

NEPOTISM LEADS TO LACK OF OPPORTUNITY FOR NEWCOMERS IN THE BOLLYWOOD FILM INDUSTRY.

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ABSTRACT

One of the most common manifestations of nepotism is injustice. The unfair attitude of institution to assignment, promotion and appointment causes increase in work stress, decreases performance, job satisfaction of workers and makes them want to leave their work. In the Bollywood Film Industry, nepotism is the most common practice. It is very natural for a production house to cast the child of a superstar in a heavy budget film over any other dedicated and talented newcomer who does not have any influence in the industry and is only here to fulfil his/her lifelong dream. This paper examines if nepotism leads to lack of opportunity for newcomers in the Bollywood Film Industry. This is achieved through examining data, which is collected from an online survey, which consists of 23 questions. The survey consisted of 2 different parts. The first part consisted of a sample informed consent form. The second part consisted of all the questions (11 open ended, 11 objective type and 1 asking the participants name). The results of the study show that nepotism does lead to lack of opportunity for newcomers in the Bollywood Film Industry.

KEY-WORDS: *Nepotism, Bollywood, Film Industry, lack of opportunity, practice, favouritism, newcomer, influence.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nepotism can be defined as the **practice** of making employment relations on the basis of relationship. It can also be defined as hiring or promoting a **relative** or **friend**, even if there are other qualified candidates for the position. It also involves **casting/ favouring** the children of celebrities over the likes of **newcomers** in the film industry.

A majority in the society are **ignorant** of the practice of nepotism and the others are least bothered and the others who raise questions against this practice are made to stay quiet. The issue of **nepotism** has not been given much importance as it only affects few artists who do not have many contacts in the **film industry**. There are many examples of artists who made it big in the **Bollywood film industry** without any contacts or Godfather for example:

- Shahrukh Khan
- Akshay kumar
- Anushka Sharma
- Kartik Aaryan, etc.

But, there are a larger number of artists who devote their “**success**” in the film industry to their contacts and so called “**Godfathers**” for example:

- Arjun Kapoor
- Athiya Shetty
- Ananya Pandey
- Sonam Kapoor and many more...

It is because of these few actors who are using **influence** to get work in **Bollywood** that a number of **newcomers/** talented actors who do not have work and have to experience work being taken away from them have to suffer. The main problem revolves around the **audition process** in which few talents who give a mind blowing performance are not considered but the so called “**star kids**” get the role without giving any audition.

Over the years there have been a few voices raised against **nepotism** by few artists in the **industry**, but it all died down because of the lack of support that the artist had received. Thus, the question lies, ‘**Is nepotism the reason that newcomers experience lack of opportunity in their work or is it not?**’

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nepotism is an issue which has been **prevailing** in this **industry** since the 1970s and 1980s due to the historic **Kapoor** family whom have been reigning in **Bollywood** since 4 generations

Karan Johar, an Indian film director, producer, screenwriter, costume designer, actor and television personality has also been targeted to be the **flag-bearer** of nepotism in India. According to few sources, he has been giving roles to so called ‘star kids’ and **neglecting** real talent. One of the biggest examples of this is him giving the lead roles of his 2018 film *Dhadak* to the **daughter** of the renowned producer Bony Kapoor and the **brother** of renowned actor Shahid Kapoor, **neglecting** other talents.

Kangana Ranaut, who is known to **speak her mind** fearlessly, sparked off a major debate on **nepotism/** **favouritism** in the industry. During her appearance on Karan Johar’s popular chat show *Koffee With Karan*, called the filmmaker “a flag-bearer of nepotism and movie mafia”. Karan promptly retaliated by saying that he has promoted many talents who are outsiders and that Kangana always plays the “**victim card**”. This led to a war of words and the two stars have been at **loggerheads** ever since.

Sushant Singh Rajput was an Indian actor and was **loved** by his audience. He committed suicide on 14 June 2020 as he was **submerged** deeply into **depression**. It is speculated that 3-4 projects had been snatched from his hands and handed over to other ‘**well known**’ actors. According to *THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS* Sushant was clinically depressed and didn’t take medication because the **Bollywood Mafia** had taken out a contract on his career. He wasn’t getting new offers after a **fall-out** with a **powerful family**, which had signed him on and **refused** to release him from a biased contract. Sushant was **replaced** in big banner films, including Sanjay Leela

Bhansali's *Goliyon ki Rasleela Ram-Leela* and Aditya Chopra's *Befikre*, by Ranveer Singh, who belongs to a film family.

Director-producer Shekhar Kapur tweeted, "I knew the pain you were going through. I knew the story of the people that let you down so bad that you would weep on my shoulder. I wish I was around the last six months. I wish you had reached out to me. What happened to you was their karma. Not yours. #SushantSinghRajput."

The aftermath of Sushant's death has **cartwheeled** into a storm of **accusations** and **defence**:

Rakul Preet, who played the lead in films like *De De Pyar De* and *Marjavaan*, says, "Yes, nepotism exists but it makes no sense complaining. Either you crib, or work hard and prove yourself out there."

A **Bollywood Nepotism Index** puts Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment Ltd, Ajay Devgn and Shah Rukh Khan's production houses on top of the list of producers who play **favourites**. Among directors Bhansali and Kabir Khan head the deadly list. Superstars like Salman Khan **promoted** previously unknown actresses like Katrina Kaif, Sonakshi Sinha and Jacqueline Fernandez. The Johars-Chopras put in filmi orbit Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt, another star kid.

Ekta Kapoor is another **production powerhouse** who is behind Smriti Irani's successful television career. The **hit machine** of the Anil-Boney Kapoor brotherhood was Boney's wife Sridevi. Anil pushed daughter Sonam K Ahuja in spite of a series of flops. Aditya Chopra, who is blamed for blackballing Sushant, promotes Ranveer. Then there are barnacles on the hull like Sonam's goombah, the anti-BJP activist-actress Swara Bhaskar who rushed to the defence of Alia and Karan Johar.

An irate post on Twitter summed up the reason behind Sushant's death—"Swara it maybe a silly chat show for you and you may have that sense of humour or thick skin to not get affected. But some don't."

However, Johar was **penitent** hearing of Rajput's death. He posted on Instagram, "I blame myself for not being in touch with you for the past year... I have felt at times like you may have needed people to share your life with...but somehow I never followed up on that feeling..." To this out-in-the-cold hero Hrithik Roshan sycophantically tweeted, "Lovely Karan." Hrithik trailed with a spate of flops after his debut hit *Kaho Naa Pyar Hai* until father Roshan made *Koi Mil Gaya*, which relaunched his career; which is again stuck currently after papa fell out with the Chopras.

Director Mohit Suri, a part of Mahesh Bhatt's retinue, **denied nepotism** and **camp** exist in **Hindi cinema**. He said, "It's the new word coined in Bollywood. Every few months we have some words that circulate for months and go on and on. There are enough kids of filmmakers and actors who are not successful. You can get a chance but you can't be successful because of nepotism. Everyone is critically judged. You have to be good at your job."

Shraddha Kapoor, despite belonging to the film family, was jobless after debuting in *Teen Patti* in 2013 and had to wait for three long years before Mahesh Bhatt cast her in *Aashiqui 2* in 2013. Varun Dhawan, now a successful actor, recently recounted about his father and director David Dhawan's struggle as an outsider in Bollywood: "Coming from a small town, he knew nobody in the industry and worked very hard to give us a good life."

According to an interview based article written by Navin Pivhal, the actors Sushant Singh Rajput and Kriti Sanon openly spoke about the existence of nepotism in the Indian Film Industry, especially in the Bollywood industry. Furthermore, they said that it is not just a few films but it is throughout one's career that nepotism plays an effective role and also the producers look for familiar faces while filmmaking instead of new faces.

Some **outsiders** do make it big in the Mumbai film world. **SRK** and **Akshay Kumar** are the only two powerful outsiders in the Hindi movie business.

Currently, it's Ayushmann Khurrana. In an old video, Sushant says that in B-town "people will pretend to be liking me but then they somehow don't take my calls."

Karan Johar may be torn up by Sushant's suicide but there is more to it. Ayushmann Khurrana provides an insight into how Bollywood works. He thought he would make his debut with Johar's Dharma Productions after Karan gave him the office number. When Ayushmann called, Dharma retorted that they 'only work with stars.'

Sushant Singh Rajput was scuttled on his way to stardom. The clique didn't forgive him for wanting to strike out on his own.

Bishal Paul in his blog talks about how star kids are given the privilege of several opportunities even after several failures. It talks about how contacts are very important in this industry to survive even if one doesn't have learned the craft of acting. Their **social positioning** comes as a great **asset**. It talks about how just talent is **not enough** to survive in this industry but **contacts** play a major role as well.

According to *ThePrint.in* The present-day Bollywood or the Hindi film industry is still **largely controlled** by a handful of families that emerged out of three essential sets of people — those who came into the industry from Punjab in the 1940s and 1950s; the actors, directors, and writers who broke in during the 1970s and 1980s; and their progeny thereafter. Understandably then, **Bollywood**, for the longest time, has remained a mom-and-pop shop, **relying heavily** on personal friendships. So the roots of these archaic practices of *bhai-chara* and nepotism and affiliated biases run deep.

When Bollywood acquired '**industry**' status in May 1998 and the corporate studios got into the act, there was a belief that things would change. Unfortunately, the scenario remains largely **unaltered**. There continues to be a **discrimination** between the two types of film aspirants — young actors and directors from the Bandra-Juhu-filmi-kid circuit and those who come to Mumbai from other cities. The difference is that the former will be given **numerous chances**, while the outsiders have to **succeed with their early projects**, otherwise even the few doors open to them start slamming hard on their faces.

Furthermore, they add, most of those bred within the industry are well groomed in the **code of excessive deference**, of acquiescence, and double-talk, which serves them well until they reach the critical mass of stardom. They are also tutored well on establishing and cementing their position as stars, even before they actually become one. Outsiders are allowed into the **hallowed circles** only if they achieve the success that directly benefits the trade. Those outsiders who achieve some amount of celebrity status and success are given a little pat on the back

but not the real perks such as the fraternity support for their professional endeavours. Indeed, the **best opportunities** are still **reserved** for the **insiders** until they prove to be total duds. Even then, they are still able to leverage the starry aura created around them. While on the other side, outside entrants, when unable to break through the **impenetrable walls of the elite club**, have fewer plum projects coming their way, and ultimately feel left out and vulnerable.

Quotes by famous authors and personalities:

“Everybody gets everything handed to them. The rich inherit it. I don't mean just inheritance of money. I mean what people take for granted among the middle and upper classes, which is nepotism, the old-boy network.”
~ TONY MORRISON

“I stand by it. I take the criticism for it. I think it's unfair, but yes, there is a thing about nepotism, and we all try to respect it.”
~ ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF

“Nepotism exists - not just in Bollywood but in every profession in India.”
~SHEHNAZ TREASURY

“I am a product of nepotism. I don't think I would have had the profession that I'm in currently... if it wasn't for my dad.”
~ JEFF BRIDGES

“Nepotism is a natural thing that happens in every field. A doctor's son can become a doctor, and no one screams nepotism. I don't understand why, in this industry, people keep saying 'Nepotism, nepotism.’”
~ SONI RAZDAN

In an interview, Bollywood actress Huma Qureshi said, “Not that star kids are not talented, but the opportunities they get are far easier, projects far bigger and the budget for their films is huge”.

Shahid Kapoor’s wife, Mira Rajput, also said in Karan Johar’s chat show that she totally dislikes nepotism.

Tapsee Pannu also tweeted, “Nepotism. Finally LEARNT the MEANING of this word. Now will learn to deal with it”. These statements of popular actor and actresses of Bollywood clearly **reveal** that they have once or more than once been the **victim of nepotism** and totally stand against it.

While actors and actresses who are outside of the industry were totally against the topic of nepotism, star kids will always find ways to **defend** it. Alia Bhatt reportedly said in an interview, “A star kid can get that first film due to nepotism. But to constantly get films just because you belong to a filmi-family is not possible”.

Superstar Anil Kapoor’s daughter, actor Sonam Kapoor too tried to defend herself by saying in an interview, “The top heroines today- Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra- are both women who aren’t from the industry and are you telling me that Alia Bhatt is where she is because of her family and not because of her talent?”

It is indeed a **bitter truth** of **Bollywood** that the seeds of nepotism have now really grown into big trees. Actors with pure talent are **sidelined** as first priorities are given to **favourites** and **relatives** and the worst part is, if an outsider tries to raise his/ her voice, then either they are suppressed or the actor/ actress are been treated with all negative and ill comments.

3. AIM

The objective of this research is to find if nepotism is the reason for the lack of opportunity for newcomers in the Bollywood Film Industry.

4. METHODOLOGY

A random sample of 134 people were selected from the city of Mumbai. The participants had to complete an online survey, which was made using google forms. The questionnaire consisted of 2 different parts. The first part consisted of a sample informed consent form. The second part consisted of 23 questions (11 open ended, 11 objective type and 1 asking the participants name). The 11 open ended questions required the respondents to answer questions which were quantitative in nature. The 11 objective type questions required the respondents to answer questions which were qualitative in nature. Hence, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research was conducted to examine the effect of nepotism of newcomers. A major portion of the objective type questions consisted of “yes/no” segments.

Names were recorded for this survey. A consent form was also presented to the participants before the survey. No data will be altered during or specifically selected during this study to ensure the results to be unbiased. Additionally, care is taken during the analysis stage, in the presentation to not reveal any personal details other than the name of the respondents.

5. HYPOTHESIS

Nepotism leads to lack of opportunity for newcomers in the Bollywood Film Industry.

6. NULL HYPOTHESIS

Nepotism does not affect the lack of opportunity for newcomers in the Bollywood Film Industry.

7. ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS

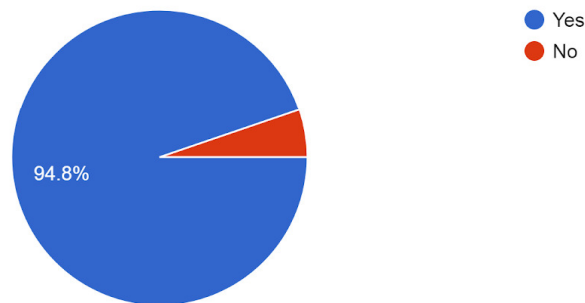
Nepotism does lead to lack of opportunity for newcomers in the Bollywood Film Industry.

8. DATA ANALYSIS

In the following section, all the data and results from the survey will be analyzed. Both the survey and the statistical representation were done using Google Forms.

Question 2 asked the respondents if they knew about the existence of nepotism in the film industry.

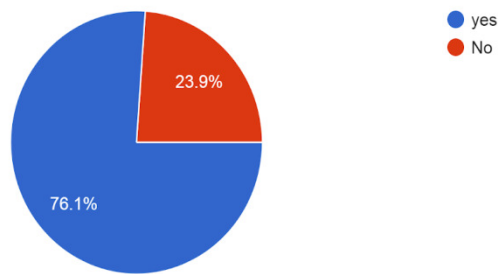
Are you aware of the existence of nepotism in the film industry?
134 responses



Out of the 134 participants that responded, 94.8% (127 people) were very much aware of the existence of nepotism in the industry, whereas 5.2% (7 people) were not aware of the existence.

Question 3 asked the participants if nepotism could be controlled or reduced.

Can nepotism be controlled or reduced?
134 responses

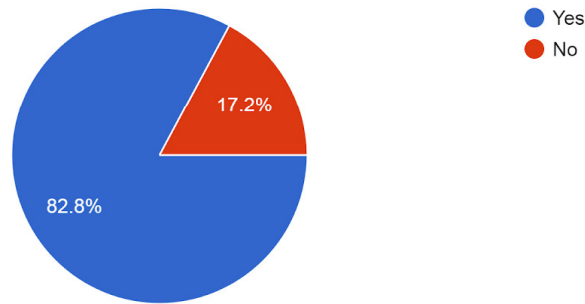


Out of the 134 participants that responded, 76.1% (102 people) strongly supported the claim that nepotism can be controlled or reduced, whereas 23.9% (32 people) did not really believe that nepotism could be controlled.

Question 4 asked the participants whether they would be in support of a policy that limited the practice of nepotism in the film industry.

Would you be in support of a policy that limited this practice in the film industry?

134 responses

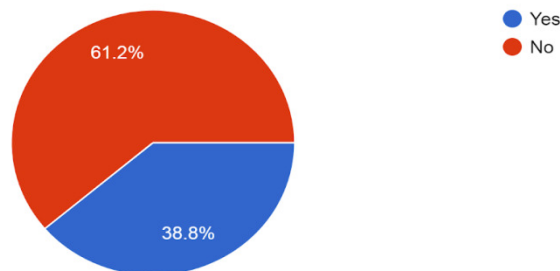


Out of the 134 participants that responded, 82.8% (111 people) responded in the support of a policy that limited this practice in the film industry, whereas 17.2% (23 people) were surprisingly not in the support of such a policy.

Question 6 asked the participants if they had ever faced nepotism in their day to day activities/workplace.

Have you ever faced nepotism in your day to day activities/ workplace?

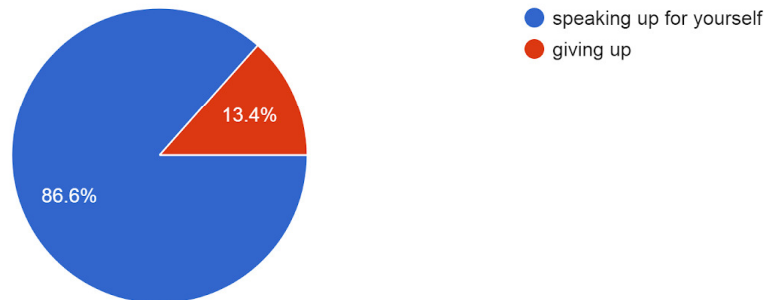
134 responses



This question asked the participants to reflect back on their day to day life and answer if they had experienced nepotism in their day to day lives. Out of the 134 respondents, 38.8% (52 people) had experienced such a practice in their day to day life, whereas 61.2% (82 people) had luckily not encountered this practice in their day to day life.

Question 7 asked the participants about their opinion that if they were a victim of nepotism what would they have done.

If you are a victim of nepotism, would you consider
134 responses

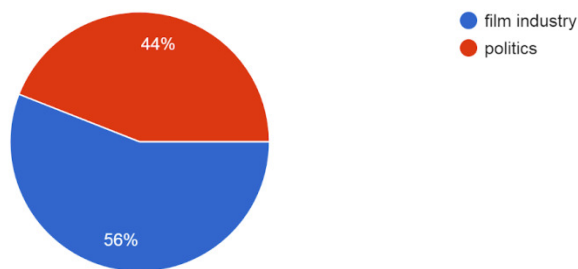


This question provided the participants 2 options to choose from i.e. “speaking up for yourself” or “giving up”.

Out of the 134 respondents, 86.6% (116 people) preferred speaking up for themselves over giving up, whereas 13.4% (18 people) surprisingly did not think that speaking for themselves was a good option but rather preferred giving up.

Question 9 asked the participants that in which field was the practice of nepotism more common in.

Nepotism is more common in
134 responses



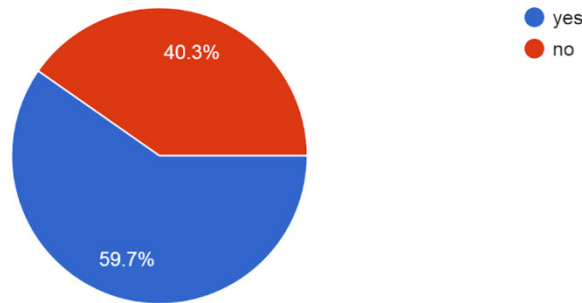
This question provided the participants 2 options to choose from i.e. “film industry” or “politics”.

Out of the 134 participants, 56% (75 people) believed that nepotism was a more common occurrence in the film industry, whereas 44% (59 people) believed that it was politics that had a higher ratio in the practice of nepotism.

Question 10 asked the participants if they or anyone that they knew had been in a position where a friend or relative of a superior had been given preference over them.

Have you or anyone you know been in a position where a friend or a relative of someone has been given preference?

134 responses

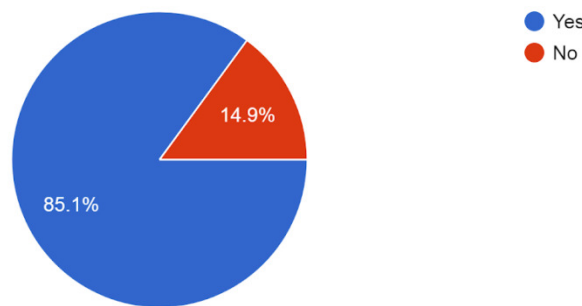


Out of the 134 participants, 59.7% (80 people) have experienced such a scenario where they or someone they knew were in a position where a friend or relative of a superior had been given preference, whereas 40.3% (54 people) had not experienced such a scenario occurring.

Question 11 asked the participants their opinion in the matter that if there is someone else better qualified to perform a particular sensitive task, then should that person be chosen over the respondent.

If there are others better qualified/ willing to perform a particular difficult/ sensitive task, should they be automatically chosen over you?

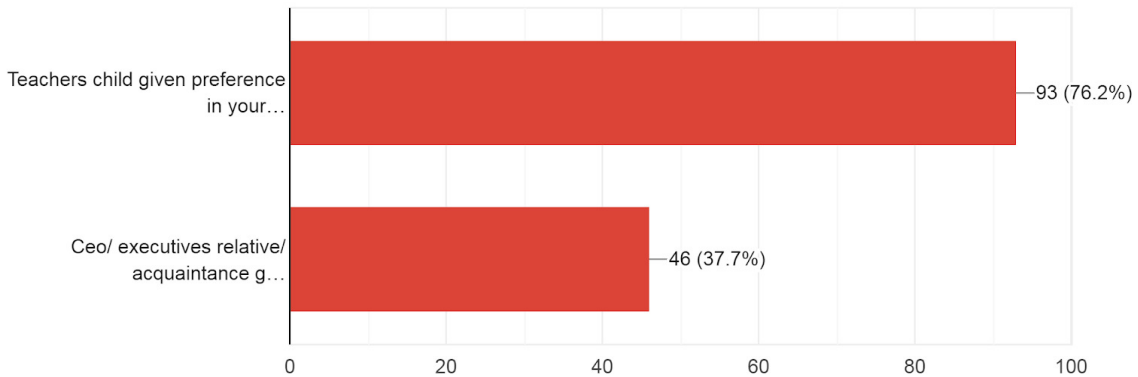
134 responses



Out of 134 participants, 85.1% (114 people) agreed to such a scenario, whereas 14.9% (20 people) did not agree to such a scenario and would prefer themselves to be chosen.

Question 16 asked the participants if they had experienced the following anytime in their lives.

Experienced?
122 responses



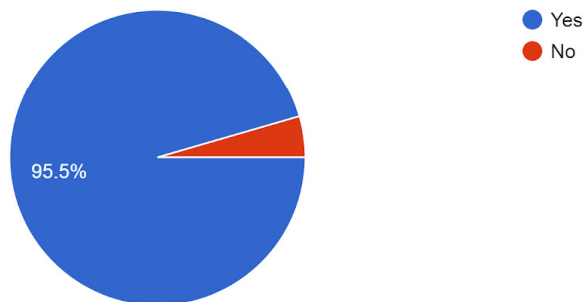
This question was a checkbox question. Respondents could select more than one choice. The respondents were asked to check the boxes if they had experienced any of the following in their life:

- Teachers child given preference in your schools’ student council
- CEO/executives’ relative/acquaintance given preference over you for a job/promotion

This was not a compulsory question for the respondents to answer. Out of 122 responses, the student council checkbox was picked 93 times and the job/promotion checkbox was picked 46 times.

Question 18 asked the participants if they believed that certain film personalities had been supporting nepotism intentionally or unintentionally.

Do you think certain film personalities have been supporting nepotism intentionally or unintentionally?
134 responses

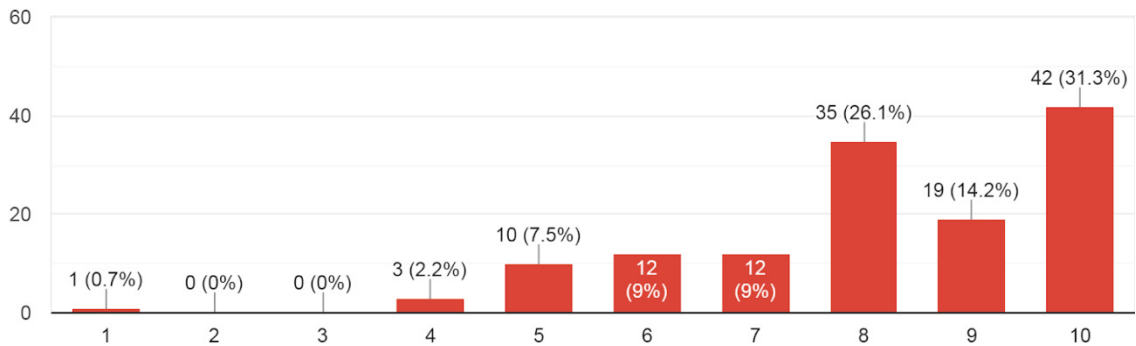


Out of the 134 respondents, 95.5% (128 people) believed that in the bollywood film industry there are a number of people who have been supporting nepotism intentionally or unintentionally, whereas 4.5% (6 people) did not support this claim.

Question 19 asked the participants about the necessity to curb the spread of nepotism.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how necessary is it to curb nepotism

134 responses



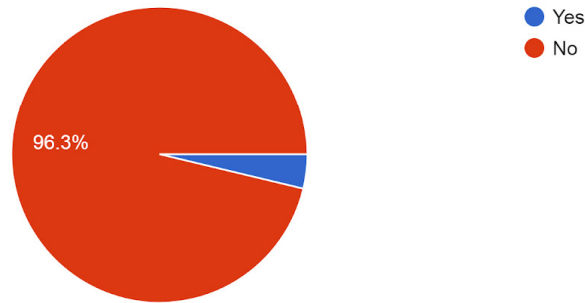
This question was asked in a scale format where the participants, on a scale of 1 to 10 had to pick the number which they felt showed the intensity for the necessity to curb the spread of nepotism.

- 1---- 0.7%
- 2---- 0%
- 3---- 0%
- 4---- 2.2%
- 5---- 7.5%
- 6---- 9%
- 7---- 9%
- 8---- 26.1%
- 9---- 14.2%
- 10---- 31.3%

Question 22 asked the participants if they would ever harm themselves if they were a victim of nepotism.

Would you ever harm yourself if you are a victim of nepotism?

134 responses



Out of the 134 responses, 96.3% (129 people) would be strong enough to face nepotism with a bold face and not inflict any harm upon themselves, whereas 3.7% (5 people) would not be able to take this pressure and would inflict harm upon themselves. We need to be strong in such a situation and not come out to be weak or else this could lead to our further exploitation.

9. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample was represented very well. It had participants of all ages, income groups, and was gender equal. **Nepotism** is when people get into the **film industry** by the **power or influence** of a person who is already very well-known in the industry. Thus, **newcomers** do not get many chances as they are **unfamiliar** with the way the industry works and this results in them not getting enough attention by the filmmakers and them missing out of valuable opportunities.

“Nepotism exists - not just in Bollywood but in every profession in India.”

~SHEHNAZ TREASURY

This quote by Shehnaz Treasury was **proved** in the survey. The responses which were received were **supporting** this quote. Most of the respondents **strongly believed** that nepotism not only exists in bollywood but it also exists in every profession in India.

In an interview, Bollywood actress Huma Qureshi said, “Not that star kids are not talented, but the opportunities they get are far easier, projects far bigger and the budget for their films is huge”.

This claim by actress Huma Qureshi was also **strongly supported** by the respondents. The respondents agreed with the fact that there are star kids who are talented, but it’s just that they are given **far bigger opportunities** to showcase their talent than the **newcomers** or the actors with not many contacts in the industry.

According to the responses received in the survey, it can be proved that **nepotism** is the current hot topic and that everyone has separate views on this topic. But even after varying views, it can be observed that nepotism and favouritism **very much exist** in the Bollywood film Industry and is here to stay.

In question 6, participants were asked if they had experienced nepotism in their day to day life, the 38% of participants of voted for 'yes' were the working class. This co-relates with the comment made by Alia Bhatt's mother Soni Razdan, "Nepotism is a natural thing that happens in every field. A doctor's son can become a doctor, and no one screams nepotism. I don't understand why, in this industry, people keep saying 'Nepotism, nepotism.'" It is claimed that nepotism exists in various fields, but nepotism in Bollywood has reached its heights and is only increasing. Question 10 is a repetition of question 6 which co-relates to similar claims.

In question 18, which asked the participants whether some film personalities had been supporting nepotism intentionally or unintentionally, a majority of the participants responded with a 'yes'. This co-relates with the quote by Jeff Bridges, "I am a product of nepotism. I don't think I would have had the profession that I'm in currently... if it wasn't for my dad." In Bollywood it is mainly the parents of the actors who interfere and use their influence to give their child work.

The **film industry** is a huge **flag bearer** of nepotism. There are enough number of people who have risen to fame with the right backing at the right time making it **difficult** for aspiring talented stars to rise as they do not have the right backing which leads to a feeling of depression due to **lack of opportunities**. This industry is largely controlled by family owned production houses. **Creating corporate style production houses** with independent board members should resolve the matter to some extent.

This is a fact that it is difficult to **control** nepotism in the industry because it is very **natural** for a parent to support his/her child. The **newcomers** need to be ready to face nepotism when they choose to be a part of this **glamorous industry**. They must come with a mindset and treat it as a challenge or obstacle in their pathway to success. An example of this is *Akshay Kumar* who has been dealing with nepotism with grace and he has gone on to become a mega star in **Bollywood**.

In Question 7 participants were asked that if they were a victim of nepotism, which choice would they have preferred:

1. Speaking up for themselves
2. Giving up

Speaking up for themselves was a majority answer for most. Newcomers who are a victim of nepotism should **voice their opinion** and make people aware of the situation. He/she should try their level best to make **corrections** and see to it that nepotism is controlled so that people who are **truly qualified** or **suitable** for the given task get equal opportunities. But, there are two sides to each coin. We do not know what are the struggles that the newcomer has faced and how far has this person battled already. The **ability to voice** your opinion **differs** according to each one's capability to handle the criticism and the long lasting battle.

Nepotism exists and won't go away soon. As an individual, we just need to be ready to face it and strengthen ourselves to ensure that we get selected on merit and do not have to worry about getting impacted. We need to continue to work hard to not get **neglected**. Our work should convince that if we miss out, the people who rejected us are at a bigger loss. This **practice** exists in each and every industry across board. It is **impossible** to root it out completely. A person who has built a successful empire from the ground up would naturally expect his/her child to expand the empire, even if there are other equally qualified people available to take the business forward. It is **critical** for people to **recognise** that they must create a level playing field in order to **ensure** that the best person gets the job.

10. CONCLUSION

As per the survey conducted on 134 participants, a majority of them have completely agreed to the fact that "Nepotism leads to lack of opportunity for newcomers in the Bollywood Film Industry". Many had harsh reviews towards nepotism and disregarded it. Thus, according to the data collected and participant reviews, the alternative hypothesis can be accepted and the null hypothesis can be rejected.

11. LIMITATIONS

Participant variability was low as all the participants were from South Bombay. This will reduce the generalization of results to a larger group of people. None of the participants had/ have any ties with the Bollywood Film Industry.

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