

Identifying Gender Preference, Gender Discrimination and its Contributing Factors among Eligible Couples in Selected Rural and Urban Population in West Bengal

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Abstract

A comparative study was conducted to identify gender preference, gender discrimination and its contributing factors among eligible couples between selected rural and urban population of West Bengal. Out of 200 women 100 from urban and 100 from rural population were selected by multi-stage random sampling. Gender preference and gender discrimination were identified by 'structured opinionnaire'. The study showed that the son preference is more among rural eligible couples than among the urban eligible couples whereas daughter preference is more among urban people. In case of gender discrimination it was seen that 52 percent urban population had discriminating behaviour against daughter whereas in rural population it was 60 percent. There was a significant association between education, occupation of husband and family income with gender preference and gender discrimination in both areas at 0.05 level. There was a significant difference in gender preference among rural and urban population as evidenced by 't' test ($t=3.67$ at $df=198$). The study has implications in the field of nursing practice, research, education and administration to take measures to reduce discrimination against daughter by reducing contributing factors and increase awareness about importance of girl child and facilities available for girl children.

Women continue to suffer from persistent inequalities in both poor and rich societies. In general, women carry most of the burden of caring for their children and domestic work. Many developing countries including India have displayed gender inequality in education, employment and health. There are vast differences in education level of two sexes (as per 2011 census, literacy rate of rural men-78.57% and women- 58.75% although this difference is less in urban area i.e. men-89.67% and women- 79.92%).

Considering the traditional preference for male child in India, it is not surprising to observe a more or less adverse sex ratio from the first census in 1871; it is 940 women for every 1000 men according to census 2011. A steady decline in sex-ratio in recent years has been due to widespread availability of ultrasound facilities. About 70 percent of all abortions in Delhi take place because of female foetus. Sex ratio is an important social indicator measuring status of male-female equality in society. Desire for male child manifests so strong that parents have no both-eration about repeated, closely spaced pregnancies,

premature deaths and even terminating child before it is born. In West Bengal adverse sex ratio and preference for male child are two indicators for gender discrimination. Data from 2001 census depicts a decline in overall sex ratio from 934 (1991) to 920 (2001); it varies from 904 in rural areas and 891 in urban areas in India. In West Bengal, it is 932 in urban areas and 951 in rural areas. Thus there is clear difference in sex ratio in urban and rural areas.

A long-standing preference for sons over daughters reflects a patriarchal culture that favours the familial and economic contributions of men over the contributions of women (Dasgupta et al, 2003). Discrimination against girls in immunisation, nutrition, and other health care practices leads to greater female mortality relative to male mortality during early childhood (Oster 2009). In rural community the position of girl in her family from infancy to old age is that of continued deprivation. During pregnancy family members are interested to know the sex of the foetus and not the health of the mother which leads to her neglect in the antenatal period. Birth of a daughter is a common cause of domestic violence of the mother.

Objectives

The study was set with the following objectives

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1. To assess the gender preference among eligible couple of rural and urban population.
2. To assess the gender discrimination among eligible couple of rural and urban population.
3. To identify the factors associated with gender preference and gender discrimination among eligible couple in rural area and urban area.
4. To find out the association between selected demographic factors, gender preference and gender discrimination.
5. To compare the contributing factors, gender preference & gender discrimination between selected rural and urban areas.

Literature Review

Dasgupta et al did a cross-country study regarding persisting son preference in East and South Asia. The effect of discrimination of female child reflected in terms of missing girl children before conception, by continuing childbearing until reaching their desired number of sons, through sex-selective abortion. This was reflected in sex ratios at birth which are more masculine than the normal biological range of around 105–106 boys for every 100 girls born.

As reported by Ananda Bazar Patrika dated 6 November 2014, in Belur (Howrah), a newborn daughter was killed by her father and thrown in Ganga river. The main cause of killing was no preference of daughter. It was second child of his second marriage. Before that he had two sons, and wanted to get another son. Delivery of his wife was conducted in home by a Dai and after delivery his wife was admitted in a local Hospital.

Chavada & Bhagyalaxmi (2009) carried out a study to know the effect of socio-cultural factors on the preference of the sex of the children among 385 married women in the reproductive age group of 15-49 years during March 2007 - April 2008 in randomly selected areas of Ahmedabad district (Gujarat). The study identified a significant association between education and son-preference. Preference for male child was higher among the rural women than among the urban women. Higher son preference was due to the demand by the in-laws or pressure from the other family members. Keeping the family line alive was the main reason for preference for a son followed by old age security. The foremost reason for non-preference for a girl-child was the fact that girls do not stay with the parents after marriage.

Materials and Methods

It was a community based, descriptive, comparative study done from 29 September 2014 to 22 November 2014. The sample was collected by multi-stage random sampling method. Total 200 eligible couples were interviewed by using structured opinionnaire. For development of this tool reviewing of extensive research and non-research-based literature, peer group discussion, experts' guidance, establishing validity and reliability of the tool were done. The tool consisted with four parts:

Part-I: Demographic data.

Part II: Structured opinionnaire containing 12 items on gender preference.

Part III: Structured opinionnaire containing 27 items on gender discrimination in terms of child rearing practice, education, nutrition, friendship, home management, right of the individual.

Part IV: Structured interview schedule containing 5 items of multiple answers on contributing factors of gender preference and gender discrimination. One rural and one urban area were selected by the multistage random sampling. After permission from concerned authorities separate eligible couples register was collected from each village and each ward from the Enayetpur Sub-centre of rural community and Tarakeswar mu-

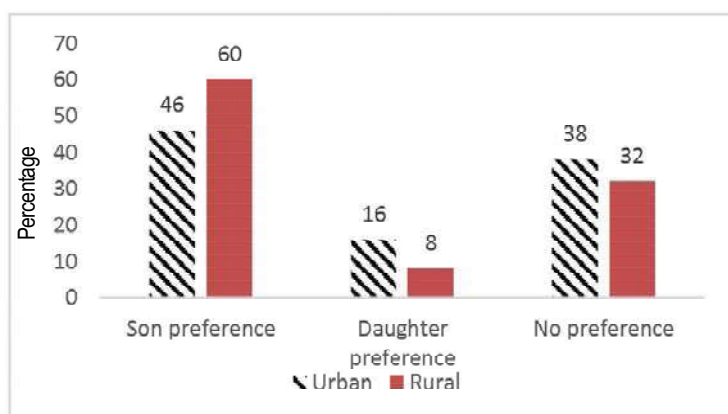


Fig 1: Distribution of eligible couples according to the gender.

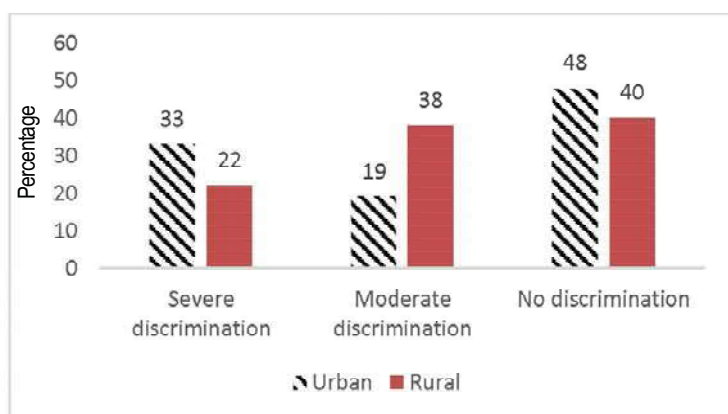


Fig 2: Distribution of eligible couple according to the presence of discriminating behaviour.

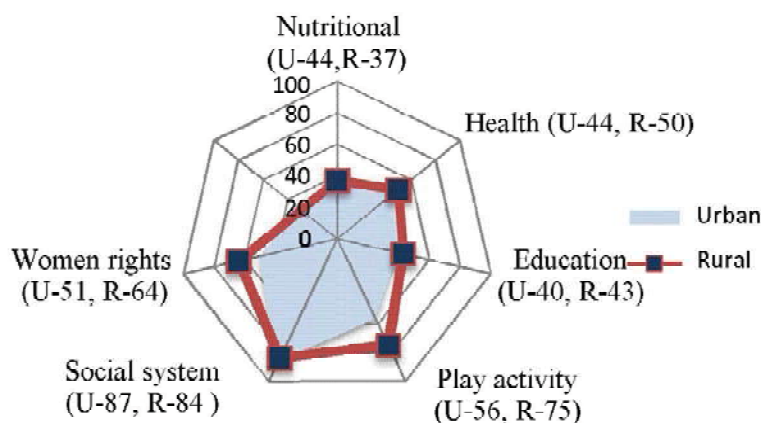


Fig 3: Frequency distribution of eligible couple according to the areas of discriminating behaviour.

nicipality of urban community. Sample was selected randomly. The investigator visited door to door to collect data with the help of ASHA in the rural community and Honorary Health Worker in urban community. The eligible couples were informed about data collection in advance. The data analysis was planned to include both descriptive & inferential statistics.

The eligible couples included in the study needed to have one child; understand Bengali and willing to participate in the study. Mentally challenged and acutely ill couples were excluded.

The demographic characteristics were computed in terms of frequency and percentage, bar diagram and pie chart. Unpaired t test was used to compare the statistical significance between two groups on the basis of gender preference and gender discrimination. Correlation & coefficient was used to determine the relationship of gender preference and gender discrimination with selected demographic factors (monthly income, number of children / sons / daughters). Chi square was used to determine the association of gender preference and gender discrimination with selected factors (education and occupation of both husband and wife, monthly family income).

Table 1: Distribution of urban & rural eligible couple according to the personal preference of gender (U-100, R-100)

Preference for son (%)			Preference for daughter (%)		
	Urban	Rural		Urban	Rural
Self	56	69	Self	45	37
Husband	90	92	Husband	12	4
In-law's house	73	85	In-law's house	29	13
Relatives	76	80	Relatives	24	20

Results

Out of 200 eligible couple, son preference was more (60%) in rural area than in urban (46%). But it is reversed in case of daughter preference where 16 percent urban eligible couples and just half of rural eligible couple (8%) had daughter preference (Fig 1). Regarding gender discrimination, severe and no discrimination were more (33% and 48%) among urban eligible couples than among rural

eligible couples (22% and 40%). But in case of moderate level of discrimination it was two times more (38%) among rural eligible couples than among urban eligible couples (19%) (Fig 2). Discriminating behaviour against daughter was quite common in both communities related to the social systems (urban-87, rural-84) (Fig. 3). Preference of son was more among husbands both in urban and rural communities (90% and 92%) but it was reverse in case of daughter preference (urban-12% and rural-4%) (Table 1). The most common reasons for son preference in both populations were: helps in earning money for the family (86% & 93%), old age security (79% & 76%), family propagation is possible by the son only (72% and 76%), ancestral rites belongs to son only (60% & 56%), for protection of family property (57% and 75%) (Fig 4). Most common reasons for non-preference of daughter in both population were after rearing up for certain period daughter goes to in-law's house (75% and 83%) & dowry is needed for girl's marriage (58% and 71%). Reasons for daughter preference in both populations were: son & daughter have equal value (45% and 40%) and daughters are obedient (42% and 30%) (Fig 5). A significant association was seen between education (both husband and wife), occupation of husband and family income, number of children, number of daughters with gender preference and gender discrimination in both areas at 0.05 level (Tables 2 and 3). Significant difference was seen in gender preference of both areas ($t=3.67$ at df 198) (Table 4) whereas no difference was seen in gender discrimination ($t=0.25$ at df 198) at 0.05 level (Table 5).

Discussion

The findings revealed that son preference was more among rural eligible couples than among urban couples whereas daughter preference was

Table 2: Association of gender preference with selected demographic factors among eligible couples of urban and rural population (N=200; Urban-100, Rural-100)

URBAN					RURAL				
Variables	GP			Chi square	Variables	GP			Chi square
	Son	Dau	No			Son	Dau	No	
Occupation of husband					Occupation of husband				
Service	6	15	19	37.46 *	Service	3	6	4	30.59*
Others	40	1	19		Others	57	2	28	
Occupation of wife					Occupation of wife				
Working women	14	9	17	3.86	Working Women	8	2	5	0.76
House wife	32	7	21		House wife	52	6	27	
Family income (Rs.)					Family income (Rs.)				
Below 5000	33	1	10	28.43*	Below 5000	33	1	9	9.27*
At or above 5000	13	15	28		At or above 5000	27	7	23	

*Chi- square df(2)=5.99 and df(4)=9.49, p<0.05 significant; GP= gender preference.

Table 3: Association of gender preference with husband and wife's education in rural population (N=200; Urban-100, Rural-100)

URBAN				RURAL			
Variables	GP		Chi square	Variables	GP		Chi square
	Son	Other than son			Son	Other than son	
Education of husband				Education of husband			
Illiterate	20	5	26.92 *	Illiterate	17	28	17.98*
Below secondary	12	5		Below secondary	32	11	
At or above secondary	14	44		At or above secondary	11	1	
Education of wife				Education of wife			
Illiterate	20	6	20.38*	Illiterate	11	2	26.49*
Below secondary	14	11		Below secondary	26	2	
At or above secondary	12	37		At or above secondary	29	36	

*Chi- square df(2)=5.99, p<0.05 significant; GP= gender preference.

more among urban than rural population. In case of gender discrimination it was seen that among urban population 52 percent had discriminating behaviour against daughter whereas among rural population it was 60 percent. There was a significant association between education, occupation of

husband and family income with gender preference and gender discrimination in both areas at 0.05 level. There was a significant difference in gender preference among rural and urban population as evidenced by 't' test (t=3.67 at df 198).

Table 4: Association of gender discrimination with selected demographic factors among eligible couples of urban population (N=200; Urban-100, Rural-100)

URBAN					RURAL				
Variables	GD			Chi square	Variables	GD			Chi square
	Sev	mod	no			Sev	mod	No	
Education of husband					Education of husband				
Illiterate	20	2	3	42.02 *	Illiterate	8	2	2	23.42*
Below sec	7	5	5		Below sec	11	20	12	
At or above sec	6	12	40		At or above sec	3	16	26	
Education of wife					Education of wife				
Illiterate	19	3	4	37.31*	Illiterate	9	3	1	39.93*
Below sec	9	8	8		Below sec	10	14	4	
At or above sec	5	8	36		At or above sec	3	21	35	
Occupation of husband					Occupation of husband				
Service	3	5	32	31.77*	Unskilled labour	12	19	10	31.77*
Self-employed	9	6	9		Farmer	1	1	2	
Unskilled labour	21	8	7		other	9	18	28	
Occupation of wife					Occupation of wife				
Working women	12	3	25	7.74*	Working women	4	3	8	2.48
House wife	21	16	23		House wife	18	35	32	
Family income (Rs.)					Family income (Rs.)				
Below 5000	23	9	11	17.63*	Below 5000	15	19	9	6.88*
At or above 5000	10	10	37		At or above 5000	7	19	31	

*Chi-square $df(2)=5.99$ and $df(4)=9.49$, $p<0.05$ significant, GD= gender discrimination.

Similar implication is reported by Chavada & Bhagyalaxmi (2009) who conducted a cross-sectional study among 385 married women in the reproductive age group.

In present study, discriminating behaviour against daughter regarding nutrition was seen among 44 percent of urban area eligible couples and 37 percent of rural area couples. Dey & Chaudhuri also concluded that 55.9 percent, 51.4 percent and 42.3 percent of the girls were underweight, stunted and wasted respectively compared to 46.6 percent, 40.5 percent and 35.3 percent of the boys. Our study also brings out that major reasons for son preference were: helps in earning money for the family (urban-86%, rural-93%), old age security (urban-79%, rural-76%), family propagation is possible by the son only (urban-72%, rural- 76%), for protection of family property (urban-57%, rural-75%), ancestral rites belongs

to son only (urban-60%, rural-56%). Similar findings were reported by Praveen (2011) who conducted a cross-sectional study to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice regarding gender preference and female foeticide among pregnant women attending antenatal clinic of RIMS Hospital, Kadapa.

Despite government claims regarding implementations of law and regulation for reducing female foeticide and women empowerment, the son preference and women discrimination is still so strong that even educated women also prefer the son in rural area specially. Moreover it is necessary to great efforts by women empowerment and intensive information, education and communication campaigns.

Recommendations

Similar study can be replicated in a large size; a study can be conducted as a qualitative method through

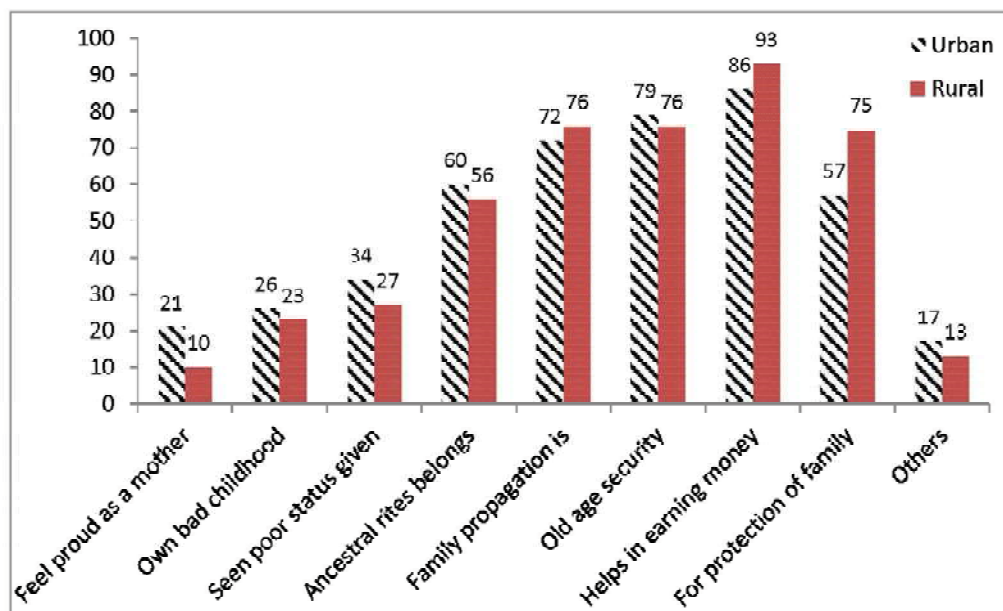


Fig 4: Percentage distribution of eligible couple according to the contributing factors of son preference.

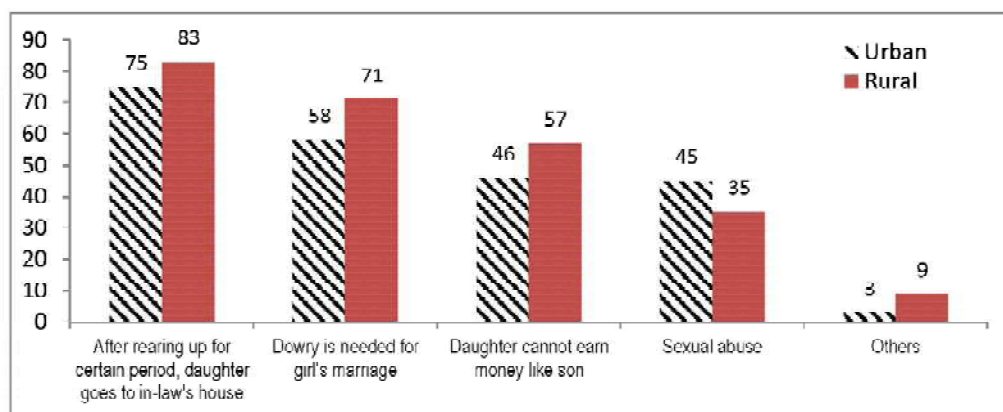


Fig 5: Percentage distribution of eligible couple according to the cause of non-preference of daughter.

Table 5: 't' value showing the difference between rural & urban eligible couple on gender preference (N-200; U-100, R-100)

Gender preference	Mean	MD	SD _D	SE _{MD}	t- value
Rural	27.66	3.16	23.88	3.34	3.67*
Urban	24.5				

t df(198) at 0.05 level 1.97, $p < 0.05$ * Significant.

Table 6: t-value showing the difference between rural & urban eligible couple on Gender discrimination (N-200; U-100, R-100)

Gender discrimination	Mean	MD	SD _D	SE _{MD}	t- value
Urban	51.25	0.48	52.60	7.36	0.25
Rural	50.77				

t df(198) at 0.05 level 1.97

focus group interview; a longitudinal study may be conducted on child rearing practice of girl children; a study can be conducted on quality of life of adolescence girls; a study may be conducted through direct

observation method.

Conclusion

Gender preference and gender discrimination is still present in society both in rural area and the urban area. But son preference is more among rural eligible couple than urban population. The main cause is prevailing value of son in society.

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