

## STUDY OF LIFE SATISFACTION OF MARRIED WOMEN IN RELATION TO FEMALE FOETICIDE AND GIRL CHILD

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### ABSTRACT

*In the words of Murthy, 2002, we talk endlessly on the podium. We worship goddesses. We are proud to say that women have the same rights as men in our constitution. The Ardhanareeshwara form of Lord Shiva shows that he too had consented to this equality. Our scriptures and our history tell of women with extraordinary qualities. But, in reality, do our women really feel secure? Do they actually enjoy freedom? Do they enjoy rights in society? Maybe a few do. The present study conducted in the state of Uttarakhand, India, aims to study the life satisfaction of married women in relation to their status and the cause behind female foeticide. A total of 600 married women were taken, divided into three groups –those with two male children, those with two female children and the ones who had one male and one female child. The study gives an insight into the six areas of life satisfaction of these women, who were found to be differently treated by their family, they were ridiculed only because they did the ‘sin of bearing a girl child’, or were worshipped for bearing a male child. The analysis of variance showed values obtained for different factors of Life Satisfaction Scale as -Health Satisfaction 14.8, Personal Satisfaction 14.95, Economic Satisfaction 22.47, Marital Satisfaction 20.05, Social Satisfaction 13, and Job Satisfaction 20.01. There is a long way to go before we would be able to say that the world has become a safe place for women. Various measures need to be taken, and various agencies need to join hands to bring in the awareness.*

**Keywords:** Son Preference, Girl Child, Married Women, Life Satisfaction, Female Foeticide

### INTRODUCTION

Life satisfaction is the way a person perceives how his or her life has been and how they feel about where it is going in the future, a measure of wellbeing. In the modern life, which is so full of stresses of various kinds, life satisfaction has acquired supreme significance. Life satisfaction is manifested through health, economic, marital personal, social, family and job satisfaction. Lack of satisfaction may be reflected in lack of adjustment in either of the areas identified earlier herein. The process of adjustment also by its inherent nature involves active coping with internal and external satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

It still remains a trend all over the world for women to compare with each other on various terms, which includes son preference, and the status associated with the birth of a male child in the family. In a study of Sousa and Lyubomirsky (2001) women’s hostility towards other women were inversely associated with their life satisfaction. The study suggested that

people's perceptions of their life satisfaction are in part due to comparisons that they make between what they have, what they want, what they used to have, and what others have. Thus, hostility toward other women may be a consequence of unfavourable social comparisons, the recognition that another woman is clearly better off may be related to dissatisfaction with one's own life.

A girl leaves the home of the father and enters the home of the in-laws in the hope of gaining the same love and care that she has received in her home, but what she finds is quite contrary to it, for with entering the door of the in-laws the expectation of bearing a son starts and ends only with the birth of a son else her status goes down with each female child birth. 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). 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). 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)

Sex determination tests are seen as providing a 'reproductive choice' - a choice to decide to have a boy or a girl. 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.

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. 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.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present study was conducted in the state of Uttarakhand, India with the aim of finding out the life satisfaction 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 914. 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 life satisfaction of women, with special concern to the Uttarakhand state.

**HYPOTHESIS**

There will be no significant difference between different groups of married women on factors of LSS<sup>1</sup>.

**METHODOLOGY**

**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 sample was classified into three groups namely 2Mc<sup>2</sup>-women with two male child, 1Fc1Mc/1Mc1Fc<sup>3</sup>- Women with one male and one female child and 2Fc<sup>4</sup> –women with two female child. Each group comprised of 200 women.

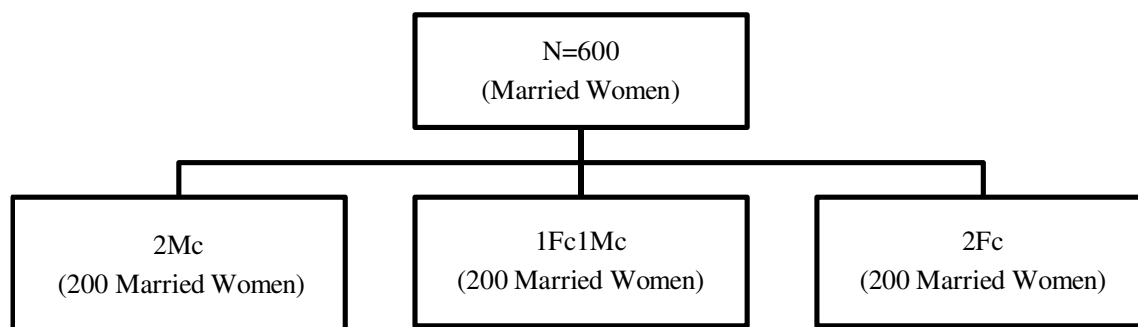


Figure 1. Showing the Sample for the study conducted

**The Tools Used and the Data Collection Procedure**

Life Satisfaction Scale (L.S.S) – Dr. Q.G.Alam and Dr. Ramji Srivastava

The Life Satisfaction Scale comprises of sixty items related to six areas of life viz. Health, Personal, Economic, Marital, Social and Job. The responses are to be given in Yes/ No. Yes responses indicate satisfaction, whereas No indicate dissatisfaction. Reliability obtained for the test was .84 while validity was .74 and .84 respectively.

**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 also paid to local government and private hospitals to collect the data. Result was compiled and tabulated with the help of analysis of variance.

<sup>1</sup> LSS-Life Satisfaction Scale

<sup>2</sup> 2MC-Married Women with two male children

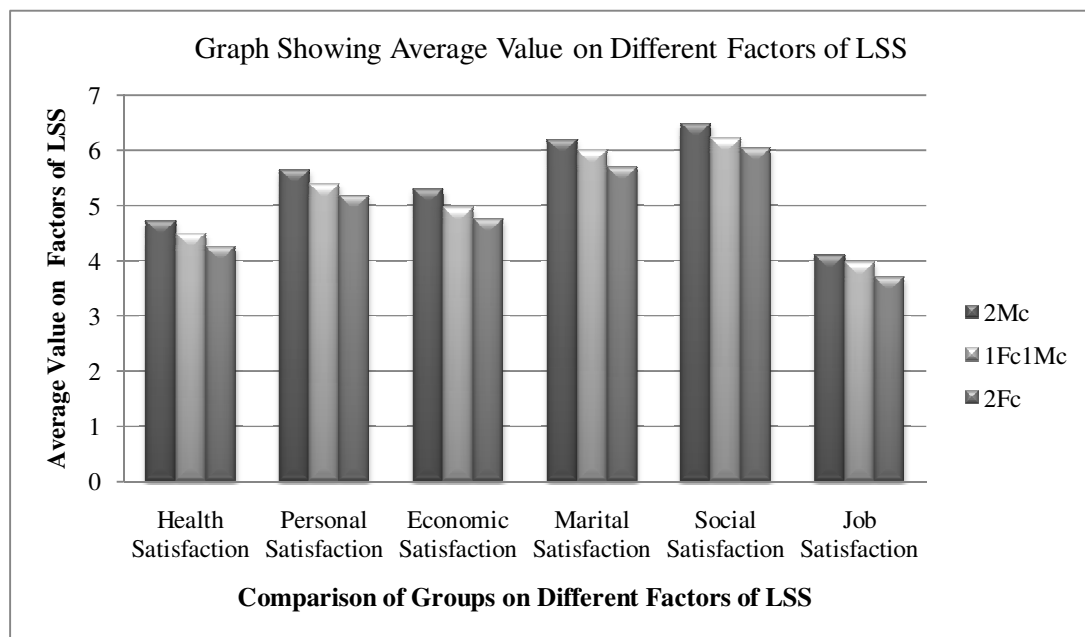
<sup>3</sup> 1Fc1Mc/1Mc1Fc- Married Women with one male and one female child

<sup>4</sup> 2Fc-Married Women with two female children

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Table 1. Showing Analysis of Variance Value Obtained for Different Factors of LSS**

<i>Factors of LSS</i>	<i>'F' value Obtained for Different Factors</i>
<i>Health Satisfaction</i>	<i>14.86</i>
<i>Personal Satisfaction</i>	<i>14.95</i>
<i>Economic Satisfaction</i>	<i>22.47</i>
<i>Marital Satisfaction</i>	<i>20.05</i>
<i>Social Satisfaction</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>	<i>20.01</i>



Graph 1. Showing Average Value on Different Factors of LSS

The health satisfaction can be understood in common terms as the satisfaction derived by an individual through good health which comprises of a healthy mind, body and soul. The health satisfaction scale of LSS tries to measure the same for women belonging to three groups. The 'F' value obtained is  $f(2,597)=14.86$ , which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. With continuous neglect and suppression being experienced by 2Fc group women due to absence of a male child, the females do not feel internally happy and being under constant pressure also experience high amount of stress, hypertension leading to high blood pressure rates, anxiety, headaches, body pain etc. as reported by them. The women of the 2Mc group and 1Fc1Mc group are found to be better satisfied with their health and thus have a more careful attitude towards their own self. As per their responses they are more conscious about their health and take good care of their sleep and dietary habits too.

Press Trust of India, February 24, 2013 revealed that five doctors from various hospitals in Kanpur, two nurses and one ward boy were arrested following raids conducted by the police,

as told by SSP Yashasvi Yadav. Seven ultrasound centres were also sealed. "The arrests were made following a sting operation by an NGO which was shown to District Magistrate M P Aggarwal who ordered the arrests. "They went to seven hospitals and all of them agreed for the test and abortion if desired," Mr Yadav said. In the video clip the doctors were seen asking Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 10,000 for the sex determination test, he said, adding that a case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PC-PNDT) Act has been registered against the accused.

The web definition describes 'personal satisfaction as the extent to which an individual's life has satisfaction and optimum quality. Looking at the data we are able to interpret the 'F' value obtained as  $f(2,597)=14.95$  which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. The women of the 2Mc group enjoy the highest score in personal satisfaction; the dramatic change experienced by them with the birth of two sons in the family produces greater degree of personal satisfaction. Such women report themselves as getting better status and respect in the family, the freedom to express and move around easily in the society with feelings of pride for 'being mother of sons'. On the other hand the women of only daughters neither seemed happy with their physical appearance, nor very willing to extend help to people, reason being they so overwhelmed by their unsatisfactory living conditions.

As in societies of East Asia, North Africa, the Middle East, and other parts of South Asia, in India couples have been observed to have a strong preference for sons over daughters (Arnold 1996, 1997; Cleland, Verrall, Vaessen and 1983; UN 1981, 1985; Williamson 1976) and to accord a low status to women (UN 1995).

The economic satisfaction for women of three groups means the freedom and liberty to take independent financial decisions for the family or at-least be a part of them. The data generated through LSS for economic satisfaction gives a 'F' value of  $f(2,597)=22.47$  which is significant at both 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. Thus we are able to understand that the women of 2Mc and 1Mc1Fc group experience better economic status thus we find the status of women growing with their child with son bearing capacity. The 2Fc group women do not experience such satisfaction. The women with sons find their economic demands easily fulfilled and also an increased share and participation in the financial decisions of the family. Their opinion is valued and given heed too, while exactly opposite is experienced by the women with two girls. With high economic satisfaction such women are more satisfied; the family does not blame them for the future trouble of arranging for dowry and other related expenses of the girl child.

A study by Kaur (1993) in a village of Chandigarh reveals that 95 per cent of women favoured female foeticide, since as quoted by one woman, "we are ashamed to have a female foetus". The study also reveals that socio-economic pressures are such that even those who consider abortion to be a sin, are prepared to abort a female foetus.

The web description of Marital satisfaction refers to an individual's subjective experience of the marriage. The LSS data on marital satisfaction reveals the 'F' value for three groups as  $f(2,597)=20.05$  which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. The women of the 2Fc group experience the least marital satisfaction, these women do not get the much desired respect from their husbands, for despite doing the household works, listening to the ill-words of in-laws, the only fault with them remains of not producing a male heir for the family. Such women report not being able to gain acceptance in the family due to their producing a girl child again and again. The easiest way to them now appears of aborting female fetuses if they wish to remain in the house of their husband. Being able to express them, gaining the love of the family and husband remains a distant dream for them till they produce a son. With

discriminations against themselves and their daughter's, women find it the most justified way out of the situation to kill their own girl child in the womb.

The 2Mc group, as seen earlier also, experience better privilege in their marital relationship too. Such women experience more closeness with their husband, expressiveness, faith, respect, love and care. As reported by them their husbands are more caring and accepting towards them and thus they enjoy a better status at home. Such husbands even like to spend more time with their sons and wife.

Spanier and Glick (1981) find that divorce is more likely if all children are girls, especially if the mother has relatively little education. Morgan, Lye and Condran (1988) find that sons reduce the risk of marital disruption by 9 percent more than do daughters.

The social satisfaction as interpreted according to LSS means the social standing which an individual sees for him in the society. The women in all the three groups have one thing in common, the desire to hold a high social prestige, value and respect and in this case, it is related to the birth of a male child. The LSS examined the social satisfaction of women belonging to three groups. The 'F' value obtained is  $f(2,597)=13$  which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. It was found that women who had 2Fc reported feeling more ashamed of their own self for producing girls and no boys. They felt themselves as the issue of talk every time they attended some social functions, on questions being asked about their future plans related to birth of son, so as to complete the family. The in-laws of such women also felt ashamed of them and avoid social presence, thus venting their anger and fury on the poor victim whose fault remains not been able to give birth to sons. The birth of a son can improve the mother's position through different channels. One potential mechanism is that the birth of a boy increases the respect of the mother within the household, and ensures that the woman is accepted as a full family member. This acceptance may then lead to more responsibilities in household decision-making being transferred to her (Das Gupta et al. 2002).

The 2Mc women enjoy better status for the birth of a son brings prestige in the form of economic relief, male labor force participation in India generally is significantly higher than that of women, so having a son may indeed lead to better old-age support for the parents (Chung and Das Gupta 2007, Rosenzweig and Schultz 1982, Rose 2000)

Women of 2Fc group report themselves being under constant fear of being abandoned by their husband, or a second marriage by their husband to secure a son. A statement noted that, "the birth of a son enhances his status, while that of a girl lowers his head" (UN Agencies, 2012). According to the statement, "it is also women who have to bear the consequences of giving birth to an unwanted girl child, these consequences can include violence, abandonment, divorce or even death, the statement adds."

Defining LSS on job satisfaction in terms of the groups selected means the satisfaction derived by women through jobs, keeping the criteria of their being mothers of sons, daughters or both. The 'F' value obtained for job satisfaction  $f(2,597)=20.01$  which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. The results show that the females of 2Mc group are more satisfied with their work environment in relation to the women with two girl child. Such women feel themselves free from the social pressures and therefore give a wing to their creative outputs in their job.

Such women are able to give a full bent to their potential and able to fully commit to their jobs. While on the other hand, the women of 2Fc group are unable to concentrate and perform



best, for as reported by them they are under pressure from their family. The women with male children are thus able to fulfill their duties at home and at job fully and enjoy the respect and freedom too, while the women having only female children many a times are even unable to move out of home and enjoy the freedom or are overburdened with the responsibilities of both home and outside as reported.

Sex-preference is very prevalent in Nigeria as well and is based on the notion of the role and value of males and females. Usually at birth, boys are valued and a grown man is traditionally viewed as the head, caretaker and breadwinner of his family. Women who give birth to female children are often blamed for ‘producing girls’, by even those who know that a man’s chromosomes usually determine the sex of the child (A Babington Ashaye, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

Women during interviews express a strong preference for having at least one son, and often at least two sons, among their children. There is some evidence, as well, of a desire to have one daughter, but having more than one daughter is generally not considered desirable.

An important aspect not to be neglected is sensitizing medical students regarding the adverse sex ratio while stressing upon the ethical issues involved in female feticide. 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 behaviour. 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 behaviour in the near future.

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