occasions, while 30.7% worshipped whenever they had access to a fire temple, suggesting that proximity to the fire temple was associated with regular worship. This also suggests that there is insufficient attendance to support numerous fire temples.
- Purity laws were observed by 48.6% of respondents, while 40.8% said they did not observe any purity laws, and 10.6% said they were not aware of any purity laws. Observance was much higher in South Asia (58.5%) and Australasia (45.6%) compared to North America (35.6%) - overall observance levels were higher than anticipated across all regions.
- 49.5% of respondents preferred dokhmeneshni (in theory if not practice), 38.3% preferred cremation and 6.9% preferred burial. Interestingly, 55.1% of 18-25- year-olds were much more likely to prefer dokhmeneshni compared to 58.1% of 76+ year-olds who were much more likely to prefer cremation. Those aged 36-45 were the most likely to prefer dokhmeneshni (57.4%). Also, interesting to note is that this pattern remains the same for North America and South Asia - 59.2% of respondents in North America preferred cremation compared to 67.3% of respondents in South Asia who preferred dokhmeneshni.
- The UK and Europe had the highest levels of respondents who did not celebrate religious festivals (19.6% and 25.0% respectively).
- Younger respondents were more likely to believe that a navjote ceremony was necessary for both a Zoroastrian religious and ethnocultural identity than older respondents, who were more likely to believe that the navjote ceremony was only necessary for a Zoroastrian religious identity.
- 39.4% of respondents held the traditional Zoroastrian belief that the soul is judged on the fourth day after death and goes to heaven or hell before the final judgement at the end of time.
- 33.4% of respondents said the opinion of priests was most important in religious disputes, while 34.7% said not applicable, indicating that over a third of the respondents chose not to get involved.

CHAPTER 5

ASPIRATIONS

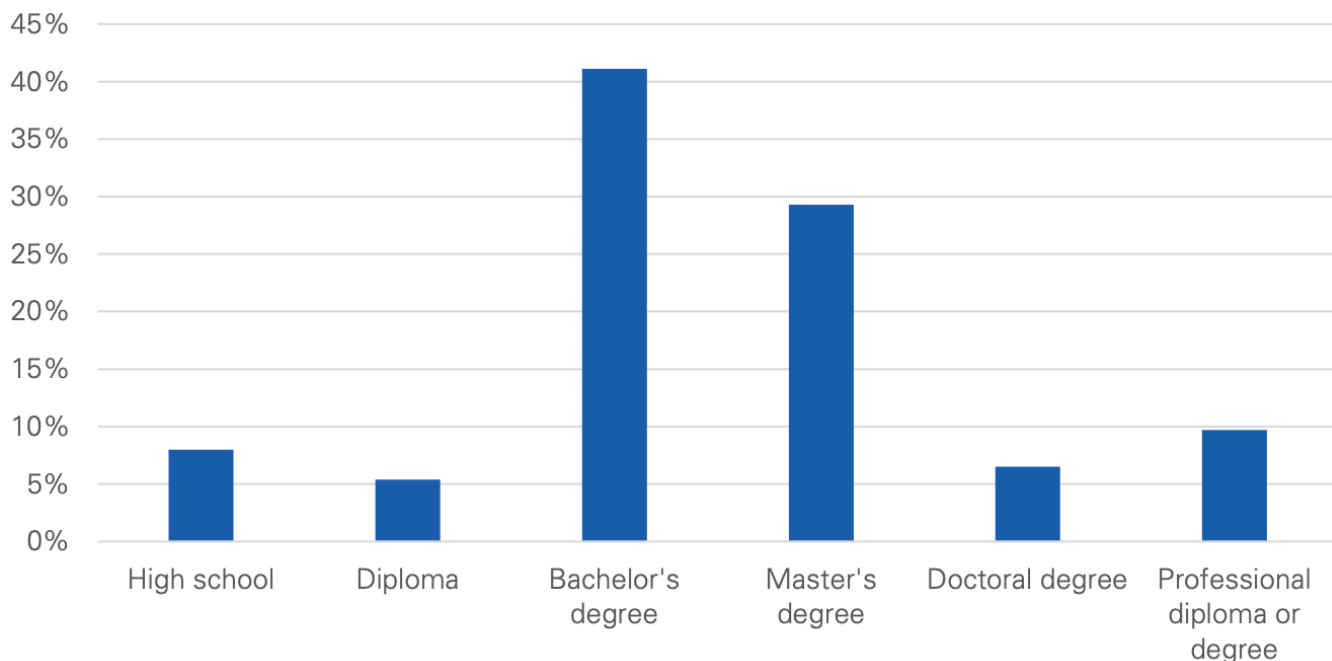
CRITICAL FACTORS:

Data from responses in previous chapters helped describe what is going on in the community today. Here, the data covers respondents' aspirations for education and employment, and their views on entrepreneurship and philanthropy. The data also explores what they feel are the threats and challenges the community is faced with, as well as what they want for the future, and what they feel can be done to strengthen the future of our community -

- While higher education levels have been high amongst Zoroastrians, this has increased even more for recent generations, resulting in low unemployment levels across all age groups and across both North America and South Asia.
- Majority of respondents were practicing or partially practicing the religion regardless of education level. However, higher levels of education corresponded to less strongly held beliefs and fewer religious practices.
- 16.4% of all respondents (similar rates of 16.9% in North America and 15.6% in South Asia) said they were entrepreneurs (this is consistent with the entrepreneurship rate in the United States, where 16% of the adult workforce are entrepreneurs).
- 72.5% of people support both Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian philanthropic causes, 12.5% give to non-Zoroastrian causes alone and only 9.1% give to Zoroastrian causes alone. It is worth noting that compared to those who felt most at home in their place of birth or place of nationality, respondents who felt most at home in their current place of residence were most likely to regularly volunteer time (30.4%) and donate in kind (36.0%).
- The three greatest perceived threats to the community were –
 - “Small, aging population” (59.5%),
 - “Unwillingness to reform issues of intermarriage and fully accept the children of intermarried Zoroastrian men and women” (45.1%), and
 - “Lack of knowledge and understanding about the religion and rituals” (35.6%).
- “Teaching the next generation about Zoroastrian religion and culture” was by far the #1 response to how to strengthen the future of the community. Respondents in North America considered teaching the next generation to be the most significant factor over respondents in South Asia (54.6% vs 45.7%). South Asian respondents considered entrepreneurship to be a more significant factor over those in North America (14.1% vs 7.7%).

KEY TAKEAWAY: Education and employment are important social metrics

KEY TAKEAWAY: Education and employment are important social metrics for the Zoroastrian community. An impressive 35.8% of respondents have a Master's and Doctoral degree (49.2% of respondents in North America v/s 27.5% in South Asia, compared to 15.1% in the United States generally).



ARE YOU AN ENTREPRENEUR?

KEY TAKEAWAY: 16.4% of respondents said they were entrepreneurs. There is a narrow margin between 16.9% respondents in North America and 15.6% in South Asia (consistent with entrepreneurship rates in the United States at 16%). Despite higher rates of education amongst Zoroastrians resulting in good jobs (which deters risk taking), the data indicates a healthy appetite for entrepreneurship within the community. 22.9% of respondents aged 46-55 were entrepreneurs compared to only 5.0% of those aged 18-25. 61.4% of respondents who were entrepreneurs were men and 38.6% were women. Commerce and Leisure as well as Business and Finance were the top two fields, combined at 44.7%.

[illegible]

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEUR AND STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS? BY AGE

KEY TAKEAWAY: Overall, although 47.5% of respondents said “No”, a sizeable 29.1% said “Maybe” and a significant 23.4% said “Yes”. A closer look indicated that over one quarter to a third of the respondents aged 18 to 55 said “Yes” and over a third across these age groups consistently said “Maybe”. It behooves the community to facilitate this aspiration. However, looking at the data by region, 26.6% of respondents in South Asia and 57.9% in Iran said “Yes”, compared to North America which was the lowest at 17.5% (attributable to the higher rates of education and employment discussed in the previous Key Takeaway).

	18-25 (N=402)	26-35 (N=662)	36-45 (N=578)	46-55 (N=567)	56-65 (N=558)	66-75 (N=537)	76+ (N=297)	Total (N=3601)
Yes	34.8%	35.8%	31.0%	26.3%	15.2%	8.2%	2.7%	23.4%
No	27.6%	30.5%	36.0%	39.0%	55.9%	75.4%	84.8%	47.5%
Maybe	37.6%	33.7%	33.0%	34.7%	28.9%	16.4%	12.5%	29.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES TO YOU BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEUR? BY AGE

KEY TAKEAWAY: “Funding and finances” was identified as the primary obstacle by respondents who are entrepreneurs, and it continues to be identified as the main challenge to entrepreneurship across all regions, and ages (respondents were able to pick more than one challenge).

	18-25 (N=279)	26-35 (N=457)	36-45 (N=366)	46-55 (N=342)	56-65 (N=243)	66-75 (N=131)	76+ (N=45)	Total (N=1863)
Funding and finances	76.3%	77.7%	74.3%	67.5%	60.5%	49.6%	42.2%	69.9%
Knowledge and resources	62.0%	60.2%	55.2%	50.9%	46.1%	45.0%	13.3%	53.7%
Lack of confidence / Fear of failure	46.2%	50.5%	47.3%	48.2%	34.2%	28.2%	8.9%	44.1%
Lack of mentorship or guidance	54.1%	49.0%	39.6%	42.1%	36.2%	27.5%	20.0%	42.8%
Risks of setting up alone	47.3%	51.9%	53.0%	52.0%	43.2%	34.4%	31.1%	48.6%
Gender discrimination	12.2%	5.3%	2.2%	3.2%	0.4%	1.5%	0.0%	4.3%
Age discrimination	12.5%	2.6%	4.4%	7.9%	16.5%	27.5%	35.6%	9.8%
Ethnic discrimination	8.6%	5.7%	3.3%	2.6%	3.3%	1.5%	6.7%	4.5%
Other	6.1%	3.7%	4.9%	5.6%	4.1%	6.9%	17.8%	5.3%

KEY TAKEAWAY: To understand how people practice philanthropy, respondents were asked about three ways in which they give: time, money and donating in kind. Older respondents were more likely to volunteer their time, donate money or donate in kind, than younger respondents. Women were slightly more likely than men to volunteer their time regularly (21.7% vs 18.4%) or to give money regularly (30.8% vs 28.3%) and were much more likely to donate in kind (31.7% vs 23.0%). Respondents in North America were more likely to volunteer time regularly than those in South Asia (29.2% vs 13.4%), money (41.9% vs 20.6%) and donate in kind (35.5% vs 22.4%). Further, respondents who were entrepreneurs donated more regularly than non-entrepreneurs: time (32.5% vs 17.7%), money (37.5% vs 28.2%), and donating in kind (35.0% vs 26.0%), indicating that entrepreneurs are more likely to be philanthropic (possibly due to higher disposable income) and be invested in the community.

[illegible]

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE GREATEST THREATS TO THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION AND THE IRANIAN / PARSI / IRANI ETHNOCULTURAL IDENTITY?

KEY TAKEAWAY: Almost 60% of respondents stated that the small and aging population of the community presents the greatest threat to our religion and identity. In second place, 45.1% of respondents stated, “Unwillingness to reform issues of intermarriage and fully accept the children of intermarried Zoroastrian men and women.” We previously noted in Chapter 2 when analyzing responses from respondents with one Zoroastrian parent, a Zoroastrian grandparent, and / or a Zoroastrian spouse, that 77.3% of respondents with a Zoroastrian mother and 58.3% with a Zoroastrian father cited “Unwillingness to reform issues of intermarriage and fully accept the children of intermarried Zoroastrian men and women” as the greatest threat facing the community.

Responses (Select up to 3 responses)	Percentage of respondents	
Small, ageing population	59.5%	(N=2459)
Unwillingness to reform issues of intermarriage and fully accept the children of intermarried Zoroastrian men and women	45.1%	(N=1864)
Lack of knowledge and understanding about the religion and rituals	35.6%	(N=1472)
In-fighting in the community	29.2%	(N=1206)
Marrying later in life or not marrying at all	22.3%	(N=923)
Marrying outside the community	21.5%	(N=887)
Parents not passing down religious traditions to children	14.0%	(N=579)
Migration to the West and the influence of Western culture	13.2%	(N=545)
Different rules in different associations and trusts	11.2%	(N=462)
Apathetic and lethargic population	9.5%	(N=393)
Lack of respect for the authority of priesthood	7.8%	(N=324)
Loss of entrepreneurial spirit	5.7%	(N=237)
Increase in atheism / agnosticism / non-religion	4.9%	(N=202)
Other	2.9%	(N=121)

Just over one third of the respondents here identified “Lack of knowledge and understanding about the religion and rituals” as a threat to our religion. When asked in a subsequent question about what they would consider to be the most significant in strengthening the future of the community, interestingly respondents honed-in on one factor that correlated directly to this threat ahead of the other two major threats identified by them here – see outcomes presented in the next data table.

KEY TAKEAWAY: The single most important action to strengthen the community (by far) cited by respondents was to improve the religious and cultural understanding and teaching of what it means to be a Zoroastrian. This is an urgent call to fundamentally rethink and upgrade the approach to teaching the culture and tenets of the religion.

A DEEPER LOOK AT RESPONSES TO THE SAME QUESTION ANALYZED BY AGE INDICATES THIS IS THE #1 IDENTIFIED NEED BY ALL AGE GROUPS.

[illegible]

NOTEWORTHY NUMBERS:

- **Business and Finance was the most popular field of work for respondents at 23.4%** while Law the least popular at 3%, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and manufacturing was popular with 15.1% of respondents.
- **More women obtained Bachelor's degrees than men (45.9% vs 36.4%), but more men obtained Post Graduate degrees (49.7% vs 41.6%).** This dispels conventional wisdom that Zoroastrian women are more educated than men.
- Top five reasons respondents cited for migration (respondents were able choose up to three reasons for migration):
 1. **Higher studies was listed #1 by respondents who had a Master's or Doctoral degree.**
 2. Better standard of living.
 3. Work opportunities.
 4. To be with Spouse / Partner.
 5. Children's education and future.
- **Self-employed respondents had the most job satisfaction at 57.9%** with Homemakers coming in high at 51.9%, possibly because these positions require people to answer to themselves.
- **78% of respondents had never applied for financial assistance for further education such as college / university from a Zoroastrian Trust or Association.** From amongst those that did apply, only about 10% were rejected in North America and South Asia.
- Top five topics respondents were interested in learning about –
 1. **Zoroastrian rituals and their significance was listed #1 by 50.3% of respondents.**
 2. Parsi / Irani history 49.2%.
 3. Zoroastrian philosophy and ethics 47.8% .
 4. Zoroastrian scripture and their meaning 43.4%.
 5. The Shahnameh 40.7%.

Data showed a socially mobile, highly educated population who are becoming more highly educated. Views on their aspirations for the future shared through this Survey would be valuable for community leaders to initiate a global dialogue amongst Zoroastrians, especially the younger generation, to understand their ideas about strengthening and furthering the well-being of the community.

***"If you do not know where you want to go,
any road will get you there."
- Alice in Wonderland***

Read the complete Survey Report by SOAS
at

<http://www.genzandbeyond.com>

All data collected will be stored in perpetuity in the UK Data Archive. The data can be accessed by persons with a genuine interest, upon providing their contact information.