

## Intergenerational continuity and discontinuity in attitude of rural women towards female foeticide

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■ **ABSTRACT** : The present study was undertaken to assess the intergenerational continuity and discontinuity in attitude 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 revealed that continuity was observed in attitude statement like exorbitant demand of dowry is coming in the way of the birth of a girl child. Highly significant differences in attitude were observed for attitudinal statement like sex selective abortions are a way to have a balanced family, only sons can provide age old security to the parents and only boys can perform the last rites of the parents.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Female foeticide, Intergenerational, Attitude

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India has historically a deficit of women compared to most other countries, but we now live in a time when a systematic extermination of an entire gender is taking place right before our eyes. Until the 1980s, women and girls were dying either of neglect or were killed soon after they were born. Today, the horrifying reality is that, thanks to 'advances' in medical technology, they are now eliminated while still in the womb (Aravamudan, 2007). The girl child in the womb faces the peril of prebirth elimination *i.e.* 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 (Scaria, 2006). Although the changing interrelationships between education, work, marriage and family status in some sense have brought a light of empowerment for women but the continuously declining sex ratio poses a big question towards the developments that have taken place till date. Keeping this in mind, the present study had been undertaken to know the intergenerational attitude of rural women towards the practice

of female foeticide.

### ■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in rural areas of Ludhiana district. 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 were randomly selected for drawing the sample. 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 data were collected through interview schedule which was 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.

### ■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 throws light on intergenerational continuity in

attitude of rural women towards female foeticide. The results implies that cent per cent respondents in the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation believed that female foeticide is a social evil. No significant change ( $z = 0$ ) could be observed for this attitude statement.

It is evident from the result Table 1 that no significant change was found as majority of the respondents (83.00%) from the 1<sup>st</sup> generation agreed that exorbitant demand of dowry is coming in the way of the birth of a girl child followed by 5.00 per cent who had doubts about it. The data for the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation depict that again majority of the respondents (81.00%) agreed with the statement and doubt was expressed by 10 per cent of the respondents. The results of the study are in agreement with the findings of Rustagi (2000) who observed that gender discriminatory practices prevalent in India stem from the influence of patriarchy and lower status of women which results in higher female mortality rate as compared to males, intrahousehold inequalities in consumption, heinous practice of demanding exorbitant dowries for marrying girls, abandonment of girls and so on.

Table 2 further throws light on the discontinuity in attitude which takes into consideration the person's feelings about the attitude object. It includes items relating to mindset

about female foeticide, reason for son preference over daughters.

It was quite evident from the data that significant differences ( $z = 2.78^{**}$ ) were observed in both the generation for the attitude statement that female foeticide is a crime against women. There were 81.00 per cent of the respondents in the 1<sup>st</sup> generation who agreed with the statement followed by 19.00 per cent of the respondents who had doubts about it. On probing the data for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, it was observed that majority of the respondents (94.00 %) believed that female foeticide is a crime against women followed by 6.00 per cent of the respondents who had doubts about it. It is apparent from Table 2 that 12.00 per cent of the respondents from the 1<sup>st</sup> generation felt that sex selective abortions are a boon for not having daughters. Doubts were shown by 78.00 per cent of the respondents. However, on probing the data for the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, it was observed that the trend had almost reversed as 65.00 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement and doubts were reported by 31.00 per cent of the respondents. The Z value came to be significant ( $z = 2.09^{**}$ ) hence, indicating a change in attitude. The statement is supported by Kumar (1983) who highlighted in his study that supporters of sex detection tests often argue that the growing

**Table 1 : Existing intergenerational continuity in attitude of rural women towards female foeticide**

Attitude Statements	1 <sup>st</sup> generation (n=100)			2 <sup>nd</sup> generation (n=100)			Z- value		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
<b>Continuity</b>									
<b>Mindset towards female foeticide</b>									
Female foeticide is a social evil	100 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	100 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0	0	0
<b>Reasons for son preference over daughters</b>									
Exorbitant demand of dowry is coming in the way of the birth of a girl child	83 (83.00)	5 (0.00)	12 (0.00)	81 (81.00)	10 (0.00)	9 (0.00)	0.36	1.34	0.69

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates percentages

**Table 2 : Existing intergenerational discontinuity in attitude of rural women towards female foeticide**

Attitude statements	1 <sup>st</sup> generation (n=100)			2 <sup>nd</sup> generation (n=100)			Z- value		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
<b>Discontinuity</b>									
<b>Mindset about female foeticide</b>									
Female foeticide is a crime against women.	81 (81.00)	19 (19.00)	0 (0.00)	94 (94.00)	6 (6.00)	0 (0.00)	2.78***	2.78***	0
Sex selective abortions are a boon for not having unwanted daughters.	12 (12.00)	78 (78.00)	10 (10.00)	4 (4.00)	31 (31.00)	65 (65.00)	2.09**	6.67***	8.03***
Sex selective abortions are a way to have a balanced family.	61 (61.00)	15 (15.00)	24 (24.00)	0 (0.00)	55 (55.00)	45 (45.00)	9.37***	5.93***	3.12***
<b>Reasons for son preference over daughters</b>									
Only boys can perform the last rites of the parents	100 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	71 (71.00)	29 (29.00)	0 (0.00)	5.82***	5.82***	0
Only sons can provide age old security to the parents.	100 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	29 (29.00)	4 (4.00)	67 (67.00)	10.49***	2.02**	10.04***

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* indicate significance of values at P=0.10, 0.05 and 0.01, respectively

popularity of amniocentesis is simply based on the theory of demand and supply where an excess of males over females are achieved by reduction of unwanted and hence neglected women which would actually raise the status of women. Highly significant differences ( $z = 9.37^{***}$ ) were observed in both the generations for the attitude of considering sex selective abortions as a way to have a balanced family.

Table 2 further reflects intergenerational changes in attitude towards reasons for son-preference over daughters. The results depict that all the respondents (100.00%) in the first generation firmly believed that only boys can perform the last rites of the parents. The trend of attitude towards performing last rites of parents seem to be comparatively less firm in the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation as 71.00 per cent of the respondents agreed with this statement followed by 29.00 per cent of the respondents who had doubts about it.

On further probing the data, it was apparent that cent per cent respondents from the 1<sup>st</sup> generation believed that only son can provide age old security to the parents. However, observation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation depicts that the trend has almost reversed as 67.00 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. There were 29.00 per cent of the respondents who showed agreement. The Z value came to be highly significant ( $z = 10.49^{***}$ ) which indicates a change in attitude.

#### Conclusion:

Female foeticide is a clear indication of a whole society being involved in a conspiracy against women which is causing the destruction of half of the population of society, at the

hands of monstrous practices becoming more and more rampant in a society fast losing its secular, social, and humanistic fabric. The results of the study indicates a difference in the attitude of women belonging to two different generations. The first generation seems to be clutched at the same age old mindset about the girl child and are having a neutral attitude towards the practice of female foeticide in contrast to the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation who are expressing a more unfavourable attitude towards this heinous crime. However, an evil like this can only be curbed if actions are taken both on individual and collective level as every member of the society belonging to any generation has his or her own piece of share in building up norms for self, family and society as well.

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