

Interplay of Religion and Gender Bias: A study on Attitudes toward Girl Birth in India

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Abstract

Background: In India, the preference for male children and the associated societal norms regarding girl birth continue to pose significant challenges to gender equality. Despite legal reforms and efforts to promote gender equity, deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes persist, influencing individuals' attitudes and perceptions towards girl birth. Understanding the underlying factors shaping these attitudes is essential for developing targeted interventions and policies aimed at addressing gender discrimination and promoting gender equality.

Materials and Methods: The study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions regarding girl birth among the Indian population. Quantitative surveys were administered to 1000 respondents, capturing demographic information, knowledge of gender issues, attitudes towards gender equality, and perceptions of girl birth. Additionally, qualitative interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into participants' perspectives and experiences related to girl birth.

Results: Analysis of the survey data revealed a high level of awareness of gender discrimination among respondents, with a significant proportion acknowledging its existence. The majority expressed positive attitudes towards gender equality, although preferences for male children and perceptions of societal norms regarding girl birth persisted. Belief in economic implications associated with girl birth was widespread among participants. Qualitative

interviews provided further insights into the socio-cultural factors influencing attitudes and perceptions towards girl birth.

Conclusion: The findings underscore the complexity of socio-cultural factors shaping attitudes and perceptions towards girl birth in India. Efforts to address gender discrimination and promote gender equality must consider these nuances, focusing on educational initiatives, awareness campaigns, and policy interventions aimed at challenging ingrained biases and fostering inclusive and equitable societies.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, Girl birth, Gender attitudes, Perceptions, India.

Introduction

In the rich tapestry of Indian culture and society, the birth of a child is a momentous occasion, symbolizing hope, renewal, and continuity. However, embedded within this cultural celebration lies a stark reality of gender bias and discrimination, particularly evident in the differential treatment accorded to male and female offspring. Despite strides towards progress and development, India grapples with deep-rooted societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality, often resulting in harmful practices such as sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, and neglect of girl children.

The phenomenon of gender bias in India is multifaceted, shaped by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, economic, and social factors. Historically, India has been characterized by patriarchal structures and norms that prioritize male lineage, inheritance, and economic productivity.¹ These entrenched gender roles and expectations have led to a pervasive preference for male children, reinforced through generations and across diverse socio-cultural contexts. This preference for male offspring is deeply ingrained within the fabric of Indian society, permeating various aspects of life from family dynamics to community relations and beyond. The birth of a son is often celebrated with pomp and ceremony, while the arrival of a daughter may be met with subdued congratulations or even disappointment. Such differential treatment not only

reflects societal biases but also has far-reaching implications for the status, opportunities, and well-being of girls and women.²

The consequences of gender bias are profound and multifaceted, impacting individuals, families, and communities alike. Beyond the immediate implications for the health and well-being of girls, gender discrimination perpetuates broader inequities in education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. Moreover, the devaluation of girls and women undermines the very fabric of society, hindering progress and development on both individual and societal levels.³

Against this backdrop, understanding the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of the Indian population regarding girl birth is paramount. Such insights are essential for devising evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at challenging entrenched biases, promoting gender equality, and fostering a culture where every child is celebrated and valued irrespective of gender.

This comprehensive study aims to delve deep into the complexities surrounding girl birth in India, shedding light on the underlying factors contributing to gender bias and discrimination. By examining the knowledge levels, attitudes, and perceptions of diverse stakeholders – including individuals, families, communities, and policymakers – this research seeks to uncover the root causes of gender inequality and identify strategies for transformative change.

A robust understanding of the dynamics shaping girl birth in India requires a multi-dimensional approach, drawing on insights from various disciplines including sociology, anthropology, psychology, public health, and gender studies. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this study aims to capture the nuances of lived experiences, cultural norms, and societal expectations that influence attitudes towards girl children.

Building on existing literature and empirical research, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on gender inequality in India and inform evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting gender equity and

social justice. Through rigorous analysis and interpretation of data, this research endeavors to advance our understanding of the complexities surrounding girl birth and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Materials and Methods

Research Design: This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to comprehensively investigate knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions regarding girl birth among the Indian population.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size Determination: A stratified random sampling technique was utilized to ensure representation from diverse socio-economic, geographic, and cultural backgrounds across India. The sample size was determined based on statistical power calculations considering the level of precision desired and the expected effect size. A minimum sample size of 1000 respondents is targeted to ensure adequate representation and generalizability of findings.

Data Collection Methods:

Quantitative Survey: A structured questionnaire was developed to assess knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions towards girl birth. The questionnaire includes close-ended questions with Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, and demographic information. The survey will be administered electronically using online survey platforms or through face-to-face interviews conducted by trained enumerators.

Qualitative Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of respondents to gain deeper insights into their perspectives, experiences, and socio-cultural contexts related to girl birth.

Questionnaire Design: The questionnaire comprised the following sections:

A- Demographic Information: Age, gender, education level, occupation, income, marital status, geographical location, and household composition.

B- Knowledge:

- Awareness of gender discrimination and its consequences.
- Understanding of sex determination techniques and their legal implications.
- Familiarity with government policies and initiatives addressing gender inequality.

C- Attitudes:

- Perceived value and importance of gender equality.
- Preference for male or female children.
- Attitudes towards gender roles within the family and society.

D- Perceptions:

- Perception of societal norms and expectations regarding girl birth.
- Stigma associated with having female children.
- Economic implications of girl birth.

E- Open-Ended Questions:

Opportunities for respondents to provide additional comments or insights on the topic.

Ethical Considerations: Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were strictly maintained. The study was adhere to ethical guidelines outlined by institutional review boards and relevant regulatory bodies.

Data Analysis:

A- Quantitative Data:

Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze demographic characteristics and summarize survey responses. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests and regression analysis, may be employed to examine relationships between variables.

B- Qualitative Data:

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns, themes, and narratives within interview transcripts. Codes were iteratively developed and refined to capture the richness and complexity of qualitative data.

Validation and Reliability: Pre-testing of the questionnaire was conducted to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability of measures. Inter-rater reliability will be assessed for qualitative coding to enhance rigor and validity of findings.

Results

1. Demographic Characteristics:

Age Distribution: The majority of respondents (350 out of 1000) fall within the 26-35 age group, indicating a significant presence of young adults in the sample. There is a relatively balanced distribution across other age groups, with slightly fewer respondents in the 56 and above age group. (Table:1)

Age Group	Number of Respondents
18-25	250 (25%)
26-35	350 (35%)
36-45	200 (20%)
46-55	150 (15%)
More than 56	50 (5%)

Table1: Age Distribution of participants

Gender Distribution: Males constitute the largest proportion of respondents (525 out of 1000), followed closely by females (475 out of 1000). (Table: 2) Understanding the gender distribution of respondents is essential for assessing the representativeness of the sample population.

Gender	Number of Respondents
Male	525 (52.5%)
Female	475 (47.5%)

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 2: Gender Distribution of participants

Education Level: The majority of respondents (600 out of 1000) have attained a graduate degree or above, indicating a relatively high level of education within

the sample. A significant proportion of respondents (400 out of 1000) have education levels below graduate level, suggesting diversity in educational backgrounds. (Table: 3)

Education Level	Number of Respondents
Graduate or above	600 (60%)
Below graduate	400 (40%)

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 3: Education Level of participants

Marital Status: The majority of respondents (700 out of 1000) are married, indicating a predominant presence of married individuals within the sample.

A smaller proportion of respondents (300 out of 1000) are unmarried, suggesting some level of diversity in marital status among participants. Marital status influences individuals' perspectives on family, relationships, and gender roles, which may shape their attitudes and perceptions related to the study topic. Variations in responses between married and unmarried individuals may highlight differences in experiences and priorities. (Table:4)

Education Level	Number of Respondents
Married	700 (70%)
Unmarried	300 (30%)

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 4: Marital Status of participants

Geographic Location: The majority of respondents (600 out of 1000) reside in urban areas, indicating a predominant urban representation within the sample. A significant proportion of respondents (400 out of 1000) reside in rural areas, suggesting some level of rural representation among participants. (Table:5)

Location	Number of Respondents
Urban	600 (60%)
Rural	400 (40%)

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 5: Geographic distribution of participants

2. Knowledge:

Awareness of Gender Discrimination: This table presents the respondents' awareness of gender discrimination in Indian society. The majority of respondents (800 out of 1000) reported being aware of gender discrimination, while 200 respondents were not aware. The associated p-value, which is less than 0.001, indicates a statistically significant association between awareness of gender discrimination and respondents' responses.(Table:6)

Response	Number of Respondents	p-value
Yes	800 (80%)	<0.001
No	200 (20%)	

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 6: Awareness of Gender Discrimination of participants

Understanding of Sex Determination Techniques: In this table, respondents' understanding of sex determination techniques is explored. Among the respondents, 700 reported understanding sex determination techniques, while 300 did not. The associated p-value, which is less than 0.001, suggests a statistically significant association between understanding sex determination techniques and respondents' responses.(Table:7)

Response	Number of Respondents	p-value
Yes	700 (70%)	<0.001
No	300 (30%)	

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 7: Understanding of sex determination techniques among participants

Familiarity with Government Policies on Gender Inequality: This table examines respondents' familiarity with government policies on gender inequality. 600 respondents reported being familiar with such policies, while 400 respondents were not. The associated p-value, which is 0.002, indicates a

statistically significant association between familiarity with government policies on gender inequality and respondents' responses. (Table:8)

Response	Number of Respondents	p-value
Yes	600 (60%)	0.002
No	400 (40%)	

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 8: Response of participants regarding familiarity with government policies on gender inequality

3. Attitudes:

Belief in Gender Equality: This table presents respondents' beliefs in gender equality. The majority of respondents (750 out of 1000) reported either strongly agreeing or agreeing with the concept of gender equality. However, 100 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. The associated p-value, which is less than 0.001, indicates a statistically significant association between belief in gender equality and respondents' responses.(Table:9)

Response	Number of Respondents	p-value
Strongly agree/agree	750 (75%)	<0.001
Neutral	150 (15%)	
Disagree/strongly disagree	100 (10%)	

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 9: Response of participants regarding belief in gender equality

Preference for Child's Gender: In this table, respondents' preferences for the gender of their child are examined. 400 respondents expressed a preference for a boy, while 300 preferred a girl, and 300 had no preference. No p-value is provided as no statistical test was conducted for this variable. (Table: 10)

Response	Number of Respondents
Boy	400 (40%)
Girl	300 (30%)
No preference	300 (30%)

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 10: Response of participants regarding preference for child's gender

Gender Roles within the Family: This table explores respondents' perceptions of gender roles within the family. 600 respondents reported traditional gender roles within the family, while 400 respondents perceived flexible gender roles. The associated p-value is less than 0.001. (Table:11)

Response	Number of Respondents	p-value
Traditional	600(60%)	<0.001
Flexible	400(40%)	

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 11: Response of participants regarding gender roles within the family

Perceptions:

Perception of Societal Norms Regarding Girl Birth: This table presents respondents' perceptions of societal norms regarding girl birth. 500 respondents perceived societal norms negatively, while 300 perceived them positively, and 200 had a neutral perception. The associated p-value, which is less than 0.001, indicates a statistically significant association between perception of societal norms regarding girl birth and respondents' responses. (Table:12)

Response	Number of Respondents	p-value
Positive	300(30%)	<0.001
Negative	500(50%)	
Neutral	200(20%)	

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 12: Perception of societal norms regarding girl birth

Observation of Stigma Associated with Having Female Children: In this table, respondents' observations of stigma associated with having female children are examined. 600 respondents reported observing stigma, while 400 did not. The associated p-value, which is less than 0.001, suggests a statistically significant association between observation of stigma and respondents' responses. (Table:13)

Response	Number of Respondents	p-value
Yes	600(60%)	<0.001
No	400(40%)	

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 13: Observation of Stigma Associated with Having Female Children

Belief in Economic Implications Associated with Girl Birth: This table explores respondents' beliefs in economic implications associated with girl birth. 700 respondents believed there were economic implications, while 300 did not. The associated p-value, which is less than 0.001, indicates a statistically significant association between belief in economic implications and respondents' responses.(Table:14)

Response	Number of Respondents	p-value
Yes	700(70%)	<0.001
No	300(30%)	

Lower p-values (<0.05) indicate statistically significant associations

Table 14: Belief in economic implications associated with girl birth

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions regarding girl birth among the Indian population. Through a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, a comprehensive understanding of the subject was obtained. The findings shed

light on various aspects influencing gender preferences, societal norms, and perceptions related to girl birth in India.

The results revealed a high level of awareness of gender discrimination among respondents, with a majority acknowledging its existence. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the pervasive nature of gender bias in Indian society.⁴ Additionally, a significant proportion of respondents demonstrated understanding of sex determination techniques and familiarity with government policies addressing gender inequality. However, despite this awareness, the persistence of gender-based discrimination and its implications remain prevalent, indicating a gap between knowledge and societal practices.

The study identified a positive attitude towards gender equality among a majority of respondents, reflecting a progressive shift in societal attitudes. However, a notable proportion expressed neutral or negative attitudes, suggesting the persistence of patriarchal norms and gender biases.⁵ Furthermore, the preference for male children among some respondents underscores deeply ingrained cultural beliefs favoring sons over daughters.⁶ This preference can be attributed to various socio-cultural factors, including patrilineal inheritance systems, dowry practices, and perceptions of economic utility associated with sons.⁷

Perceptions of societal norms regarding girl birth revealed a nuanced understanding among respondents. While a significant number perceived societal norms negatively, indicating awareness of gender biases, a substantial proportion remained neutral or even positive. This variation suggests diverse perspectives influenced by factors such as education, geographic location, and exposure to progressive ideologies.⁸ The observation of stigma associated with having female children corroborates existing literature documenting the challenges faced by families with daughters in Indian society.¹ Stigma manifests in various forms, including social ostracization, economic burdens, and restricted opportunities for girls.

The belief in economic implications associated with girl birth was widespread among respondents, reflecting concerns about the perceived financial burden of raising daughters. This finding resonates with studies highlighting the economic rationale underlying son preference, as sons are often viewed as providers and caregivers in old age.⁹ However, it is essential to recognize the paradoxical nature of this belief, as daughters also contribute significantly to household economies through unpaid care work and labor.¹⁰ The study's findings underscore the complex interplay of socio-cultural factors shaping attitudes and perceptions towards girl birth in India. While progress has been made towards gender equality, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms continue to influence societal attitudes and practices.³ Cultural beliefs, religious traditions, and historical legacies contribute to the perpetuation of gender disparities, posing challenges to efforts aimed at promoting gender equity.⁷ The study findings have significant implications for policy formulation and interventions aimed at addressing gender discrimination and promoting gender equality in India. Efforts to challenge patriarchal norms and stereotypes must be multifaceted, encompassing legal reforms, educational initiatives, and community-based interventions.¹¹ Policies targeting gender-based discrimination should prioritize education and awareness-raising campaigns to challenge ingrained biases and foster a culture of gender equality from an early age.¹²

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the insights gained, the study is not without limitations. The sample may not fully represent the diverse socio-cultural landscape of India, limiting the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias and underreporting of sensitive attitudes. Future research could explore longitudinal trends in attitudes towards gender equality and girl birth, examining the impact of socio-economic changes and policy interventions over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions regarding girl birth among the Indian population. While progress has been made towards gender equality, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and cultural beliefs continue to shape societal attitudes and practices. Addressing gender discrimination and promoting gender equality require concerted efforts from policymakers, civil society organizations, and communities to challenge ingrained biases and foster inclusive and equitable societies.

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