

## A study on status of girl child in Punjab, India

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### ABSTRACT

A sample of 50 adolescent girls who were attending schools were drawn from the villages of three agroclimatic zones of Punjab State namely submountain undulating region (Sub-mountain undulating region). Central plain region (central plan region) and flood plain region (flood plain region). A multi stage random sampling method was employed for the selection of sample. Focus group discussion were conducted with the girls in the age range of 16-18 years, studying in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> class standard and data were pooled in percentages. The existing levels of schooling status, economic and social aspects, household responsibilities, upbringing practices, work pattern, existing level of knowledge of legal aspects, health aspects and puberty were studied. Results revealed that schooling status of girls in district Ludhiana of Sub-mountain undulating region is better than other zones and girls of this district are aware of vocational facilities, bank transactions. In this district girls do not go out for field work. Girls emphasized that main criteria for mate selection is that their life partner should not be under the influence of any drug addiction

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The girl child in India, like in many parts of the world, is born and raised in an environment, which brings negative values towards her. The scriptures have given a high place to women in Indian society, but parents always pray for a son. This perhaps is attitude all over India with a few exceptions. The preference for boys is deep rooted in psyche of the people and ingrained in their social, cultural and economic thinking through centuries (Mathur, 1984). The compelling reasons to prefer a son than a daughter in Indian families are that a son brings happiness and hopes since he continues the family line, offers "Shradha" to his ancestors for their spiritual benefits and supports parents in their old age. The girl child is also neglected in feeding and health care. This discrimination begins soon after birth. The female children are breast fed for a shorter duration as compared to the male children. This discrimination in feeding continues throughout her life leading to a high degree of malnutrition (Sinha, 1996 and Ghosh, 1990). The scenario with regard to education is depressing one too. India's ranking on female education has been put only 50.4% in a global study. Every nation today is concerned with welfare of women. For that various strategies and measures are being adopted (Behl, 1996). The mass media both print and electronic, opportunities for higher education for women, urbanization and industrialization have contributed tremendously towards the commencement of a new era with women attaining new heights thus, removing gender bias and developing positive attitude towards girls in the society.

### METHODOLOGY

A multi-stage random sampling method was employed for the selection of the sample. A sample of 50 adolescent girls who were attending school were drawn from the villages of three agroclimatic zones of Punjab state namely, sub-mountain undulating region (Zone-I), central plain region (Zone-III) and flood plain region (Zone VI). The demarcation of zones in Punjab State being studied on the basis of pattern given by Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. From each selected agro climatic zones, two districts at the most and from each selected districts-two blocks and from each block three villages were studied. From sub-mountain undulating region (Zone-I)-District Hoshiarpur, Flood plain region (Zone VI)-District Ropar (only one district falls in Zone VI), from Central plain region-District Patiala and District Ludhiana (being large two districts were selected) and. Focus group discussion was conducted with the girls in the age range of 16-18 years, studying in 10<sup>th</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> class standard and data were pooled in percentages. The schematic presentation is shown below:

STATE  
AGROCLIMATIC ZONES  
BLOCK (2 from each district)  
DISTRICTS  
(Min 2 from each zone)  
VILLAGES (2-4 from each block)  
GROUP OF GIRLS FROM EACH VILAGE

Focus group discussion was conducted with the girls

in the age range of 16-18 years, studying in 10<sup>th</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> class standard and data was pooled in percentages.

Self structured checklist was prepared for assessing the existing levels of schooling status, economic, social aspects, household responsibilities, upbringing practices, Work pattern and existing knowledge level of legal aspects, health aspects and puberty were studied

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Schooling status:*

– In all the three zones, the girls (90%) go to school on foot and cycles except in district Ludhiana where girls are going to school on, buses and autos. This clearly shows that in this district, girls are provided opportunities to study by attending schools irrespective of the distance of the school from their homes whereas in other districts girls reported that they are not allowed to study in schools situated at farther distance, the result being girls have to discontinue their studies

– The distance from house to girls' school is approx. 1-2 Km in all districts whereas in district Ludhiana distance extends to 10-15 kms.

– In Central Plan region and flood plain region all the girls (100%) spend one hour at home for studies whereas in Sub-mountainous undulating girls reported that they spend 3-4 hrs on their study

– Eighty per cent of girls from the three zones reported that both their parents encouraged them to study and the rest (10% each) father/mother encouraged them to study.

– In ninety per cent of girls families the stationery items or other material required for their study is brought from the nearest town/city by fathers and for rest of the respondents (10%) mothers bring stationery.

– Girls belonging to zone I *i.e.* Sub-mountainous undulating region and Zone VI *i.e.* Flood plan region do not have access to newspaper but not to magazines

– Seventy per cent of the girls from selected villages of district-Patiala (Central plan region) reported that their parents visit the school to ask about their development in studies whereas in rest of the villages of central plain region and flood plain region girls reported that parents visit to school only if teacher has complaint against particular student or if parents are required to sign and documents in the school.

### *Economic aspects:*

– In all the three zones, girls of high school were interested in taking skill-oriented training mainly in stitching and embroidery (62%), cooking (30%) and rest 8% has shown interest in learning computers, personal

grooming (beauty parlour), nursing and want to pursue it as a career except in village Bambeli of district Hoshiarpur where girls showed no interest in taking skill oriented training as they wanted to study.

– In the 90% of the families belonging to three zones, fathers' were the financially contributing member in the family whereas in the rest of the families either mother or elder brother was the financially contributing member as father had expired.

– Girls in three zones were not aware of the vocational facilities/avenue except in district Ludhiana and village Dher of district Ropar.

– Girls in district Ludhiana (76%) of central plain region were aware of the Govt. programmes for entrepreneurial facilities whereas in rest of the zones no girls had awareness

– Similarly, girls do not have awareness regarding bank transaction/post office except girls from village Narangwal of district Ludhiana of central plain region were aware of bank transaction and post office.

### *Social aspects:*

– In all the three zones, girls were not members of any youth club/society/cooperative body surprisingly in village Dher of district Ropar in Flood plain region girls were members of anti-pollution club.

– Girls in all zones do attend marriages/fairs/naming ceremony only if the function is within relatives otherwise to attend such social functions of relatives and friends at far off places is considered not necessary for them.

– In district Patiala of Central plain region and in Distt. Hoshiarpur of Zone-I girls are not allowed to go for movies. In Flood plain region (district Ropar) 50% of girls and in district Ludhiana 28% reported that they are allowed to go for movies in near by city.

– In sub-mountain undulating region, Central plain region and Flood plain region girls are allowed to chat with their friends but in Zone I and Flood plain region girls are not permitted to go to their friend's house very frequently.

– In Central plain region, girls are not allowed to read books/ magazines where as in Zone I and flood plain region (except in village Soorewal girls are allowed to read books/magazines).

– All the girls in central Plain region are permitted to write and send letters to their friends except in district Hoshiarpur (Zone I) and village Soorewal of district Ropar.

– For going to school, 100% of girls go alone or with their friends. For going to the market, they are accompanied by their parents usually mother and they go alone to their friends house rarely accompanied by their mother or

brother.

– 36% of girls in district Ludhiana (central plain region) and 100% girls in district Hoshiarpur (Sub-mountain undulating region) interact with the members of opposite sex (they were either their classmates or known to their family members and rest of the girls reported that people doubt their character if they talk to boys and it is not acceptable in their society).

**House hold reponsibilities:**

– Time spent on household activities like (sweeping and mopping, cleaning vessels, washing clothes and collecting water) performed by the girls varies in all zones like in zone I time spent is 1 hour, in central plain region, district Ludhiana time spent is 2-3 hours and in district Patiala and in flood plain region time spent is 3-4 hrs. The girls in all the three zones do not collect water as it is available through taps, hand pumps at their individual homes. In central plain region district Patiala and in flood plain region girls collect firewoods. All girls in zone VI and 34% girls in district Ludhiana reported that their male siblings help in performing the above activities.

– Girls spend 2-3 hours in the fields after attending their school and during holidays in flood plain region and in district Patiala of central plain region and 1-2 hrs in zone I. In district Ludhiana no girls is doing work in the field.

**Upbrining practices:**

– No discrimination regarding feeding practices was reported by girls of district Ludhiana in central plain region (Zone-III) and flood plain region (Zone-VI) except in zone I and district Patiala girls reported that in joint families first elders followed by young children and male members are served meals and in the end girls are supposed to eat meals with their mothers.

– All girls in Zone I, 50% of girls reported in district Patiala that expenditure on clothes is more for boys than girls because the cost of one trouser and one shirt is equal to their two suits whereas in Ludhiana girls reported that expenditure in girls is more because they need more number of clothes whereas boys have 2-3 shirts with one trouser and in flood plain region girls reported that expenditure is equal.

– 95% of girls in Zone I, central plain region, flood plain region reported that educational expenditure of boys is equal to girls, 5% of girls reported that boys' expenditure is more because they are studying in private schools.

– All the girls reported that expenditure on recreational activities was more for boys than girls as boys are allowed to watch movies, fairs and other functions

within village or outside.

**Health:**

– All the girls get the medical facilities like medicines, visit to hospital and home treatment for ailments like their bothers

**Rituals performed:**

– The rituals performed at the birth of a baby boy are TEHRVAAN (when he is of 13 days of age), naming ceremony, distribution of sweets, Lohri celebrations, first birthday, Hair cut function (only in Hindu community) etc. whereas no such functions was performed on birth of a baby girl. Function is celebrated on the birth of girl child only if she is first born child after long year of wait. Girls from all different zones reported that there are many rituals for the boys but no ceremony for girls in our society.

**Marriage:**

– In district Ludhiana of central plain region and in flood plain region girls reported that the ideal age of marriage for girls is above 20 years and in zone I and district Patiala of central plain region, the ideal age of marriage is 18 years and above. For boys it should be 21 years and above in district Patiala and 24 years and above in central plain region and zone I and flood plain region.

– In district Ludhiana of central plain region, girls reported they have their choice in marriage but girls in district Patiala of central plain region and girls of flood plain region reported that they feel shy in expressing their choice and accept the proposal whether she likes or dislikes the boy.

– In all zones, gap of less than five years is generally accepted between boy and girl for their marriage.

– All girls in the three zones reported that they face problems with the buoys/men (like eve teasing, passing unpleasant remarks) in their villages and they prefer to approach their mothers.

– When girls were asked about important criteria in mate selection, girls belonging to central plain region and flood plain region gave the criteria such as boy's age, physical looks, education, family size, employment, financial background of boy and agricultural land. According to girls in zone I in addition to above factors, astrology (horoscope matching) and family background is also considered. In all zones girls emphasized that their life partner should not be addicted to drugs and alcohol.

– All the girls were of the view that giving and taking dowry is crime and child marriage is an illegal offence

**Work pattern:**

– In district Ludhiana of central plain region girls reported they do not go to fields for work and in district Patiala girl child aged 8-9 years, in zone I, 12 years old girls and in flood plain region 14 years old start going to fields for work like plucking potatoes, tomatoes, peas and during winnowing and harvesting seasons.

– Equal wages are given for girls and boys in flood plain region but in zone I and central plain region wages were more for boys than girls for working in the fields. Reasons mentioned by the girls was-girls are not able to work in late hours and for long hours

– In all the three zones, the girls are not punished for not being able to do the work.

– Girls get sufficient time for their personal care and recreation. Girls view combing hairs, as their personal care and watching T.V, chatting with friends as their source of their recreation. When asked further they are satisfied with the amount of time available to them for these activities. They never considered necessity of more time at this age long with other household activities.

**Legal aspects:**

– The girls are not aware of the rights of the girl child in district Patiala of central plain region and Zone I. In Zone VI and district Ludhiana of Zone III were aware of some of the rights of girl child such as right to study, pursuing for career, marriage of their choice, marriage after 18 years of age, right to claim in property.

– Girls do not have the right to give their opinion in family matters in district Patiala of Central Plain region and Zone I.

– In all the three zones; parents consider suggestions of their daughters in all the household activities (planning a menu, arrangement of house, recreation, serving guests etc.) except for spending money.

**Health aspects:**

– All girls are aware of the food related deficiencies

except in district Patiala of Central Plain region.

– The girls reported that long hours of field work reflected on their health like fatigue, headache and backache etc.

**Puberty:**

– According to the girls age at menarche is 12-14 years.

– The girls had prior knowledge regarding menstruation in district Patiala and in flood plain region. The sources of information were mothers, friends and teachers.

– In all the three zones, girls were restricted on taking hot (dry fruits), sour (pickle, curd)foods, astringent food like onions as it produce foul odour during menstruation period.

– Girls in zone III and zone VI were aware of the puberty changes-primary and secondary sexual characteristics.

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