

A study of anxiety level of youth in relation to female foeticide and girl child

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Prejudices related to the birth of girl child have long existed in the Indian society. Since ages voices have been raised against the issue, trying to curb the ill practices of killing the girl child soon after birth or in the womb of the mother itself yet nothing good has come out of it. Killing of the girl child has found its easy course in the womb- female foeticide. Despite the fact that we have entered the 21st century yet censuses still show the declining ratio of the girl child. Women have progressed in every sector, be it managing home or society, yet the birth of a girl is never celebrated. The women still have to fight for respect at each step, has to struggle for its survival. The present study aims to study the anxiety levels of married youth in order to understand the thinking behind the committing of the heinous crime of female foeticide. The study makes some questions ring into our mind again and again seeking for a solution. Why does the sound of the first baby has to be that of a boy, why not a girl. Why is a family considered complete only with the birth of a boy? Why is a boy considered a symbol of status and a girl just another financial burden? A deeper thought has to be given to find out the reason why despite so many government policies and facilities we still have not been able to change our thinking and consider women as 'Human'.

Keywords: anxiety level, female foeticide, girl child

Prejudices related to the birth of a girl child have long existed in the Indian society. Since ages, voices have been raised against the issue, trying to curb the ill practices of killing the girl child soon after birth or in the womb of the mother itself - yet nothing good has come out of it. Killing of the girl child has found its easy course in the womb - female foeticide. Despite the fact that we have entered the 21st century, yet censuses still show the declining ratio of the girl child. Women have progressed in every sector - be it managing home or society, yet the birth of a girl is never celebrated. The women, still, have to fight for respect at each step and struggle for its survival.

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There is empirical evidence from India that son preference has two pronounced and predictable family-level effects on the sex composition of children ever born. First, data from India show that smaller families have a significantly higher proportion of sons than larger families. Second, socially and economically disadvantaged couples and couples from the northern region of India not only want but also attain a higher proportion of sons, if the effects of family size are controlled (Clark, 2000).

The Hindu blessing 'May you be the mother of a 100 sons' rings true in every bride's ears. Never do we wait to think that if there would be only sons and no daughters, who would be left to marry a boy? Whom would one call a mother or sister? Have we ever wondered what a woman undergoes to allow herself to commit the crime of female foeticide? How many times her heart must have been torn apart because of conditions she would have had to face. Probably, the ultimate solution she would find is to abort a female foetus in her anxiety over the concern of the future of an unborn 'girl child'.

Anxiety over the future, anxiety over the most celebrated and awaited happiness in the world for a woman truly, we have stooped to our doom. Is this what we term as 'progress'? Anxiety has been considered as the most common yet the most hazardous problem existing for achieving a balanced state of mind in an individual. It has a detrimental effect on the health and emotional make-up of an individual. Not only does it affect the individual but through the individual to his social surroundings including his family and environment.

Every individual aims for happiness around him and the basic source for it is one's family. How many of us can actually keep our hand on our heart and without any hesitation say: my family is complete without a female in it. Does the very thought of imagining one's completion of identity, in the absence of a female, make us twitch in discomfort?

Diamond-Smith (2008) found that the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu has experienced a dramatic decline in fertility, accompanied by a trend of increased son preference. This paper reported the findings from qualitative interviews with women in rural villages about their fertility decision-making. Findings suggest that daughter aversion, fuelled primarily by the perceived economic burden of daughters due to the proliferation of dowry, is playing a larger role in fertility decision-making than son preference. The desire for a son is often trumped by the worry over having many daughters. Women use various means of controlling the sex of their children, which in this study appear to be primarily female infanticide.

The study conducted by Panday (1995) discussed the problems of the girl child at the family level in India. Analysis is based on a field study in Maharashtra state and other studies included in a government report on the "Girl Child and the Family." The family context strongly impacts child growth and development. Evidence indicates that a girl child faces discrimination and inequality. Every sixth female death is attributed to gender discrimination. Household tasks prevent girls' school enrollment. Children learn role expectations at home. Daughters are taught their duties and obligations as if they were a piece of property. 25% of the parents in the sample considered a girl's birth with indifference and unhappiness.

In 11% of cases, girls were not immunized at all. Breast feeding was short. 31.8% of mothers and 25% of in-laws expected the girl's birth to be a boy. 98.2% of mothers did not rely on sex determination of the fetus. Almost 60% of households did not restrict smiling or crying among boys or girls. 70% restricted laughing loudly. 42.4% restricted only girls' laughing out loud. 17% restricted girls' smiling or crying. 46.5% restricted girls' movement to the house. 42% did not allow daughters to speak to the opposite sex. 17% restricted access to the market for daughters. Girls were encouraged to cook, stitch, and dance. 60% of girls preferred to spend time with girl friends. Boys had better access to movies. 57% of girls spent time on housework. 47% became gender aware from mass media. Most felt frightened at menstruation. 88% of girls thought that all should equally attain the same level of education. Girls received an equal share of food and health care. 87% of girls did not work for wages. Those who worked did not control their income.

The rapid efforts being made by various agencies to make an unborn creation see the light of the day, all come to stop as soon as a test detects a girl child. It is thought wiser to do away with this future calamity, before the word spreads. In such a situation, often a bewildered to be mother looks at the people around her in hope - truly, false hope - believing that somebody would be able to read the unsaid words behind her pursed lips. Before the test she would be looking forward to her baby, but the detection of a girl child would immediately force her to dread the thought of an empty womb. She would be perplexed to belong to a land which worships a female deity, yet, quite paradoxically, is ashamed of owning a female at home. It is biologically proven that a female foetus is more capable of sustaining itself. It is made stronger and more viable than the foetus of the opposite sex, but where does she find a world which would allow her first breath.

The scenario is similar in other parts of the world too. A study conducted by Ali (1989), showed that the demand for additional children is influenced by the presence of sons within a family. This study was based on cross-sectional data of 9416 currently married women under age 50 from a Pakistan national survey in 1979-80. The analysis suggests that having at least one son in the family influences the demand for additional children. Urban and rural comparisons indicated a higher preference for sons in urban areas.

Man, the highest order animal, flaunts his knowledge and intellectual privilege over the other species, but, proves his acute deprivation when he learns to discriminate between the two genders. Animals prove more endearing than humans as regards their off springs and, more importantly, their endearment is not dependant on the gender of their off springs.

Conceptual framework

The present study was conducted with the aim of finding out the anxiety level of the youth (the married couples) in relation to their thinking of female foeticide and the status of a girl child. The youth have long been considered the biggest hope for bringing change into the society and taking it towards the path of justice and progress. The thinking of the youth, if given a direction at the right time, can become the biggest and the most undefeatable change - bringing force. Today's youth is much more awakened, realizing its responsibilities and finding out possibilities of reaching the desired end. The study attempts to peep inside the emotional and social aspects of the lives of those youth who are trusted contributors in the achievement of the aim of balancing the sex ratio or, at least,

awakening those who are hampering it.

According to the 2011 census, the number of females/1000 males is 940. In Uttarakhand it is 963 projecting the acutely damaged sex ratio. The present study attempts to find out the extent to which the aforesaid data has a consequence on the thinking of a modern man. A sample was taken from the Dehradun district of Uttarakhand, surveying 200 youth couples (comprising both males and females). Two groups were allotted for study just married youth (not completed one year of marriage), referred as JM group, and youth with a second girl child, referred as 2GC group. The 2GC group was looking forward to the arrival of a third child or willing to have a third child.

Hypothesis of the study

There will be no significant difference in the anxiety level of JM group and 2GC.

Method

Participants

The Participants comprised of 200 youth from urban and rural regions of Dehradun. 100males and 100 females (couples) were taken from different socio-economic backgrounds and religions. Educated and uneducated youth, both were included in the study.

Instruments

A self-made questionnaire on female foeticide was used for the purpose, with selectively chosen questions to determine the attitude towards female foeticide and the status of the girl child.

Perception and Action Scale (PAS) of Attitude Self: Made Questionnaire by Balodi and Singh SPS (Son Preference Scale). There were 12 questions in this questionnaire and every question has four/ five alternatives procedures for data collection.

The rating method used is according to the 'Likert Scale'. This scale was developed with full care and its efficacy was fully examined through pilot studies, as scale was mainly intended to measure traditional/ modern attitude of the young couple towards female foeticide/ female infanticide, care was taken to reveal this dimension of the following areas of their personal and social life.

A questionnaire on anxiety was selected and employed for the purpose. (ASQ Kapoor based on Cattell's Self Analysis Form). The test comprises of 40 items relating to different factors. Scoring key is directly kept over the answer booklet following the simple instructions printed on the booklet. The score simply adds the 2's or 1's for each answer, according to the numbers printed above the hole through which the answer appears, the higher score always means more anxiety.

The test measures areas like: Tense/ relaxed, apprehensive/ self-assured, emotionally stable/emotionally unstable, suspicious/ trusting etc.

Data collection was done through door-to-door survey and unstructured interview technique. The sample was also collected through visits to government and non-government hospitals.

Statistical analysis

Data collected was analyzed with the help of 't' significance.

Problems encountered

In the rural areas as well as in urban people are reluctant to share the

details of their personal living especially due to the fear of in-laws. This problem becomes even worse if the in-laws are present while the interview takes place. Due to the existing laws of the government, the people have become more conscious and therefore hesitate in answering or filling any kind of survey forms. The in laws tend to believe that if the pregnancy of their daughter in law is revealed, it might cause an evil eye to fall on continuance of the family lineage.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Showing anxiety score for the two groups

Group	JM	2GM
Mean Score	36.1	40.4

Statistical analysis reveal 't' value 20.2 significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels. The results and the information gathered through the interview technique reveal that the JM group showed less anxiety and a more negative attitude towards female foeticide as compared to the 2GC group. It is surprising to find how a young and happy couple who have begun their life with high morals and ideas, change their thinking and begin to show such great a change towards a female child after a due course of time, and, ultimately, reach poor health and social states due to their own anxiety, which is a consequence of their injured thinking.

The results showed that the couples in the early stages of marriage did not consider the sex of the child an issue, at all. They did not show any anxiety over the sex of their yet born kids. As revealed by the data, it is only the in-laws who worry about these facts, while the couple shows a better state of understanding towards each other and thus a better and well-managed anxiety - free life. In comparison to this, we find that the couple who already had 2 girl children, and were either looking forward to the arrival of another child, or planning for another child, had a high level of anxiety.

Various socio-economic factors were also found responsible for such findings. The youth consider factors like dowry, responsibility for the performance of one's last rites, and the fear of sexual abuse of a girl child as some of the factors responsible for the increasing negative attitude. Some other factors held responsible are the high esteem and symbol of status associated with the presence of a male heir in the family i.e. the male lineage. A small family, comprising of two children, is preferred, yet it is considered a blessing if both the children are male. The sample revealed presence of such attitude at all the economic levels of living - both the urban and rural level collectively revealed the results where 2GC group seemed unhappy with the birth of two daughters.

The results reveal the idealistic thinking being present at both the stages but the practical aspect weakening when faced with the truth. The personal and social factors began to taken a hold of the individual as soon as the individual starts facing the issue himself.

The experience of anxiety shatters down the normal living pattern of the individual. The various factors covered in the study show how the level of anxiety differs in both the groups. Studies show that the 2GC group is more tensed and can be taken as generally frustrated, showing more of a concern as to what people say about them rather than seeking happiness in what they desire. Hence, the birth of the child becomes more of a social - fulfillment issue rather than a personal happiness and satisfaction - issue between the couple.

Suspiciousness would be high in the 2GC group. When trust is lost between the partners and it becomes an issue of different viewpoints between the husband and the wife, both are the sufferers. In trying to

exercise self control and moving along the set pattern of the society, they tend to neglect their own wants.

The interviews, conducted, played an important role in bringing to picture the helplessness experienced by these individuals who expressed their desire and the constant pressure being exerted on them, making them believe that unless they succumb to the social pressure, there would be no real happiness.

The JM group felt at ease, since they had not yet fallen a victim to the pressing social factors which irreducibly trouble the 2GC group. The interviews helped us come face to face with the fact that the level of heightened anxiety is stressful for both the partners, who start experiencing various symptoms of stress and anxiety and its ill effects on health too.

As per Harvard Medical School, Social Scientist Dr. Rosen Lind Wright and others, who experience excess of stress during pregnancy, may have high levels of Immunoglobulin E that is a substance of Ig- E related to immune system. High stress levels amongst female animals leads to increase in allergy related diseases. (20th may'08, Amar Ujala)

The face to face interviews revealed females of JM group complaining of less physical problems than compared to 2GC group which revealed various symptoms and physical ailments as a result of their being in a constant state of tension, being stressed up with the thoughts of the uncertain future. Physical ailments such as headaches and high blood pressure being the most common.

Studies also revealed the complications arising in their earlier pregnancy, their heightened anxiety states due to which they had to face many other problems like trouble in lactation, heavy bleeding, etc.

Results of the first population census of the millennium revealed a number of significant changes in the sex ratio patterns in India. Firstly, the sex ratio decline among children in the 0-6 age group turned out to be sharper in the urban areas (32 points) than in the rural. Second, the traditional north-south divide stands significantly modified and the 'northernization' of sex ratios is rapidly taking the urban route. The sharp decline in the urban female/male (f/m) ratios among children cannot be explained away by any of the three popular escape hatches of previous years, i.e., migration, undercount or biologically ordained high sex ratios at birth. This decline clearly points to one factor, sex selective abortion or female foeticide that has gained currency during the 1980s and more sharply in the 1990s (Agnihotri, 2003).

Son preference is one of the oldest issues in most of the societies with special reference to sons being getting preferential treatment over daughters in South Asia and developing countries. Women usually didn't get proper regard in their husbands' families until and unless they had a son in most of the societies. Numerous factors affecting son preference were socio-economic setup of the society, cultural beliefs, literacy, lesser opportunities for women jobs, cultural restrictions on women, family size, males' dominance and their validity as earning heads of the households and intact/shared relations with the family as compared to daughters who would otherwise leave their families soon after getting married. Daughter's birth in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan was considered as an economic liability because of the dowry system and the higher incurring cost on their weddings. Son preference was found to be stronger in areas where daughters were more expensive to marry owing to the dowry system. Cultural preference for sons was evident from that fact that in Hindu's traditions, only sons could pray for and release the souls of their dead parents and only males could perform

birth, death and marriage rituals. Although, son preference was stronger, some 98% of the women in Bangladesh wanted to have at least one daughter realizing the importance of women in a house for household activities and perpetuation of generation. A common perception of son's preference on daughter was the ascribed ability of sons; to contribute more to family income, provide adequate support to parents in old age; carry on family name and impose minimal financial burdens on their parents. Women's employment problems and male inheritance also favored son preference in Taiwan. Excessive infant mortality in females was due to discrimination against females in the allocation of food and health care within the household. Aside from male's attitude towards son preference, women their-self in most of the south Asian countries preferred sons to daughters. In addition, women were having few opportunities to generate income and invest household resources in female children as compared to males, thereby further widening the chances for son preference. Preferential son treatment may lead to larger family size and higher fertility if there is increased incidence of female births. Emphasis on women education and employment, giving them due status in the society and creating awareness among the people to treat son and daughter alike would be better options to eliminate frustration, reduce fertility rate and limit family size. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2008 APA, all rights reserved)

Conclusion

The above mentioned facts press upon man a need to face the truth of his own corrupted thinking that the germ, the fault lies in himself, not outside. Only when man liberates himself of the evil inside him, can he see the creation as the Creator had willed it to be seen.

Some Suggestion

- Public needs be awakened towards the issue and towards its ill effects.
- Issue should be discussed in formal and informal public meetings.
- Support of media should be taken to spread awareness.
- Special government plans should be made to balance the sex-ratio through awakening the society at large.
- Curriculum of schools and colleges should include special section on sex ratio, birth registration and female foeticide.

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