

Social and cultural factors influencing the perceptions related to girl child in the three regions of Andhra Pradesh

BILQUIS* AND K. MAYURI

Department of Human development and Family studies,
Acharya N.G. Ranga Agriculture University, Hyderabad (A.P.) India

ABSTRACT

The declining girl child sex ratio in Andhra Pradesh reflects the status of the girl child . The attitude and perceptions of men and women of younger and older age groups towards the girl child highlights the deep rooted conservative thoughts which have strong social and cultural base. This paper focuses on studying the perceptions of a mixed culture group from varied social settings. Four hundred and twenty people belonging to Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana regions of united Andhra Pradesh state were interviewed to find out the perceptions related to girl child. The study revealed that majority of the respondents irrespective of region, religion and socio-economic status opined that the society is not Girl child friendly and the customs and traditions favour the male child . Gender discrimination is still existing in the food , work and marriage related issues.

Key Words : Gender bias, Sex ratio, Andhra Pradesh, Perceptions, Girl child

INTRODUCTION

The sex composition by age group especially the 0-6 years is vital for studying the demographic trends of child population, its future patterns and particularly, the status of the girl child. The child sex ratio (under-6 years) in 2011 is 914 females for every 1,000 males, indicating a continuing preference for male children over females. Gender discrimination is most prevalent in Indian cultural ethnicity. Although female infanticide is now a crime in India, census data of the last two decades show a persisting male bias in sex ratios in several parts of the country (Muthulakshmi, 1997; Natarajan, 1997). The ratio of girls to boys in India is becoming increasingly skewed in favour of boys, as more and more girls are being selectively aborted as foetuses or killed after birth (Arnold, Kishor and Roy, 2001; Malaviya, 2005). In India, the state has enacted various women-specific and women-related legislations for the upliftment of women and improve the status of women in the society. But still the gender discrimination is highly prevalent in all the sectors. The mind set of the people needs to be changed to value girl child.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection :

The data related to perception towards the girl child was collected from the three major

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geographical regions of united Andhra Pradesh state. Four hundred and twenty men and women were interviewed selected from rural, urban and tribal areas. Men and women belonging to various socio – economic and cultural back grounds were selected for the study.

Tool :

A questionnaire was developed by the researcher for the purpose of the study. The schedule was pre tested and standardized before using in the field. The perception statements related to girl child issues like food, work, play, marriage, dowry and general issues were included in the schedule. Three point rating scale was given for the responses.

Sampling technique :

Stratified random sampling method was used for selecting the respondents.

Age group :

Men and women in the age group of 21 to 60 years were selected for the study.

Locale of the study :

Nine villages from Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana regions of united Andhra Pradesh state were selected (Three villages from each region).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis :

The responses given by the respondents were coded, scored and tabulated based on their scores. The responses of men and women for each statement in the three regions are presented below:

Majority of the respondents in the Rayalaseema region agreed with the statements that boys need more food than girls, it is not safe to allow the girls to play outside. About ninety eight percent of the respondents felt that older girls should remain indoors. The perceptions of the male and female respondents were similar with regard to food, education and play activities. Majority of the sample disagreed with the statements like by birth girls are stronger, girls need not go to school, boys need more food than girls and boys are more intelligent than girls. About twenty percent of the respondents remained undecided on the given statements. Male and female respondents of Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions had similar perceptions regarding girl child issues on food, education and play activities. Few elder age group (41-60 years) respondents opined that by birth girls are stronger and they have more chances of survival rate compared to boys. That is the reason why boys should be given more food to make them strong. This myth has no scientific base but the rural people do believe strongly in this. The tribal respondents felt that boys are more intelligent than girls and opined that girls need not go to school as they get married and go for labour work. Interestingly ninety eight percent of the respondents opined that older girls should remain indoors as it is not safe to leave the outside for longer and late hours. As the crime rate on girls are increasing parents and elders do not want their child to become a victim. All the respondents felt that girls need to be protected and expressed their worry about the safety and security of the girl child in the present society. Majority of the respondents opined that education is a must for the girl child. They said that girls should have the knowledge of life skills and become financially independent. The sample agreed that if a girl is educated then whole family is educated.

About seventy respondents from Andhra region disagreed with the statement that by birth girls are stronger than boys. But a considerable number of respondents agreed with the statement. They said that girls have better immunity power and fall sick less frequently than boys. Majority of the

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Table 1 : Perceptions related to girl child's food, education and play activities – Rayalaseema region

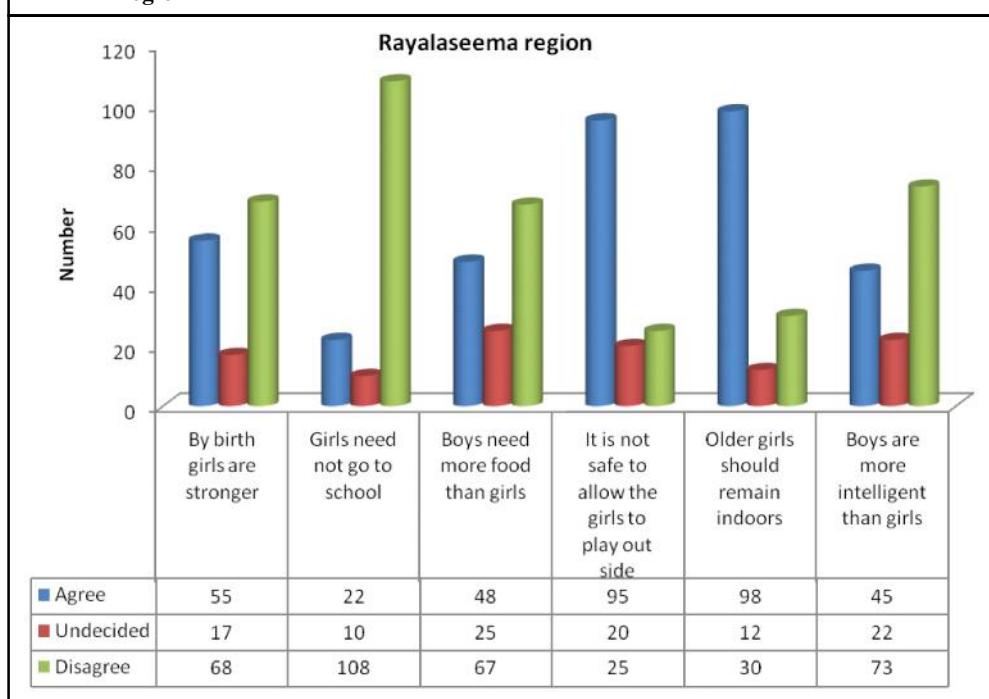
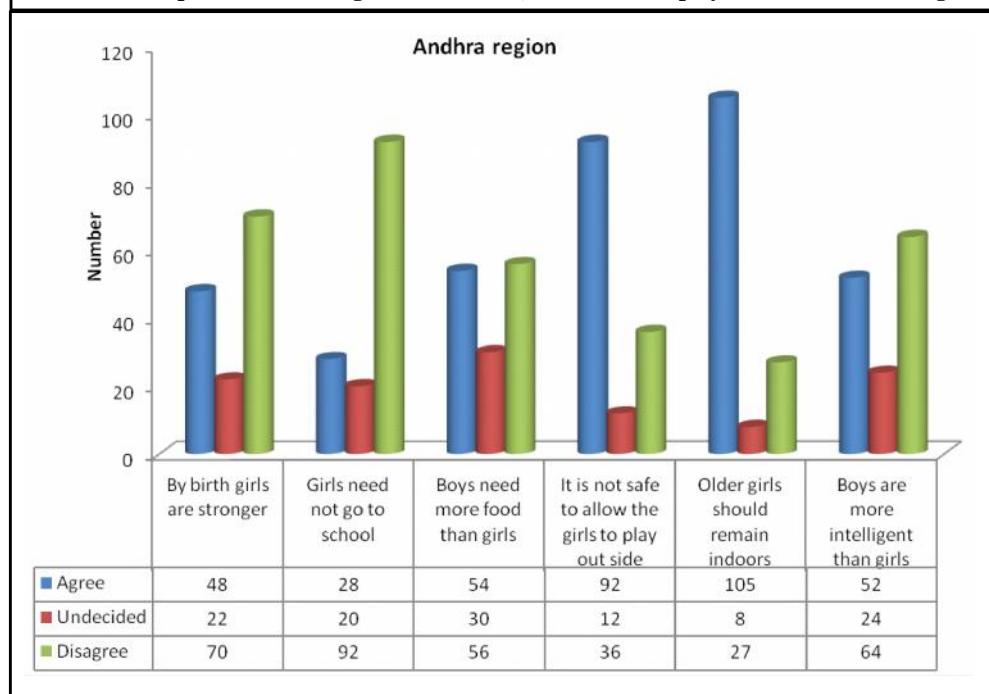


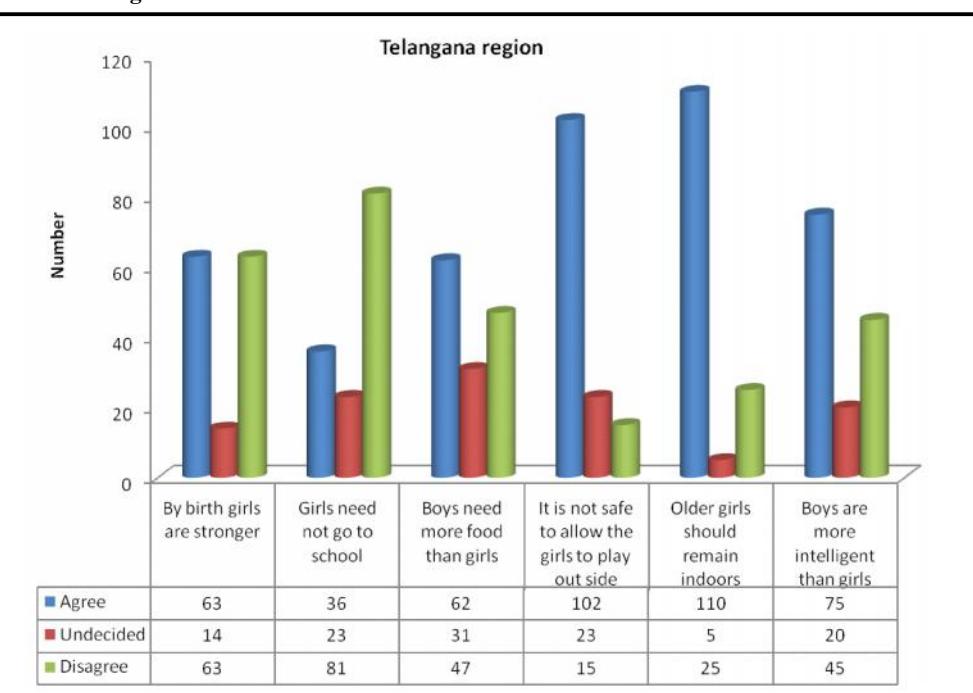
Table 2 : Perceptions related to girl child's food ,education and play activities-Andhra region



sample irrespective of gender and religion felt that girl child education is important. They said that women empowerment is directly linked to their education. Equal number of respondents had given contradictory opinion on the food quantity to be given to the girls and boys. Fifty four respondents opined that boys need more food than girls as the activity levels and energy requirement for boys is more than girls. Whereas fifty six members opined that both boys and girls need equal quantity of food. Majority of the respondents expressed that girls should not be allowed to play out side for longer hours. They said that girls once they reach puberty they should not be allowed to play out side. But if there is parental supervision and they are playing near the house they can be permitted. Muslim girls are strictly prohibited to play out side after puberty. These respondents agreed with the statement that older girls should remain indoors as there is no safety for girls in the present society . The sample also felt that because of the technologies like mobile phones and internet the crimes are increasing . Sixty four members disagreed with the statement that boys are more intelligent than girls. They opined that girls are also equally excelling in the studies and other activities on par with boys. Whereas fifty two respondents who were from rural and tribal areas agreed with the statement and said that boys are more intelligent and competent than girls. They said that girls always need the protection of boys in every stage of her life. They expressed that girls are dependent on boys for fulfilling their needs.

The above table indicates a difference of opinion on the perceptions of the Telangana region respondents on the food and education related issues of girl child. Sixty three members agreed that by birth girls are stronger than boys and sixty three members disagreed with the statement. The rural and tribal respondents agreed whereas the urban respondents disagreed . However majority of the sample felt that girl's education is important and she should go to school. Whereas the elder age group of tribal sample felt that girls need not go to school and opined that they should be trained in the

Table 3 : Perceptions related to girl child's food, education and play activities-Telangana region



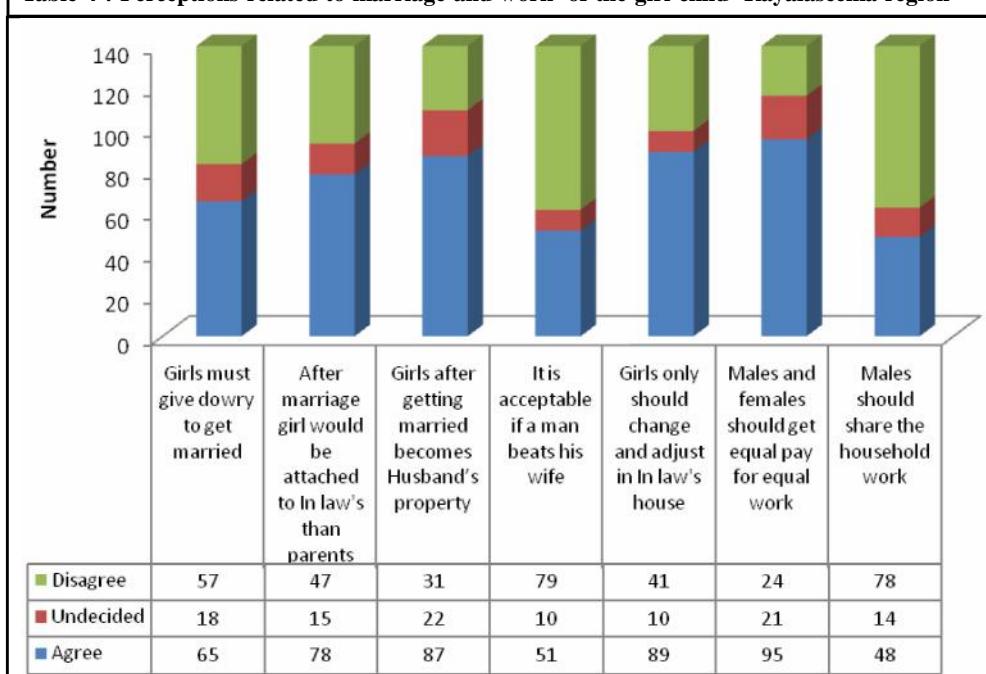
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household work and labour work so that after getting married she should not be blamed. Majority of the respondents irrespective of gender and religion opined that girls should not be allowed to play outside and older girls should remain indoors. However they felt that boys are more intelligent than girls.

About fifty percent of the sample agreed with the statement that girls must give dowry to get married whereas the remaining fifty percent felt that girl need not give dowry to get married and disagreed with the statement. Majority of the respondents from Rayalaseema region agreed that after marriage girls would be more attached to the in laws family and becomes husband property. The urban educated respondents disagreed with the statements that man can beat his wife and girls only should change and adjust in In - law's house. The urban sample expressed that males and females should get equal pay for equal work. They had agreed that males should share the household work. Whereas the rural and tribal women said that male dominance is more in their communities and involvement of men in the household work is very less. They had expressed that their culture do not support gender equity and domestic violence is common in their community. Their society accepts if a man beats his wife. Over all the respondents felt that girls only should change and adjust in the In law's house and adopt their culture and living style.

The above table depicts that people are still holding the orthodox feelings and strongly observe gender discrimination in the Andhra region. Irrespective of the religion and income majority of the male and female respondents agreed that girls must give dowry to get married and girls become husband's property after marriage. They had expressed that girl should adopt her mother in law's culture and follow their customs and traditions. Majority of the rural male sample expressed that women should get less wages than men as they are not equal. They had said that men do more work than women in the field. Whereas the domestic work done by women was not recognized by the male respondents. (Walia, 2005) Difference of opinion was observed in the statement on work sharing

Table 4 : Perceptions related to marriage and work of the girl child- Rayalaseema region

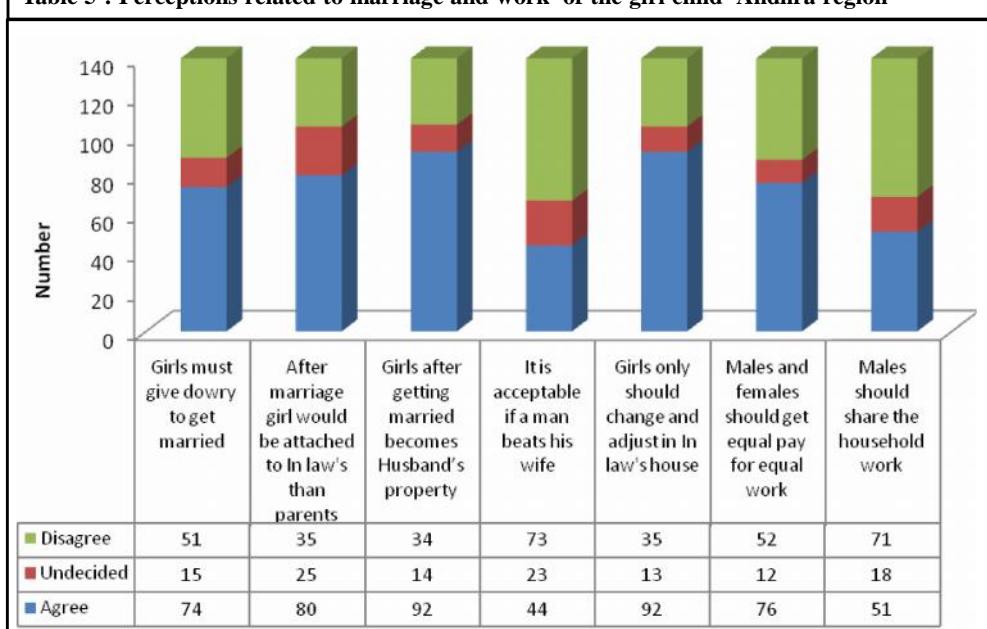


where in the males irrespective of their education and social status felt that house hold work is the responsibility of women.

The Telangana tribal region respondents had given mixed responses related to marriage and work aspects of girl child. The tribal culture differs from rural and urban cultures. More male dominance and girl child discrimination were observed in this region. Hence the statements which had favoured the males were agreed and the others which had favoured the girls were disagreed irrespective their socio economic status. Majority of the rural and tribal sample opined that girls become the husband's property after marriage and girls only should change and adopt the In law's culture. Domestic violence was commonly observed in the rural and tribal households and it is an acceptable phenomenon in this region (Roli mishra, 2011). About seventy six members disagreed with the statement that men should share the household work. The female respondents opined that they should get equal pay on par with males. But they said that women get less wages though they do same amount of work in the field and do extra domestic work. All the respondents felt that the attitude towards girl child should be changed and the women status in the society should be improved. The urban employed people had different opinion on the girl child issues. They opined that the girl child discrimination in the urban areas is less as the family size is limited and parents treat the boy and girl in the same way. They had expressed that it is only through education and awareness the girl child status should be improved (Pandey, 2003).

Majority of the respondents in the Rayalaseema region opined that girls are more affectionate and have strong attachment with the parents compared to boys. Twenty five percent of the sample felt that boys also would be affectionate with the parents. But parents of the girls opined that girls need to be protected always by some body or the other as the present society is not girl friendly. Eighty five percent of the sample irrespective of the religion and gender agreed with the statement that family functions are more if there is a girl child in the family. They said that in every religion there are certain rituals which are specially celebrated for the girls such as ear ring ceremony, half saree ceremony, maturity ceremony before marriage. After marriage many ceremonies are celebrated which are particular

Table 5 : Perceptions related to marriage and work of the girl child- Andhra region

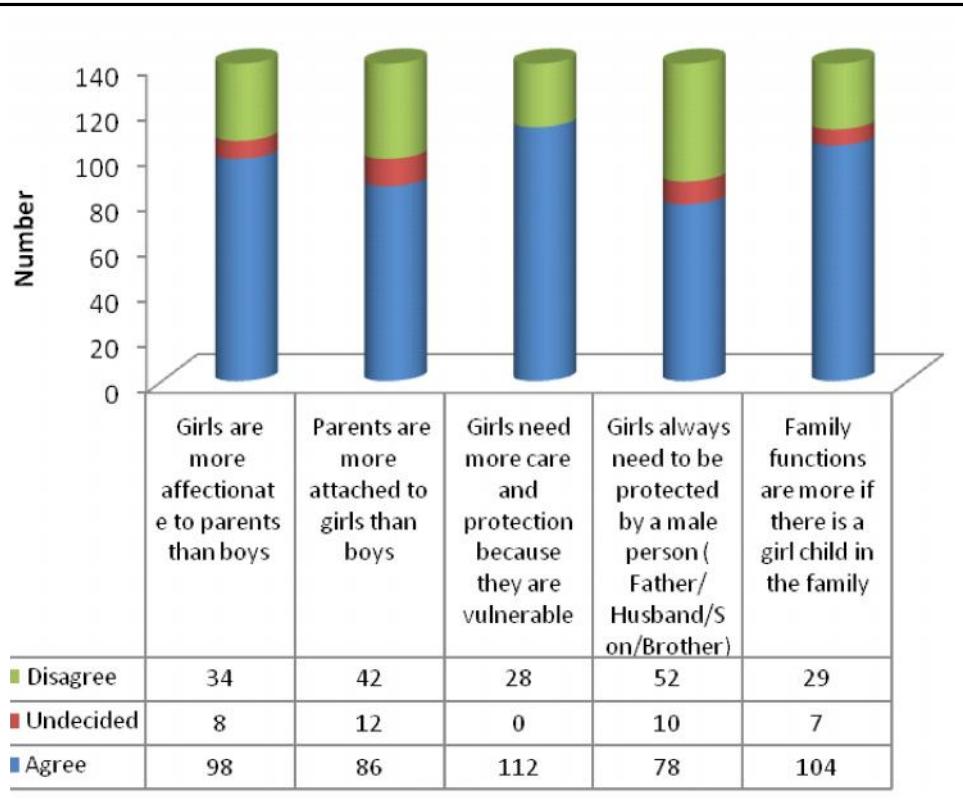


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Table 6 : Perceptions related to marriage and work of the girl child- Telangana region



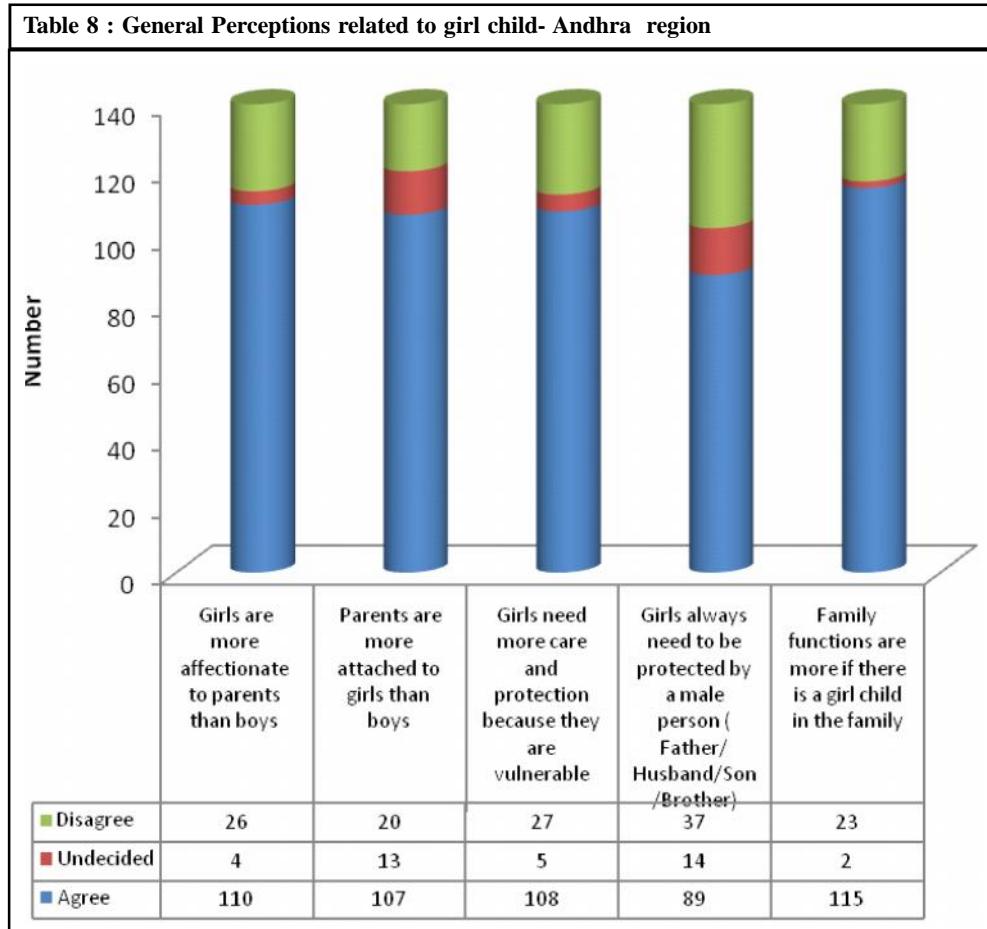
Table 7 : General Perceptions related to girl child- Rayalaseema region



to each religion. Other rituals and traditions are followed after the birth of the child. All these functions would be performed by the girls parents. Hence the respondents belonging to middle and high income groups expressed that they would enjoy performing these ceremonies for their daughters and also to please their in laws. Whereas the low income group sample said that they have to incur debts for meeting the demands of the son in law and his family members.

The above table indicates that ninety percent of the respondents from Andhra region agreed with the statements given which are related to general perceptions on the girl child. Majority of the respondents felt that girls are more affectionate than boys. They said that girls even after getting married also think about the parents and take the responsibilities with kind heart. Whereas the boys would be detached from the parents once he is grown up and married. The mother in laws interviewed felt that their sons have changed after marriage whereas their daughters had become more affectionate after marriage. Majority of the respondents expressed that parents would like to share the problems with their daughters comfortably than their sons. They had agreed with the statement that parents are more attached to girls than boys. Eighty nine members opined that girls always need protection by the male members as they are vulnerable. Whereas the urban educated sample felt that girls can take care of themselves and they need to aware of the things happening around them. All the respondents opined that girls should be educated and financially independent so that they can take care of

Table 8 : General Perceptions related to girl child- Andhra region

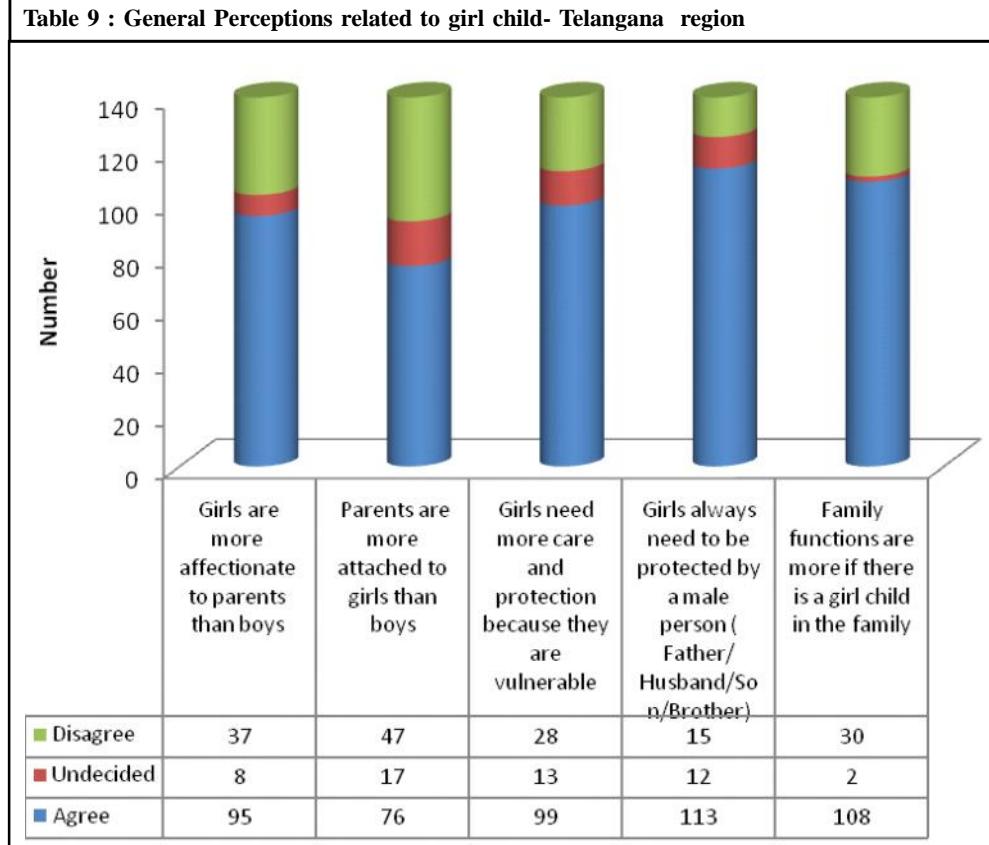


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themselves. Ninety percent of the sample agreed that family functions and get-togethers are more if there is a girl child in the family. As our culture demands the celebration of each and every life event in every stage of family life cycle more number of functions are performed by the girl's family compared to boys. Before marriage and after marriage there are many rituals and customs to be celebrated irrespective of the socio economic status of the girl's parents. This is probably one of the reasons for not wanting the girl child in the family.

Seventy five respondents from the Telangana region agreed that girls are more affectionate than boys. Whereas fifty percent of the sample opined that parents are more attached to their daughters than sons. However fifty percent of the sample disagreed with this statement and said that sons and daughters both are equally attached to their parents and parents are also impartial towards both. Majority of the respondents opined that girls are vulnerable and need to be protected by the family members as the present society is not safe for the girl child. Ninety percent of the sample expressed that functions are more if there is a girl child in the family. The opined that more responsibilities are present over the daughter's parents than the son's. First delivery of the married daughter should be done by the daughter's parents and more financial burden is present on the daughter's parents compared to the son's. This is the reason why sons are most wanted children in the family. The respondents opined that these customs and traditions should be changed and there should not be any compulsion over the daughter's parents. This finding supports the results of the study conducted by Kamla Sarna (2003) where she had found that cultural factors play an important role in improving the sex ratios in India.

Table 9 : General Perceptions related to girl child- Telangana region



Conclusion :

This study reveals that inspite of the various legal provisions and women's specific developmental programmes, the gender bias and deep-rooted prejudices still persist. The continuously declining child sex ratio over time is a glaring example of gender bias. About the causes of this decline various social and cultural factors have been identified in the study. These are for instance: social security, religious ceremonies, domestic violence, education levels of men and women and rural-urban- tribal residence. However, the most influential factor that has affected the perception was cultural factor. Underlying this factor are age old as well as modern factors, specifically related to the historical, sociological, economic, psychological and modernization influences.

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