

Existing Intergenerational Continuity and Discontinuity in Knowledge of Rural Women towards Female Foeticide

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ABSTRACT The present study was undertaken to assess the intergenerational differences in knowledge of rural women towards female foeticide in Ludhiana district. The study was based upon the sample of 200 respondents. The respondents were distributed equally over the two generations; the first comprising of mothers-in-law and the second comprising of daughters-in-law. The subjects for the sample were drawn randomly from six villages located on Block I of Ludhiana district. Data were collected through interview schedule. Results indicated that both the generations were aware of the practice of female foeticide and sex selective abortions. Majority of the respondents in the 2nd generation had the knowledge of imbalanced sex ratio, the legal aspects and the impact of female foeticide as compared to the 1st generation. Overall highly significant differences were observed in the knowledge level of both the generations.

INTRODUCTION

India is a democratic republic with the second largest population of the world with women forming nearly half of the population. As child sex ratio is considered as an important indicator of the society's well-being, the present figures of the census have reaffirmed the age old prejudice against women in India who are increasingly seen as a liability. At the national level, CSR declined from 923 to 914 between the last two censuses. The decline of 13 points from 2001 to 2011 as compared to 18 points between 1991 (945) and 2001 (927) may offer some consolation to all those working on the issue. But the fact remains that gender discrimination continues to be rampant.

A number of factors are contributing to the skewed sex ratio of the country, and one of the major reasons behind this is female foeticide. The term "foeticide" is a combination of the Latin words *fetus* and *caedo* which means to kill an unborn child. The practice of female foeticide involves the detection of the sex of the unborn child in the womb of the mother and the decision to abort it if the sex of the child is detected as a girl. It is agonizing to know that the gender bias and deep-rooted prejudice and discrimina-

tion against girl child, which have been there down the centuries, are now found to begin in the womb itself. Keeping this in mind, the present study had been undertaken to know as to what extent rural women are oriented to the actual problem of declining sex ratio by ascertaining their knowledge level towards female foeticide.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in rural areas of Ludhiana District in 2010. Random sampling technique was followed. A list of blocks falling in Ludhiana district was prepared. Out of the 11 blocks, block 1 was randomly selected. A list of villages falling under block I was prepared and out of them six villages namely *Baddowal, Pamal, Alamgir, Dad, Phulawal and Sangowal* were randomly selected for drawing the sample. The data were collected through Interview Schedule which consisted of both positive and negative items and analyzed using percentages, Z Test. Scoring was done on a three point scale by assigning 3,2,1 scores for agree, doubtful and disagree respectively for positive items and vice versa for negative items.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Existing Intergenerational Continuity in Knowledge Level of Rural Women towards Female Foeticide

It is evident from the data presented in Table 1 that all the respondents in the 1st generation (mothers-in-law) and the 2nd generation (daugh-

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Table 1: Existing intergenerational continuity in knowledge level of rural women towards female foeticide

Attitude statements Continuity	1 st generation(n1=100)			2 nd generation(n2=100)			Z- value		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Dis- agree
<i>Knowledge About Female Foeticide</i>									
Female foeticide is killing of female foetus in the womb of the mother.	100(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	100(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0	0	0
There are certain methods available to determine the sex of the child.	100(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	100(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0	0	0
Sex selective abortions are aborting a foetus after the determination of the sex of the child.	88(88.0)	12(12.0)	0(0.0)	94(94.0)	6(6.0)	0(0.0)	1.48	1.48	0

ters-in-law) agreed to the statement that female foeticide is the killing of female foetus in the womb of the mother and at the same time they were equally aware of the fact that there are certain methods available to determine the sex of the child. Results depicts that there was no significant change in attitude of two generations towards these statements as z-value came to be non significant ($z = 0$).

When the attitude was studied for the knowledge regarding sex selective abortions, it was evident that 88 per cent of the respondents in the 1st generation knew that sex selective abortions are aborting a foetus after the determination of the sex of the child followed by 12 per cent of the respondents who expressed doubts about it. The data for the 2nd generation revealed that 94 per cent of the respondents agreed to the statement and doubts were shown by 6 per cent of the respondents. The z value came out to be non significant ($z = 1.48$) which indicates a continuity in knowledge level.

Existing Intergenerational Discontinuity in Knowledge Level of Rural Women towards Female Foeticide

Table 2 depicts existing intergenerational discontinuity observed in the knowledge level of rural women. It was observed that highly significant differences ($z = 6.96^{***}$) were observed for the attitude that sex ratio is the number of females per thousand males as to this 97 per cent of the respondents in the 1st generation had doubts. It is felt that meagre respondents (3%) from 1st generation disagreed with this statement. While probing the data for the 2nd generation, it was found that 39 per cent of the respondents

agreed to this statement and the doubts had also diminished to 61 per cent. The results further elucidates that for the attitude statement that sex ratio in our country is imbalanced, 61 per cent of the respondents in the 1st generation expressed doubts, whereas there were 20 per cent of respondents who agreed to this. There were only 19 per cent of the respondents who showed disagreement. The observation for the 2nd generation depicted that trend had almost reversed, as 79 per cent of the respondents agreed to this statement. Doubts were reported by 21 per cent of the respondents. Differences between 1st and 2nd generations in this respect were statistically significant ($z = 8.34^{***}$) indicating a change in attitude.

On further probing the data, significant differences ($z = 6.25^{***}$) were observed as more than half of the respondents (58 %) from the 1st generation had doubts that imbalanced sex ratio will lead to a lack of brides in the future. It is found that agreement was shown by 23 per cent of the respondents whereas 19 per cent of the respondents reported to having doubts. However, the trend was reversed in the 2nd generation as there were 67 per cent of the respondent who agreed to the statement and the intensity of doubts also diminished (33%). This statement is supported by Anand (2004) who observed that female foeticide can lead to declining sex ratio, detrimental effect on physical and psychological health of women due to multiple pregnancies and abortions, increase in crime and violence against women, social problems like bride selling, dowry deaths, child marriages, kidnapping, rape etc.

As far as the knowledge regarding female foeticide is concerned, it was found that 69 per cent of the respondents in the 2nd generation believed that female foeticide is one of the factors re-

Table 2: Existing intergenerational discontinuity in knowledge level of rural women towards female foeticide

Attitude statements Discontinuity	1 st generation(n1=100)			2 nd generation(n2=100)			Z- value		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
<i>Knowledge About Sex Ratio</i>									
Sex ratio is the number of females per thousand males.	0(0.0)	97(97.0)	3(3.0)	39(39.0)	61(61.0)	0(0.0)	6.96***	6.25***	1.75*
Sex ratio in our country is imbalanced.	20(20.0)	61(61.0)	19(19.0)	79(79.0)	21(21.0)	0(0.0)	8.34***	5.75***	4.58***
Imbalanced sex ratio will lead to a lack of brides in future.	23(23.0)	58(58.0)	19(19.0)	67(67.0)	33(33.0)	0(0.0)	6.25***	3.55***	4.58***
<i>Knowledge About Female Foeticide</i>									
Female foeticide is one of the factors responsible for the imbalanced sex ratio of the country.	29(29.0)	55(55.0)	16(16.0)	69(69.0)	31(31.0)	0(0.0)	5.66***	3.43***	4.17***
<i>Legal Aspect</i>									
Sex selective abortions are illegal.	78(78.0)	22(22.0)	0(0.0)	100(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	4.97***	4.97***	0
There is a PNDDT Act which has been enacted against sex selective abortions.	0(0.0)	77(77.0)	23(23.0)	13(13.0)	87(87.0)	0(0.0)	3.73***	1.84*	5.12***
<i>Discontinuity</i>									
<i>Impact of Female Foeticide</i>									
Female foeticide has a negative impact on the physical and psychological health of the women.	10(10.0)	53(53.0)	37(37.0)	72(72.0)	28(28.0)	0(0.0)	8.91***	3.60***	6.74***
Female foeticide will lead to a rise in violence against women.	0(0.0)	74(74.0)	26(26.0)	77(77.0)	23(23.0)	0(0.0)	11.19***	7.22***	5.47***

*Significant at 10% level **Significant at 5% level ***Significant at 1% level

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates percentages.

sponsible for the imbalanced sex ratio of our country. It is felt that 31 per cent had doubts about this. However, the data for the 1st generation depicted a different picture as 55 per cent of the respondents had doubts that female foeticide is contributing to the imbalanced sex ratio of the country and agreement was shown by 29 per cent of the respondents. Differences between 1st and 2nd generations were statistically highly significant ($z = 5.66^{***}$) indicating a change in attitude. The statement is supported by Patel (1984) who found in her study that sex selective abortion of female foetuses has a high likelihood of having serious demographic repercussion in terms of tilting the sex ratio further against the women.

The table further conveys intergenerational discontinuity in knowledge in legal aspects of female foeticide. Most of the respondents (78 %) in the 1st generation knew that sex selective abortions are illegal followed by 22 per cent who had doubts whereas observations for the 2nd generation depicts that the trend had almost reversed

as cent per cent (100%) of the respondents were aware of the fact that sex selective abortions are illegal. The Z value came out to be highly significant (4.97***).

While further probing the data, it was observed that 77 per cent of the respondents in the 1st generation had doubts that there is a PNDDT (Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques) Act (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse Act 1994) which has been enacted against sex selective abortions. There were 23 per cent of the respondents who were unaware of this legal aspect of female foeticide. The data for the 2nd generation revealed that majority of the respondents (87 %) had doubts about it and only 13 per cent of the respondents were aware of it. Significant attitudinal change ($z = 3.72^{***}$) was observed in 1st and 2nd generations in this respect. The results are in line with the findings of Sarkar (1990) who in her study revealed that female foeticide is one of the extreme manifestation of violence against women. Misuse of law, wrong implementation of law has

added to the woe of female foeticide. Female foeticide is a reflection of what happens when technologies is misused.

Highly significant differences ($z = 8.91^{***}$) were observed in both the generations for the attitude statement relating to the impact of female foeticide as only 10 per cent of the respondents in the 1st generation agreed to the statement that female foeticide has a negative impact on the physical and psychological health of the women followed by 53 per cent of the respondents who had doubts about it. Disagreement was shown by 37 per cent of the respondents. The trend had almost reversed in the 2nd generation as majority (72%) of the respondent agreed to this statement and doubts were reported by 28 per cent of the respondents. This statement is supported by Sethi (2008) who reported in his study that violence against women has taken a dismaying variety in form of female foeticide, female infanticide, domestic abuse, dowry death etc. It has assumed such an alarming proportion that it is not only seen as an assault against her body but is a negation of her personhood.

It is quite clear from the table that respondents from the 2nd generation believed that female foeticide will lead to a rise in violence against women as majority of the respondents (77%) agreed with the statement followed by 23 per cent who showed doubts. The trend in 1st generation depicts that 74 per cent of the respondents had doubts about it and disagreement was reported by 26 per cent of the respondents. Statistically highly significant ($z = 11.19^{***}$) attitudinal change was observed. Since majority of the 2nd generation were aware of the repercussions of the practice of female foeticide.

CONCLUSION

It is quite obvious that the situation as indicated by the study is alarming and the data given here clearly indicates a difference in the knowledge level between the two generations. Although both the generations seem to have a fairly good idea of the practice of female foeticide but a significant intergenerational difference can be

observed in their knowledge regarding the repercussions of this evil practice. These differences in knowledge level can be attributed to various factors and among them difference in educational level is one. So clearly these figures are ringing bells to act because an individual's orientation towards a problem can be well judged by his/her knowledge level and therefore we cannot afford to wait to determine whether the practice of female foeticide will further go up.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Development of school based strategies for inculcating of positive self-image amongst girls.
2. Males should stand up to their own parents when they start chirping about unwanted female children.
3. Proper vigilance will help to stop discrimination against girls and send out strong message to those who err. Each one of us can change our immediate environment by treating our daughter equal to our sons. If each of us looks at the girl child with a changed mindset, it will break the prevailing social apathy.
4. Orientation programs should be planned for women specially the older generation since they play a very important role in decision making when it comes to the birth of a girl child.

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