

# ATTITUDES OF INDIAN WOMEN TOWARDS ABORTION

K. S. BHARDWAJ  
and Mrs. SAROJ MULLICK

The absolute justification for abortion is the most extreme form of social approval as Muslims consider it as a kind of murder and Hindus compare it with the crime of crimes. Even in *Mahabharata* letting a woman's Rtu (fertile period) go waste was considered as an embryo murder. Opponents of abortion hold that it opens the door to the brutalisation of society, encouraging many deaths, infanticides and violations of the sanctity of life. It is also said that abortion undermines the social structure by encouraging promiscuous sexual relations, by weakening family ties and by raising legal problems related to property ownership and inheritance. The modern concept of abortion is defined as a conclusive object of the programme of family planning.

To evaluate the aforesaid discussion a study has been conducted in Delhi in January 1972. The sample taken to represent the universe consisted of 615 women belonging

to the age group 15 to 45 and above; having 0 to 6 and more living children; experienced 0 to 10 pregnancies; having a net monthly income of Rs. below 100 to 500 and more; holding different occupations; varying from illiterates to educated up to university levels; living in joint and nuclear type of families; and using different methods of conception control. Other characteristics that were studied pertained to their attitudes towards abortion in relation to expected and ideal number of children.

The findings of this study showed a positive attitude towards abortion as stated by 62.9 per cent of the women in a sample. Nearly 36 per cent of the women who had negative attitude considered abortion as a sin, unlawful and crime. The remaining 1.1 per cent gave neutral replies. The various demographic and socio-economic features of all the women who favoured and disfavoured abortion are described below:

TABLE 1  
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO AGE

Age Group	Status of attitude			Total	Values of chi-square test
	Positive	Negative	Neutral		
15-19	3	3	—	6	$X^2 = 9.31$ d.f. = 6 P (0.250) = 7.804
20-24	45	12	3	60	
25-29	120	66	—	186	
30-34	69	51	3	123	
35-39	108	48	3	159	
40-44	36	24	—	60	
45+	—	3	—	3	
Unknown	6	12	—	18	
Total	387	219	9	615	

Mr. K. S. Bhardwaj, Extension Educator and Mrs. Saroj Mullick, National Institute of Family Planning, New Delhi.

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*Age Factor*

As is seen in table 1 the age distribution of women who favoured and disfavoured abortion elucidated a difference which is not significant according to the values of chi-square test. The average ages for favoured and disfavoured groups were 31.5 and 32, respectively.

*Living Children*

Table 2 shows that a maximum number

of women who favoured and disfavoured abortion had two living children at the time of interview. One of the interesting findings given in table 2 was the more number of women with a favourable attitude than those with a unfavourable attitude with zero parity. The average number of children were 3.4 for a unfavourable group. The difference between the favoured and disfavoured groups of women is significant over the parity as indicated by the values of chi-square test.

TABLE 2

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO NUMBER OF LIVING CHILDREN

Number of living children	Status of attitude				Values of chi-square test
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total	
0	6	3	—	9	$X^2 = 20.26$ d.f. = 6 P (0.100) = 10.644
1	60	18	3	81	
2	93	63	—	156	
3	87	54	—	141	
4	48	33	3	84	
5	39	30	3	72	
6+	54	18	—	72	
Total	387	219	9	615	

*Number of Pregnancies*

The number of pregnancies varied from 0 to 10. The distribution of favoured and disfavoured groups of women according to

the occurrences of pregnancies is given in table 3. The difference between the favoured and disfavoured groups were highly significant over the pregnancies as indicated by the values of chi-square test.

TABLE 3

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO NUMBER OF PREGNANCIES

Number of pregnancies	Status of attitude				Values of chi-square test
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total	
1	51	21	3	75	$X^2 = 31.25$ d.f. = 8 P (0.001) = 13.362
2	75	48	—	123	
3	54	36	—	90	
4	54	27	3	84	
5	51	27	3	81	
6	24	27	—	51	
7	21	21	—	42	
8	36	6	—	42	
9+	21	6	—	27	
Total	387	219	9	615	

*Monthly Income*

The information on the monthly income also includes the monthly incomes of their husbands. Table 4 shows that the monthly income varied from Rs. below 100 to Rs. 500

and above for both favoured and disfavoured groups of women. The chi-square values showed a marked difference between the favourable and unfavourable groups of women.

TABLE 4  
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO INCOME

<i>Income</i> (in groups)	<i>Status of attitude</i>				<i>Values of chi-square test</i>
	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Below Rs.					
100	15	15	—	30	
100-199	30	57	—	87	$X^2 = 107.16$
200-299	102	72	3	177	d.f. = 5
300-399	93	42	—	135	P (0.001) = 9.236
400-499	75	9	3	87	
500+	72	24	3	99	
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>615</b>	

*Occupation*

Of a total sample of 615 women, the majority (552) were housewives — the percentages for favoured and disfavoured groups were 63 and 37, respectively. Out of 36 women in a sample who were in service, 83.3 per cent belonged to the favoured and 16.7

per cent to the disfavoured group. Of the remaining 27 women who were in business, 55.5 per cent belonged to the favoured and 44.5 per cent to the disfavoured group. The difference observed between the two sets of attitudes was found to be insignificant as represented by the values of chi-square test,

TABLE 5  
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO OCCUPATION

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Status of attitude</i>				<i>Values of chi-square test</i>
	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Housewife	342	201	9	552	$X^2 = 6.73$
Service	30	6	—	36	d.f. = 2
Business	15	12	—	27	P (0.025) = 7.378
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>615</b>	

*Education*

Table 6 shows that majority of the women who showed positive attitude towards abortion had attained education up to high school level and the corresponding majority for

negative attitude had attained primary education. The difference between the two sets of attitudes as observed by using the chi-square test was found to be highly significant when compared with education.

TABLE 6  
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO EDUCATION

Educational status	Status of Attitude				Values of chi-square test
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total	
Illiterate	36	30	—	66	$X^2 = 30.79$ d.f. = 7 P = (0.001) = 12.017
Literate	27	12	—	39	
Primary	81	75	3	159	
Middle	84	51	3	138	
High School	93	30	—	123	
College	48	9	3	60	
High School & Training	12	9	—	21	
College & Training	6	3	—	9	
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>615</b>	

#### Types of Families

The majority of the women who had positive and negative attitudes towards abor-

tion were found to be living in nuclear type of families. The distribution according to the type of family versus attitude is given in table 7.

TABLE 7  
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO TYPES OF FAMILIES

Type of family	Status of attitude				Values of chi-square Test
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total	
Joint	108	69	—	177	$X^2 = 1.71$ d.f. = 2 P (0. 250) = 2.773
Nuclear	279	150	9	438	
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>615</b>	

The values of chi-square test indicated that the difference between the positive and negative attitudes and between the joint and nuclear types of families is not significant.

#### Current use of Conception Control Methods

Table 8 shows that maximum number of women who gave positive attitude towards abortion were condom users and the corresponding majority who gave negative attitude were also condom users. Nearly 13

per cent of the total women who gave positive attitude and 8 per cent who gave negative attitude were non-users. It is significant to note that 1.5 per cent of the total women gave positive attitude towards abortion inspite of accepting permanent methods of birth control. The values of chi-square test indicated a significant difference between the positive and negative attitudes towards abortion in relation to use of conception control methods.

TABLE 8

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO CONCEPTION CONTROL METHODS

Types of conception control methods	Status of attitude			Total	Values of chi-square test
	Positive	Negative	Neutral		
Condom	153	60	3	216	$X^2 = 12.39$ d.f. = 7 $P (0.100) = 12.017$
Loop	6	3	—	9	
Withdrawal	63	48	6	117	
Safe period	51	45	—	96	
Oral pills	6	6	—	12	
Abstinence	3	3	—	6	
Sterilisation	9	6	—	15	
Not using	81	48	—	129	
Unknown	15	—	—	15	
Total	387	219	9	615	

*Expected Number of Children*

The number of children expected by the women in a sample were the sets of various combinations. As for instance 10.2 per cent showed their expectations for one son and 3.9 per cent for one daughter only, The remaining 85.9 per cent expected to have one issue to six issues. Table 9 shows that majority of the women who gave positive attitude expected to have three children. The percentage for those who expected to have

4 to 6 children and one child only accounted for 32.5 and 15.5 respectively. Similarly a majority of the women who gave negative attitude, expected to have 2 to 3 children. The percentage for those who expected to have one child and 4 to 6 children accounted for 16.4 and 39.7, respectively. The difference between the positive and negative attitudes of women over the expected number of children was found to be significant at 5 per cent level as indicated by the values of chi-square test.

TABLE 9

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO EXPECTED NUMBER OF LIVING CHILDREN

Expected number of children	Status of attitude			Total	Values of chi-square test
	Positive	Negative	Neutral		
At least one son	33	27	3	63	$X^2 = 14.40^{**}$ d.f. = 7
One Child only	12	—	—	12	
2 children	75	48	—	123	$P = (0.100) = 12.017$
3 children	126	48	3	177	
4 children	51	33	3	87	
5 children	27	27	—	54	
6 children	48	27	—	75	
At least one daughter	15	9	—	24	
Total	387	219	9	615	

*Ideal Number of Children*

The responses regarding the ideal number of children were given in multiple combinations. As is seen from table 10, a majority of the women who gave positive attitude indicated one male and one female offspring for an ideal size of family. The corresponding majority who showed a negative attitude

indicated two males and one female offspring for the constitution of an ideal family. The details for other combinations could be visualised from table 10. The chi-square values indicated a highly significant difference between the two sets of women in relation to number of children required to constitute an ideal size of family.

TABLE 10

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS ABORTION IN RELATION TO IDEAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN

<i>Ideal number of children</i>	<i>Status of attitude</i>			<i>Total</i>	<i>Values of chi-square test</i>
	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Neutral</i>		
1 male only	9	12	—	21	
2 males & 1 female	117	63	3	183	$X^2 = 56.10$
4 of both sexes	3	3	—	6	d.f. = 9
2 of any sex	75	27	—	102	$P (0.001) = 14.683$
3 of any sex	30	24	3	57	
3 of both sexes	15	3	—	18	
1 male & 1 female	120	57	3	180	
2 males & 2 females	15	6	—	21	
4 of any sex	—	21	—	21	
3 males & 3 females	3	3	—	6	
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>615</b>	

## CONCLUSION

The aforesaid discussion clearly supported the modern concept of abortion which is defined as a conclusive object of the programme of family planning. The main

variables which supported the concept are the number of living children, use of conception control methods and number of pregnancies. Other supportive variables are the expected and ideal number of children.