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**AWARENESS OF THE EXISTENCE OF DOWRY AND DOWRY HARASSMENT AS A CAUSE OF DECLINING SEX RATIO : A CASE STUDY OF JALGAON DISTRICT (MS)**

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**Abstract :**

*The present paper investigates the awareness about factors leading to declining sex ratio in Jalgaon district of Maharashtra. The survey method is used for the study. About 900 respondents are interviewed from 30 villages from the district. Systematic random sampling method is used while selecting the respondents. From the present study, it is cleared that most of the respondents, mainly women and mothers-in-law were aware of the existence of the dowry system in society. It is also interesting that a majority of respondent have reported awareness about dowry harassment in the neighbourhood. The study reveals that the community is aware about harassment events of dowry but still the practice is existed and deeply rooted in the society.*

**Keywords :** Awareness, sex ratio, dowry, harassment, Jalgaon district

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**Introduction :**

According to the 2011 census, for every 1000 boys, there are only 918 girls. The child sex ratio in India has been on the decline since 1991 and the worst since independence. According to the 1991 census, there were 945 girls for every 1000 boys and in 2001, 927 girls for every 1000 boys. The sex ratio is defined as the ratio of the number of males to number of females in a population set. It is internationally expressed per 100 females but in India, it is expressed as per 1000 males. According to the World Health Organization, biologically normal child sex ratio ranges from 102 to 106 male per 100 females. Converting it to Indian terms would be 943-980 females per every 1000 males. In Maharashtra, the child sex ratio in the year 1991 was 946 girls for every 1000 boys and in 2001, it declined up to 913 girls per 1000 boys. But in 2011 Census, this decline is very sharp and it has become the matter of greater concerned because now this ratio is as low as 894 girls per thousand boys.

It is important to understand why and how the child sex ratio has declined. Other things being equal, the child sex ratio, like the sex ratio at birth, does not undergo drastic changes over short periods of time. Women have experienced in the past, and continue to experience, higher mortality than men from late infancy to almost the end of their reproductive period. The existence of dowry system is one of

the major causes for declining sex ratio. The bride's parents have to pay a huge amount to bridegroom as gift in wedding ceremony. Though there are anti-dowry laws existed in our country but the dowry system is not uprooted completely due to deep rooted customs and traditions in the society. This paper tries to investigate the responses of people about the existence of dowry system and dowry harassment in the society.

**Objective :**

The objective of the present research paper is to investigate the awareness about the existence of dowry system and dowry harassment in Jalgaon district of Maharashtra.

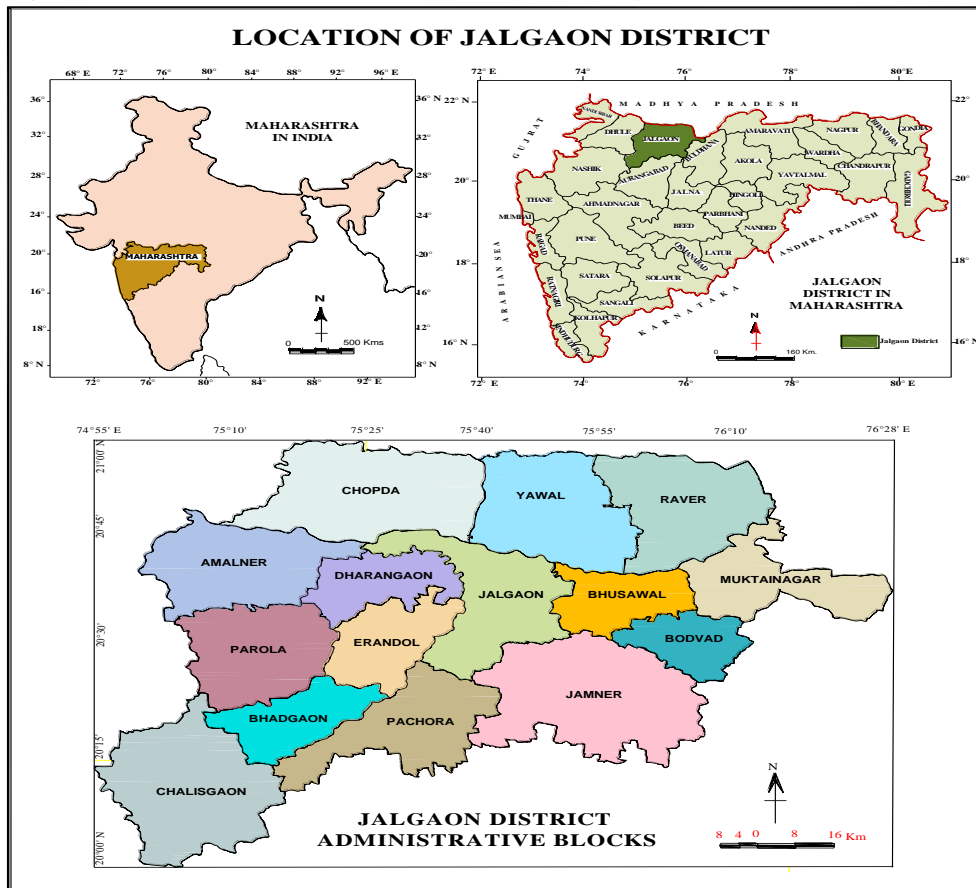
**Research Methodology :**

The researcher undertook a study to ascertain the awareness about the existence of dowry system and dowry harassment in the study region. The field work was conducted throughout the district. The primary data for the study was collected through multi-stage stratified random sampling method. Two villages from each tehsils (15 x 2 = 30 villages) were selected by considering various geographical factors such as physiography, rainfall, net sown area, density of population and sex ratio. Urban respondent were considered from Amalner town. The perceptions of different stakeholders – women (15-45 years), men and mothers-in-law/elderly women, were ascertained. 10 women (15-45 years), 10 men and 10 mothers-in-law were

communicated from each village. Therefore, from 30 villages 30 respondents were communicated which arrived at total 900 respondents. The data was substantiated with an analysis of policy instruments, programmes, legal provisions, enforcement machinery, media inputs, etc. on the issue, using secondary source data. Care was taken to maintain confidentiality at all costs.

**The Study Region :** The district under study is flanked by the Satpura ranges to the north and Ajanta hills to the south and the central

part of the district is covered by well known Tapi river basin which flows towards the west. The region experiences slightly different climate than by rest of the state of Maharashtra, since it is located away from the coast but at much lower altitude than the rest of the plateau of Maharashtra. The location away from the coast has resulted in high range of mean daily temperature which is slightly than 15<sup>0</sup>C. Low altitude has resulted in abnormally high maximum summer temperature which is normally above 40<sup>0</sup> C.



Map No.1

The district is bounded by the state of Madhya Pradesh to the north. The rivers Anner and Panjhara form a boundary in the west between the region and the Dhule district. In the east, the district under study is bordered by Buldhana district. To the south, Satmala, Ajantha and Chandor hills form a natural boundary between the study region and the districts of Nasik and Aurangabad. The Jalgaon district which is one of the 34 districts of Maharashtra lies between 20<sup>0</sup> N and 21<sup>0</sup> N latitudes and 74<sup>0</sup> 55' E and 76<sup>0</sup> 28' E

longitudes. The total area of the district is 11765.0 sq. Km. According to 2011 Census, the total population of the region was 42, 29, 917.

**Profile of the Respondents**

**Age-wise Distribution of Respondents:** The age-wise distribution of respondents is depicted in table No. 01. Most of the women were in the 20-35 year age group and men in the 25-35 year age group. The majority of mothers-in-law were in the 55 years and above category.

**Table No. 01 : Age-Wise Distribution of Respondents**

Age-groups	Respondents			Total n=900 No. (%)
	Men n=300 No. (%)	Women n=300 No. (%)	Mothers in-Law n=300 No. (%)	

15-19 years	--	04 (1.33)	--	04 (0.44)
20-24 years	25 (8.33)	71 (23.67)	--	96 (10.67)
25-29 years	98 (32.67)	85 (28.33)	--	183 (20.33)
30-34 years	84 (28.00)	59 (19.67)	--	143 (15.89)
35-39 years	36 (12.00)	48 (16.00)	02 (0.67)	86 (9.56)
40-49 years	22 (7.33)	16 (5.33)	28 (9.33)	66 (7.33)
50-54 years	18 (6.00)	12 (4.00)	45 (15.00)	75 (8.33)
55-59 years	13 (4.33)	05 (1.67)	57 (19.00)	75 (8.33)
60 years and more	04 (1.33)	--	168 (56.00)	172 (19.11)

*Source : Data collected during field work.*

### Educational Status of Respondents

Educational status of male respondents suggests that 35 % males, who were age old, have been reported as illiterates. The proportions of male respondents completed schooling up to primary, middle, SSC and HSC schooling were 12.67 %, 18.00 %, 17.33 % and 20.67 % respectively. About 16 % male respondents were graduates while proportion of postgraduates was only 4 %. It was heartening to note that the educational status of women of the present generation was better than that of

their mothers-in law, where 48 per cent were illiterate and the %age of mothers-in-law who had passed schooling up to the primary, middle, SSC, and HSC were 17.33 %, 15.33 %, 11.33 %, and 5 % respectively. The distribution of illiterates, those who had passed the primary level, middle level, SSC, HSC of schooling, and who were graduates and postgraduates among the women was 18.00 %, 14.67 %, 22.33 %, 18.00 %, 20.67 %, 15.37 %, and 4 %, respectively.

**Table No. 02 : Distribution of Respondents by Educational Status**

Educational Status	Respondents			Total n=900 No. (%)
	Men n=300 No. (%)	Women n=300 No. (%)	Mothers in- Law n=300 No. (%)	
Illiterates	35 (11.67)	54 (18.00)	145 (48.33)	234 (26.00)
Primary School	38 (12.67)	44 (14.67)	52 (17.33)	134 (14.89)
Middle School	54 (18.00)	67 (22.33)	46 (15.33)	167 (18.56)
S. S. C.	52 (17.33)	54 (18.00)	34 (11.33)	140 (15.56)
H. S. C.	62 (20.67)	62 (20.67)	15 (5.00)	139 (15.44)
Graduate	47 (15.67)	16 (15.37)	08 (2.67)	71 (7.89)
Postgraduate	12 (4.00)	03 (4.00)	--	15 (1.67)

*Source : Data collected during field work.*

### Occupational Status of Respondents :

Majority of men are farmers followed by agricultural labourers. About 14 % men are engaged in various services. About one-third women are agricultural labourers and 37 % are

unemployed (housewives). Majority of mothers-in-laws are unemployed followed by agricultural labourers. It is surprising to note that the %age of unemployed women and mothers-in-law were greater than men.

**Table No. 03 : Distribution of Respondents by Occupational Status**

Occupational Status	Respondents			Total n=900 No. (%)
	Men n=300 No. (%)	Women n=300 No. (%)	Mothers in-Law n=300 No. (%)	
Farmers	119 (39.67)	11 (3.67)	05 (1.67)	135 (15.00)
Agricultural labourers	88 (29.33)	107 (35.67)	57 (19.00)	252 (28.00)
Casual workers	23 (7.67)	45 (15.00)	13 (4.33)	81 (9.00)
Service	41 (13.67)	16 (5.33)	11 (3.67)	68 (7.56)
Business / Self employment	25 (8.33)	10 (3.33)	06 (2.00)	41 (4.56)
Unemployed	04 (1.33)	111 (37.00)	208 (69.33)	323 (35.89)

*Source : Data collected during field work.*

**Results And Discussion :**

‘Due to declining sex ratio, apparently it does seem that increasing paucity of female in the country’s population will change the matrimonial scenario wherein girls will enjoy greater say in the selection of spouse as they may be more sought after. Many males may have to remain unmarried. It might help raising the status of females in the Indian society but knowing the Indian social set up it seems possible that girls as long as they are married, the essentials of the Indian social system may prevail whereby married women especially in the rural society do not have any say in the decision making process. There are also apprehensions that increasing paucity of females may force the revival of polyandry in certain segments of Indian society which are more permissible sections. It may lead to an increase in the HIV cases.’ (Chandana, 2011)

Most of the respondents with 95.56 percent perceived non-availability of brides as the major repercussion of missing girls followed

by lack of workforce 65.00 percent and increase in rate of crime against women 43.22 percent. A negligible proportion i.e. only 9.89 percent respondent perceived polyandry as a repercussion of missing girls. However, there is a striking difference in the perception of men and women. The problem of non-availability of bride is reported more prominently by men than that of the women in the study region, while more women perceived that declining sex ratio will lead to lack of female workforce, especially in various agricultural activities. The problem of non-availability of bride is very serious in some communities in the study region. They have to pay a certain amount of money to some economically backward communities for brides. The percentage of women who foresee increased crimes against women, especially sexual violence, was higher among the women and mothers-in-law than that of the men. Polyandry was perceived stronger by the men than women and mothers-in-law.

**Table No. 04 : Awareness about Consequences of Declining Sex Ratio**

Reasons for Son Preference	Respondents			Total n=900 No. (%)
	Men n=300 No. (%)	Women n=300 No. (%)	Mothers-in-Law n=300 No. (%)	
Non-availability of brides	294 (98.00)	291 (97.00)	284 (94.67)	869 (95.56)
Lack of female workforce	184 (61.33)	201 (67.00)	200 (66.67)	585 (65.00)
Increased rate of crimes against women	124 (41.33)	136 (45.33)	129 (43.00)	389 (43.22)
Polyandry	51 (17.00)	12 (4.00)	26 (8.67)	89 (9.89)

Source : Data collected during field work.

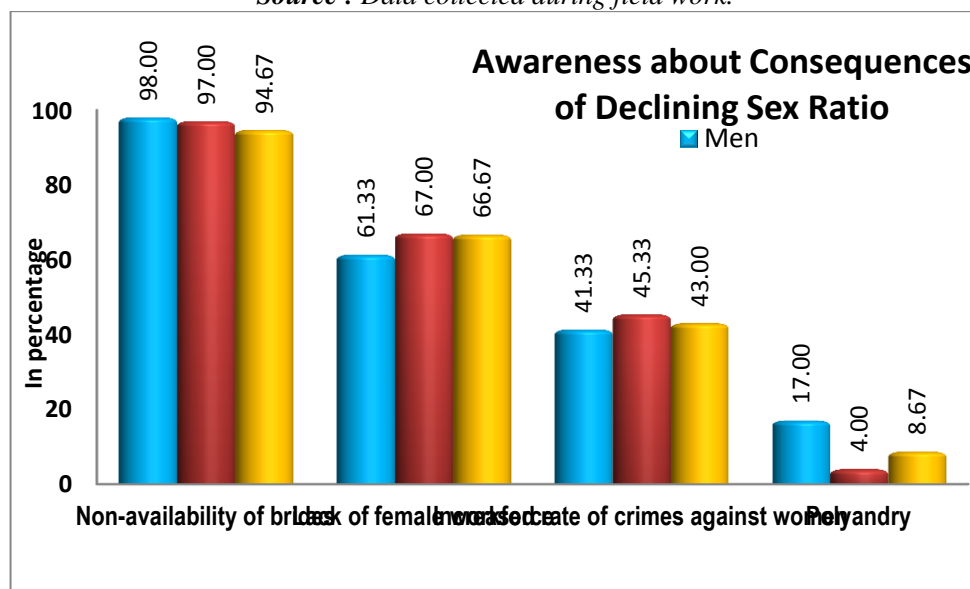


Fig. No. 02

### Suggestive Measures For Curbing The Problem Of Dowry:

The table No. 05 shows the suggestive measures for curbing the problem of dowry as reported by the respondents in the study region. The various suggestive measures as reported by the respondents include strict implementation of laws; removal of poverty; improving the status of literacy; creating awareness about the evils of accepting dowry; and improving the value of the girl child. The responses like Creating awareness

about the evil of accepting dowry, removal of illiteracy and improving the value of the girl child were expressed more strongly, i.e. 93.0 percent, 75.0 percent and 75.11 percent respectively implying that society is desirous of a long-term solution to the problem. But it is also important to note that about 36 percent people think that the strict implementation of laws may not be a solution for curbing the problem of dowry. (Fig. No. 03)

**Table No. 05 : Suggestive Measures for Curbing the Problem of Dowry**

Suggestive Measures	Respondents			Total n=900 No. (%)
	Men n=300 No. (%)	Women n=300 No. (%)	Mothers in- Law n=300 No. (%)	
Strict implementation of laws	204 (68.00)	189 (63.00)	181 (60.33)	574 (63.78)
Removal of poverty	211 (70.33)	231 (77.00)	233 (77.67)	675 (75.00)
Removal of illiteracy	222 (74.00)	235 (78.33)	219 (73.00)	676 (75.11)
Creating awareness about the evil of accepting dowry	278 (92.67)	288 (96.00)	271 (90.33)	837 (93.00)
Improving the value of the girl child	235 (78.33)	215 (71.67)	209 (69.67)	659 (73.22)

*Source: Data collected during field work.*

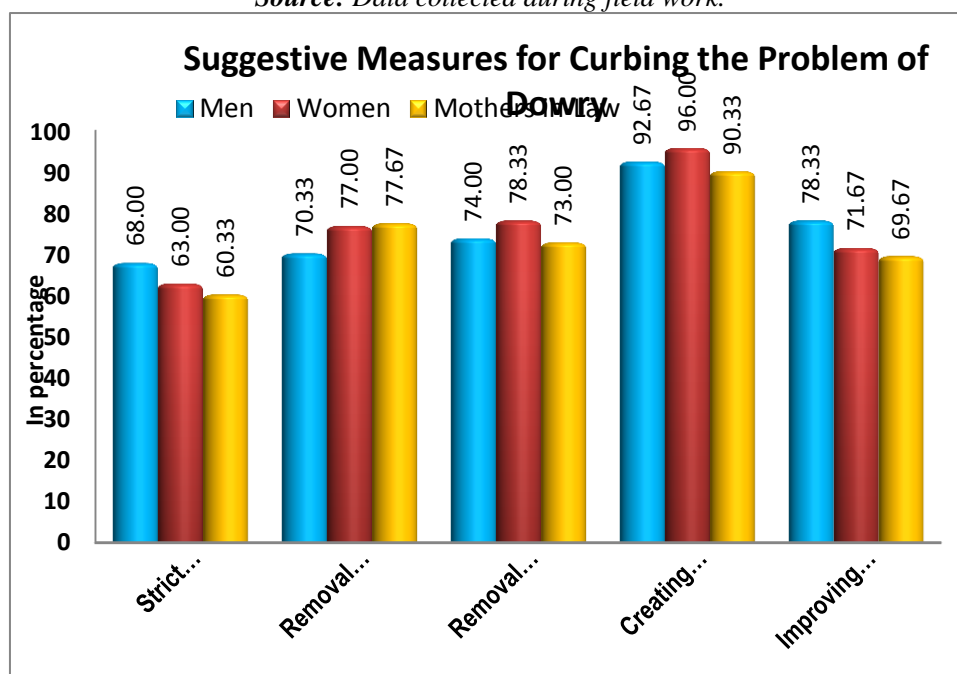


Fig. No. 03

### Conclusion :

Most of the respondents, mainly women and mothers-in-law were aware of the existence of the dowry system in society. It is also interesting that a majority of respondent have reported awareness about dowry harassment in the neighbourhood. The study reveals that the community is aware about harassment events of dowry but still the practice is existed and deeply

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rooted in the society. The perception of men, women and mothers-in-laws were elicited about dowry and the dowry system existing in the study region. The men and mothers-in-law were of the view that the existing system of dowry should be abolished. However, this view was strongly reported by women respondents as majority of women were of this opinion. But it is also surprising to note that there are few

respondents in all three categories who still have the opinion that there is no need to stop dowry system.

**Recommendations :**

1. The legislative measures, such as the Prohibition of Dowry Act, PNDT Act etc., should be stringently implemented. The defaulters must be punished and set many examples which may lead for positive change.
2. Awareness about the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, MTP, anti dowry act. Etc. needs to be created.
3. Government departments should popularize schemes in operation in the study region through economic benefits that could accrue to those families having a girl child, similar to the *Shagun* scheme launched by the Governments of Punjab and Haryana, *Apni beti apna dhan*, *Balika samriddhi yojana*, *Beti Bachav Beti Padhav*, etc.
4. To provide financial incentives to encourage people to retain the girl child and the more subtle and intangible one to change the family's mindset towards the girl by linking cash and non-cash transfers to her well-being, it is hoped, would give the necessary impetus to improve women's status.
5. The conditional cash transfers should be given on completion of certain conditionality such as birth registration, immunization, school enrolment, retention in primary and elementary school, entry into secondary school/vocational training and completion of 18 years without getting married.

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