

# An Insight into the Family Environment of Indian Women in Relation to Female Foeticide and Girl Child

Divya Raina<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Geeta Balodi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pacific University  
Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

<sup>2</sup>M.K.P(P.G) College  
Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India

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**ABSTRACT**— *The present study focuses on the Family Environment (FES) of married women in relation to their status and the cause behind female foeticide, conducted in the state of Uttarakhand, India. A total of 600 married women were taken, those with two male children (2Mc), those with one male and one female child (1Fc1Mc) and those with two female children (2Fc). The sample comprised of five blocks of Uttarakhand namely Doiwala, Raipur, Sahaspur, Kalsi and Vikas Nagar. The 't' test between 2Mc and 2Fc reveals the value as 7.29, between 2Fc and 1Fc1Mc as -4.86, and between 2Mc and 1Fc1Mc as 3.09, 'F' value shows that there exists a difference between the three groups  $f(2,585) = 34.37$ , difference between blocks is  $f(4,585) = 23.11$ , suggesting the existing difference in the family environment of these women. Various measures need to be taken to help women gain control over their lives by coming out of orthodox restrictions imposed undesirably on them.*

**Keywords**— Son Preference, Girl Child, Family Environment, Female Foeticide

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The family is the oldest and the most important of all the institutions that man has devised to regulate and integrate his behaviour as he strives to satisfy his basic needs. Its key position rests on its multiple functions in relation to overall development of its members, their protection, and over all well-being. Therefore, it would emerge that not only the social and physical well-being of the individual is taken care of by the family, but the psychological well-being as well. The family environment is influenced by a number of factors like the nature of family constellation; number of children in the family; marital relationships between husband and wife; maternal (parental) employment; and socio-economic and religious background of the family.

Most marriages begin with spouses who report being satisfied and having high hopes for a long-term, successful relationship (Gottman, 1999; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994). Yet what still remains uncertain is which factors account for the differing degrees of marital satisfaction and the fluctuations in the marital quality (e.g. marital conflict) that spouses experience over time?

Son preference has remained and continues to remain a trend, a religiously followed custom all over the world, not realizing how acutely damaging affect it can produce on the women facing such discrimination. Facing the discrimination since birth, although a girl begins to understand her future fate too, yet the little heart that she carries forces her to dream, a dream which ends as soon as she enters the home of in-laws and is further burdened with the said, unsaid, silent and screaming demands of bearing a son. In North India, the bride and groom must not be related by blood and preferably must come from different villages. When the bride moves to her husband's village, her subsequent contacts with her natal village become infrequent. Her isolation from her family of origin strips her of social power within her family of marriage, but she regains it by the birth of sons (Basu 1992; Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001; World Bank 1996).

Her marital home becomes a den of torture and fear. Her life partner and family members become the perpetrators of all forms of violence against her (Devi and Prema 2006) explain that the main cause of domestic violence against women are unequal power relations, gender discrimination, patriarchy, economic dependence of women, dowry, low moral values, negative portrayal of women's images in media, no participation in decision-making, gender stereotypes and a negative mindset. There are various manifestations of violence, which includes

beating, mental torture, forced pregnancy, female infanticide, rape, denial of basic necessities and battering. The worst form of violence is dowry murder.

India is a country with a pervasive preference for sons and one of the highest levels of excess child mortality for girls in the world (child mortality for girls exceeds child mortality for boys by 43 per cent). Data from the National Family Health Survey were used to examine the effect of son preference on parity progression and ultimately on child mortality. Family composition affects fertility behaviour in every state examined and son preference is the predominant influence in all but one of these states. The effects of family composition on excess child mortality for girls are more complex, but girls with older sisters are often subject to the highest risk of mortality. (Fred Arnold, Choe, Roy, 1997)

For the Indian mother, the son is the major medium of self-expression. It is her motherhood that the traditional family values and respects; her wifehood and daughterhood are devalued and debased. The woman's self-respect in the traditional system is protected not through her father or husband, but through her son. It is also through the son-and for that matter on the son-that she traditionally exercises her authority

Morgan et al. (1988) examined how the marriage-stabilizing effects of children differed by the sex composition of children. The authors argued that while children of both genders stabilize marriages, sons have a greater effect on marital stability than daughters because sons elicit more involvement from fathers. Their results indicate that parents with sons experienced lower risks of divorce than parents with only daughters. Morgan et al. (1988) also found that sons living with both biological parents reported more paternal involvement than daughters in the same situation.

Sex determination tests are seen as providing a 'reproductive choice' - a choice to decide to have a boy or a girl. However women do not really enjoy an unfettered choice. Choice cannot exist in the context where women are socialized to subordinate their interests to those of men; where women attain a status only through marriage and by giving birth to children preferably sons; where they largely bear the burden of cooking, bearing and rearing children, eat last and the least, have lesser access to education and health services. Choice is only meaningful if it can be exercised in the context of material, social and gender equity. The availability of sex detection tests creates a situation where women are forced to undergo the test either by external pressure from family members or by internalized social values.

Female foeticide has now not only remained a forced option but a choice at times for women for they do not wish their daughters to face the same hatred and neglect as they have been facing. The birth of a son may also lead to increased acceptance of a woman by other household members and the society at large. A son typically increases a family's social prestige, and women can be seen as having fulfilled the duty of carrying on the family line. Women in North India are often called X's mother, and change their name after the birth of a son. This reflects an increased respect for the mother of the child (Das Gupta 2009). As a way of demonstrating a new level of acceptance after the birth of a son, other household members may willingly transfer some of their responsibilities to the woman. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence suggests that women without sons are often the target of gossip or snide remarks in their village.

The supporters of sex detection tests argue that on the basis of the theory of demand and supply, an excess of males over females achieved with the reduction of unwanted, and hence, neglected female children would actually raise the status of women. However if mere numbers were to indicate status, then in several states in India, where adverse sex ratio exists, status of women would be high. On the contrary, one observes that incidence of dowry deaths, rape and other atrocities being committed in these states is as high as in other states. Based on anthropological evidence (Dube 1983) it has been observed that societies with adverse female sex ratio have indicated the presence of customs like polyandry and abduction and purchase of women. It is strongly felt, that contrary to raising the status of women, adverse sex ratio would increase the incidence of rape, prostitution and violence against women.

Since the birth of a girl child is always seen as a trouble by the family members, it is well understood how difficult the survival a girl would be in such a situation. Not only has this affected the healthy upbringing of the child, denied of various facilities so easily available to a male child with no extra efforts. The discrimination continues lifelong and becomes so ingrained in the blood of women themselves, they start accepting this discrimination as a truth of their life and continue to do the same to their own daughters.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present study was conducted in the state of Uttarakhand, India with the aim of finding out the family environment of the married women in relation to female foeticide and the status of a girl child. According to the 2011 census of India, the number of females/1000 males is 940, and the child sex ratio is 913. In Uttarakhand it is 963, the child sex ratio(0-6 yrs) is 886 – 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 family environment of women, with special concern to the Uttarakhand state. A sample was taken from Uttarakhand, surveying 600 married women divided into three groups:- 1) Women with two girl child, 2) Women with one male and one female child, 3) women with two male child.

## 3. HYPOTHESIS

1. There will be no significant difference of Family Environment (FES) between the 2Mc and 2Fc group.
2. There will be no significant difference of FES between the 2Mc and 1Fc1Mc group
3. There will be no significant difference of FES between the 2Fc and 1Fc1Mc group
4. a) There will be no significant difference on FES between the three groups of women (2Fc, 1Fc1Mc and 2Mc  
b) There will be no significant difference on FES between the women of five blocks ( Doiwala, Raipur, Sahaspur, Kalsi and Vikas Nagar)  
c) There exists no significant interaction between the three groups and five blocks of women.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Sample

The sample comprised of 600 married women from urban and rural regions of Uttarakhand, India. Sample was taken from different socio-economic backgrounds and religions. Educated and uneducated women, both were included in the study. The women was classified into three groups namely 2Mc-women with two male child, 1Fc1Mc-women with one male and one female child, 2Fc –women with two female child. Each group comprised of 200 women. The sample comprised of five blocks of Uttarakhand namely Doiwala, Raipur, Sahaspur, Kalsi and Vikas Nagar. Figure 1. Shows the sample for the study conducted.

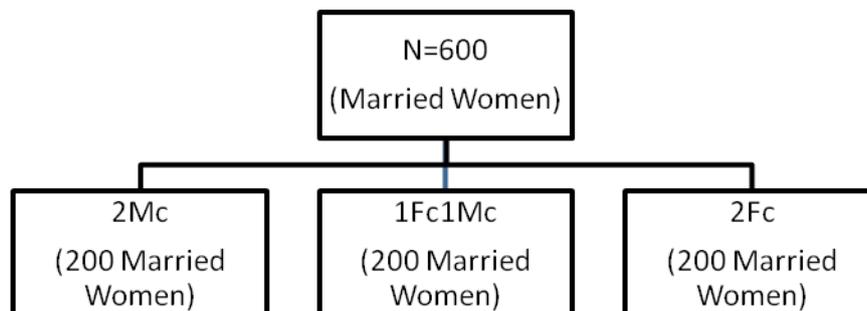


Figure 1. Showing Sample for the study conducted.

### 4.2 The Tools Used and the Data Collection Procedure

Family Environment Scale (F.E.S)- Harpreet Bhatia and N.K.Chadha

This family environment scale is based on the family environment scale by Moos (1974). This scale consists of three dimensions which are taken from Moos' scale. Although the concept of dimensions was taken from Moos' scale, all the subscales in each dimension were operationally defined with certain modifications of original definitions. Certain dimensions were chosen for the Scale. These are:

### Relationship Dimensions

1. Cohesion – Degree of commitment, help, and support family members provide for one another.
2. Expressiveness – Extent to which family members are encouraged to act openly and express their feelings and thoughts directly.
3. Conflict – Amount of openly expressed aggression and conflict among family members.
4. Acceptance and Caring – Extent to which the members are unconditionally accepted and the degree to which caring is expressed in the family.

### Personal Growth Dimensions

5. Independence – Extent to which family members are assertive and independently make their own decisions.
6. Active – Recreational Orientation – Extent of participation in social and recreational activities.

### System Maintenance Dimensions

7. Organization – Degree of important of clear organization structure in planning family activities and responsibilities.
8. Control – Degree of limit setting within a family.

Split-half reliability was found for the present scale. Reliability obtained is as follows: Cohesion 0.92, Expressiveness 0.88, Conflict 0.84, Acceptance and Caring 0.86, Independence 0.70, Active – Recreation Orientation 0.48, Organization 0.75, Control 0.48 Both face and content validity was tested by giving the scale to eighteen experts to evaluate the test items. Only those items with at-least 75 per cent agreement among the judges were retained.

### 4.3. Data Collection and Statistical Analysis

For the purpose of data collection indirect interview method along with door to door survey method were employed. The help of local NGO's, Anganwadi's and ASHA in Uttarakhand was also taken. Visits were paid to local government and private hospitals to collect the data. Result was compiled and tabulated with the help of 't' test and Analysis of Variance (Anova).

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1.** Showing 't' value obtained on FES for 2Mc and 1Fc1Mc group

Groups	2Mc	1Fc1Mc
Mean	214.37	208.81
Variance	393.74	249.88
Df	398	
t Stat	3.09	

Family Environment is a crucial element in the proper development of an individual making him a responsible citizen realizing his duties and fulfilling them to the best of his potentials. In the lack of a proper family environment the growth of an individual gets restricted, the development is stagnated and thus growth is not possible. Table 1. Shows the mean for 2Mc group is 208.8 while that of the 1Fc1Mc group is 214.3. The 't' value obtained is 3.09 which is significant both at 0.05 and 0.01 Level of Significance. The women of two groups show a difference in family environment. With females of the 1Fc1Mc group getting low scores indicates that even today the modern India women is prejudiced with the presence or absence of a male heir in the family. A female with two sons is even more valued than the woman who has been able to bear only one son. The bearing of sons becomes an important influencing factor in the amount of value allotted to the women of the family considering her as a commodity whose price depends on her male producing capability. The higher the ratio of male offspring the higher will be her status in the family which would have a direct influence in raising her overall life satisfaction.

A study on Sex Composition of Children and Marital Disruption in India by D M Hamby, Ann Arbor, S Tarantola (2003) states that although it has been suggested that parents of sons are less likely than parents of daughters to divorce, few studies have explored this relationship in societies characterized by a strong preference for sons, where such an effect should be most pronounced. Using data from 116,498 once-married female respondents to the 1992-1993 and 1998-1999 Indian National Family Health Surveys, it was found that at lower parities, having at least one

son is associated with a significantly lower risk of divorce or separation. Moreover, with few exceptions, the effect of children's sex composition on the risk of divorce holds for subgroups of Indian women across categories of education, religion, location (urban vs. rural), caste, cohort, and region.

**Table 2.** Showing 't' value obtained on FES for 2Fc and 1Fc1Mc group

<i>Group</i>	<i>2Fc</i>	<i>1Fc1Mc</i>
Mean	200.29	208.74
Variance	352.34	251.67
Observations	200	200
df	398	
t Stat	-4.86	

The importance of family environment cannot be overlooked if considering the well being of an individual. The mean value obtained for the 2Fc group is 200.2 while the same of the 1Fc1Mc group is 208.7. The 't' value obtained is -4.86, significant at both 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. This is a clear reflection of the difference in the family environment being experienced by both the groups. The women of 2Mc group experience a much lower quality of family environment as compared to the one being experienced by the 1Fc1Mc group. The more the number of daughters in the family the lower the status of women was found. With a balanced family of one son and one daughter the females were getting a better status in the family. Thus the devalued image of a woman only with daughters can easily be visualized.

Reflecting back on the results obtained we are able to clearly understand the devalued image of the women who is unable to bear a male offspring, be it in the eyes of the family which forms her family environment or in her own eyes which is further an expression of her life satisfaction.

A study conducted by S M 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.

**Table 3.** Showing 't' value obtained on FES for 2Mc and 2Fc group

<i>Groups</i>	<i>2Mc</i>	<i>2Fc</i>
Mean	214.37	200.29
Variance	393.74	352.34
Observations	200	200
Df	398	
t Stat	7.29	

As revealed by the data (Table 3.), the mean value for 2Mc group on FES is 214.3 and for the 2Fc group is 200.2. The 't' value obtained is 7.29 which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. With the fact that Indian women are moving out of homes and trying to gain an equal status with men, we still find women experiencing low status at home, which is considered to be the first building block in any individual's life. The women in the 2Mc group experience a high status and high value for being able to produce male offspring to the family who could carry forward the name of the family, while the fate of the women not being able to produce male heir is clearly evident with the low family environment score obtained by them.

Table 4. Data Showing 'F' value for different groups of women on FES

SUMMARY	Doiwala	Raipur	Sahapur	Kalsi	Vikas Nagar	Total
<i>2Fc</i>						
Count	40	40	40	40	40	200
Sum	7577	7763	8030	8278	8410	40058
Average	189.42	194.07	200.75	206.95	210.25	200.29
Variance	555.58	559.35	287.32	64.048	23.42	352.34
<i>IFcIMc</i>						
Count	40	40	40	40	40	200
Sum	8002	8195	8320	8558	8674	41749
Average	200.05	204.87	208	213.95	216.85	208.74
Variance	417.89	109.08	154.10	215.48	199	251.67
<i>2MC</i>						
Count	40	40	40	40	40	200
Sum	8209	8408	8566	8760	8932	42875
Average	205.22	210.2	214.15	219	223.3	214.37
Variance	729.71	258.01	278.23	278.10	257.6	393.74
<i>Total</i>						
Count	120	120	120	120	120	
Sum	23788	24366	24916	25596	26016	
Average	198.23	203.05	207.63	213.3	216.8	
Variance	601.81	349	266.09	207.37	185.94	
<b>ANOVA</b>						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Sample	20104.74	2	10052.37	34.37	7.702	3.01
Columns	27043.36	4	6760.84	23.11	9.337	2.38
Interaction	421.09	8	52.63	0.17	0.993	1.95
Within	171091.6	585	292.46			
Total	218660.8	599				

The sons have always been preferred to girls, be it birth of sons which is considered auspicious to the birth of a girl which is considered ominous, be it the sons being considered as an economic lifter to girls being considered as an economic burden, girls being hushed into the homes and boys being allowed to wander in streets at midnight, girls being murdered for dowry and the boys bringing the dowry home, boys allowed to fire the pyre and the girls not even allowed to go near it.

Dowry is one of the biggest reasons in India why girls are so unwanted. For most Indian parents the cost of a daughter's marriage is the single largest expense of their lives. In one rural sample the average cost of a

daughter's marriage was six times the parents' annual income and, consequently, a cause of indebtedness and destitution (Rao, 1993). While families may want one daughter for a balanced family composition, very few want more than one daughter while most families definitely want at least one son (International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro 2000; Pande and Astone 2007).

Family environment scores were subjected to two way analysis of variance having three groups of women and five blocks from where the women belonged. The main effect of group differences yielded an F ratio of  $f(2,585) = 34.37$  which is significant. There exists a difference in the family environment of women in different groups. The difference is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance.

The main effect of block differences in women's family environment yields an F ratio of  $f(4,585) = 23.11$  which is significant. There exists a difference in life satisfaction of women in different blocks. The difference is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. The interaction effect between the groups and blocks of women is not significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance with F ratio yielded as  $f(8,585) = 0.17$ .

The woman with two girls is looked down upon in the society and the family for adding an unnecessary burden on the family. The family's gets a good name in the society with the birth of a son which is reflected in their family environment. This also brings high status, more independence in taking decisions, love, care and support from the family members, which includes the affection of in-laws too.

The low family environment might lead the women to take decisions which are fatal to birth of further girls. The family not willing to take the burden of girl's mite plan for abortions sometimes hiding it under the name of miscarriages too. Jha et al (2006) provide evidence that parents may want a daughter after they have sons but typically do not want more than one daughter, a preference which can differentially affect sex ratios at birth depending on the sex composition of surviving children. Osaranen (2008) notes that female foeticide is perceived by many women as a 'sober acknowledgement of the miseries they suffer in oppressive patriarchal societies' and can even be seen as a positive deed. 'It is better they die than live like me'

## **6. CONCLUSION**

It is true that the Indian scenario has not changed much over the years, despite the claims of increasing women empowerment. The concept of son preference is so deep rooted in the hearts of the Indian population, to imagine a change with only implementing policies and increasing the punishment cannot be the ultimate solution. Women themselves prefer having sons in order to protect their place, position, value and status in the family and be free to express themselves in the society. Women with only daughters are always awed at, blaming their past life acts, destiny, being cursed and what not, as said before the only fault they committed is of not being able to bear a male offspring, in which scientifically they have a lesser role to play. A skewed sex ratio has worrisome implications for future population structure, the marriage and labor market, and personality development. In this regard, population policy needs to pay special attention to the possible consequences of high son preference that go beyond the retardation of fertility decline.

Although son preference in India will be difficult to change dramatically in the short run, Arnold, Choe, and Roy (1996) have recommended a number of programs that could expedite the transition toward more gender-neutral attitudes and behavior. These include expanded efforts to encourage equal education for daughters and sons (such as educational savings accounts for girls and the provision of free midday meals at schools) and education and motivational programs to encourage equal treatment of daughters and sons, particularly with respect to medical care. Without a basic change in the dowry system and the other traditions that engender a preference for sons, however, it is unlikely that son preference will decline sufficiently to transform fertility behavior in the near future.

Not only this, there is an increasing need to approach and connect with the young population, the need to develop such curriculum which focuses on the eradication of the problem with the help of youth of the society. The NGO's have to better their approach, adopting better techniques of reaching people, focusing on the older population whose opinions and decisions still play a major role in decision making at home, especially in the context of keeping or doing away with the 'sin' - the girl child.

In this context it is important to mention how small steps can help build a nation without discrimination against their girls - A fictional television series *Atmajaa* ("Born from the Soul") initially aired in India in 2004. The series dramatized the issue of sex selection, first within an urban, upper-middle class North Indian family and

then in a rural village. Women's rights (particularly reproductive rights), the value of the girl child, and the negative societal consequences of sex selection formed the central themes, and the series explored the gender discrimination and traditional values that drive the practice of sex selection. The main audience was women of reproductive age, though the story was set in a family context and explored relationships among family members. An audience impact study conducted after the first part of the series aired found that young women were the most receptive to the messages of the show. Older women liked the series but felt negatively stereotyped; married women said that the decisions needed to be situated more clearly in the family; and men felt that the series did not adequately represent them. Later episodes attempted to address these points, although no evaluation has been conducted of those episodes. The path is definitely difficult, but definitely not impossible, if the hearts of young and the old are awakened and equally involved in the uplifting the status of women.

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