

A Five City Audience Impact Study on Tele-Serial - "Atmajaa"

born from the soul"

CENTRE FOR ADVOCACY AND RESEARCH
2005

A FIVE CITY AUDIENCE IMPACT STUDY
ON TELE-SERIAL
'ATMAJAA' – BORN FROM THE SOUL

SUBMITTED TO
PLAN INDIA EVALUATION DEPARTMENT

By
CENTRE FOR ADVOCACY AND RESEARCH
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary (1-12)

List of Acronyms (13)

2. Introduction (14)

3. Process (15-18)

Desk research

Methodology

4. Baseline Study – Pre-telecast Audience Feedback (19-25)

- Key objectives
- Major findings
- Perceptions of younger women about gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility
- Evaluating the younger women’s engagement with the serial
- Perceptions of older women about gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility
- Evaluating the older women’s engagement with the serial
- Perceptions of men about gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility
- Evaluating the men’s engagement with the serial
- Concluding Observations

5. Main Study – Post-telecast Audience Feedback (26-42)

- Perception of the young respondents on gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility –
 - Young women - Kurukshetra
 - Young women - Rohtak
 - Young women - Ajmer
 - Young women - Amritsar
- Evaluating younger women’s engagement with the serial
 - Young women - Kurukshetra
 - Young women - Rohtak
 - Young women - Ajmer
 - Young women - Amritsar
- Perceptions of older women about gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility

- Evaluating older women's engagement with the
 - Older women - Kurukshetra
 - Older women - Rohtak
 - Older women - Ajmer
 - Older women – Amritsar

- Perceptions of men about gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility

- Evaluating men's engagement with the serial
 - Men - Kurukshetra
 - Men - Rohtak
 - Men - Ajmer
 - Men - Amritsar

6. Role Model Appraisal-Spontaneous Respondent Feedback (43-44)

7. Audience Rating on Production Values (45-46)

8. Recommendation (47-48)

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The five-city audience feedback study on the thirteen episodes *Atmajaa* serial was done with the objective of gauging and assessing the overall impact and effect the popular communication had on specific target audiences.

The serial *Atmajaa* attempted to use the format of *edutainment or infotainment* to convey messages on the inalienable rights of the girl-child and the illegality of sex determination and sex-selection.

To highlight these aspects the serial contextualised the problem in an urban upper middle class North Indian family.

Given this thrust it was essential to assess whether the serial has had the desired effect of catalyzing a household and community discourse on the different aspects of the issue.

Whom did the viewers hold responsible for the situation? To what extent were the viewers open to an attitudinal rethink? Did they understand the relationship and link between gender inequality and sex determination?

Were the audiences aware of the ban on sex selection? How did they assess the attitudinal biases, prejudices, dilemmas and conflicts that the various protagonists in the serial experienced in taking a stand on this issue?

Process

Desk Research

The desk research helped us to understand the issues and messages in the serial. We began with scanning regional newspapers to get an understanding of the programmes of Regional Kendras.

Meanwhile, a sample of seven episodes were selected to look at the communication elements such as characters, quality of dialogues, plot, storyline, issues and the messages.

We prepared a matrix on the main protagonist in order to understand the different phases of depiction. This included:

- *Phase of negotiation/ defensive fighting*
- *Phase of single/ separated women*
- *Phase of building a support system*
- *Phase of resolution*

Based on this desk research, we designed the methodology and the tools for the study.

Methodology

Qualitative study – two phases

- Phase I: Baseline indicators (pre-telecast)
- Phase II: Episode specific feedback (post-telecast)

We conducted the study in two phases. Phase one was a baseline study, done pre-telecast to establish some baseline indicators about the potential response to the serial. Phase two tracked the audience response in different cities, during the period of telecast to check out whether the expectations were validated.

Tool of Enquiry

- Focus Group Discussion (FGD)
- Audience Panel Feedback

Respondents' Profile

- The young women consisted of married, unmarried, working and housewives between the 24-35 age group.
- The older women consisted of mothers-in-law working, non-working between 45 to 60 years representing joint and nuclear families.
- The men included sons and husbands from age group 35 to 60 years.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The respondents were from the upper and middle class socio-economic categories of A1, A2, B1 and B2. However, in the case of men we had some respondents from category-C. This bias towards the upper strata emerged from the data presented in Census 2001.

Before conducting the focus group discussions, we also administered a recruitment questionnaire to ensure that respondents meet certain critical criteria.

Selection of Cities

We selected A, B, and C class cities such as Delhi, Ajmer, Amritsar, Kurukshetra and Rohtak because Census 2001 shows that all these cities are witnessing adverse sex ratio in the 0-6 age group.

Focus Group Discussions

We used multiple methods to investigate knowledge, attitude and perceptions. This included the following:

A spontaneous and rapid feedback on identifiable role models.

A more considered response through a moderated discussion on a highly recognisable problematic real-life situation.

Finally used specific clips, denoting different aspects of the issue to assess their identification and quality of engagement with the issue and the manner in which it is represented in the serial.

Audience Panel Feedback

We constituted an eight-member panel in five cities. The panel consisted of equal proportion of young married/ unmarried and elderly women. The audience had to rate the entertainment and production value of the program.

Baseline - Pre-Telecast Study in Delhi

Key Objectives

To assess prevailing attitudes, values, mindsets on the issue of sex selection, son preference and discrimination against the girl-child.

To ascertain levels of readiness of key target sections of the programme to the theme and its treatment and the quality of messages that emerge.

To identify areas, which the viewers were likely to support and areas likely to cause stress, etc.

Focus Group Discussions

Major Findings

The baseline study made it very clear that young women across the cities were likely to be the most decisive supporter of the serial.

The older women would have a compelling but uneasy and disturbed relationship with the serial.

The men would have a critical relationship with the serial. They would feel personally excluded and marginalized. They would even harbour the feeling that the challenges confronting men, not been represented properly.

Perceptions of younger women on gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility

The feedback from young women indicated that across the board, whether married or unmarried, there was a consensus about the need to be empowered. Within this segment a small and critical mass of unmarried girls were extremely combative. The rest tended to be quietly assertive and in some ways even prepared to make some unavoidable adjustments.

However, a majority of married young women though conscious of their rights, put more emphasis on developing the skills and mechanisms.

The mechanisms they were looking for ranged from the simple to more complex. Despite some differences in approach between married and unmarried women, what united both groups was the discomfort and unease with in-laws and marital family.

All the respondents were aware of the sex determination issue. Since, many of them have also seen it happen within their family, they indirectly took responsibility for the issue.

In terms of the solution, much of the focus was on preventing such exploitation and discrimination.

Evaluating younger women's engagement with the serial

Some of the major reasons for the serial having the potential to involve this target audience were as follows:

- The selection of a highly relevant and “emotive” issue
- Injustice as a strong hook the “black” and “white” contrast of the Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law would work
- The quick transition of the protagonist from “oppression” to “resistance created an action-packed pace
- The strong body language of the protagonist, the responsiveness of the law and the decisive finish would enhance its appeal.

Some of the major problematic areas identified during the baseline study and in fact persisted across the telecast phase were:

Mamta's decision to leave the house evoked tremendous anxiety and discomfort from a pragmatic point of view.

Perceptions of older women on gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility

The main challenge in the present was to sustain the quality of life they had led and preserve the values they had grown up with and nurtured.

The objective was to evoke the much-deserved respect and cope with generation gap. From this perspective, they found that they had problems with the younger generation.

Evaluating their engagement with the serial

It was clear that older women were likely to have a difficult but a compelling relationship with the serial.

They would have a defensive relationship with the characterisation of the older woman and the situation. Under these circumstances, it was clear that they were likely to have an argumentative and active relationship with the serial.

Perceptions of men on gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility

The serial would evoke mixed reactions from men. While empathising with the younger women, accepting the magnitude of the problem, they will have serious misgivings about the manner in which the serial constructed relationships.

They stressed the fact that in a patriarchal society, men often found themselves marginalized and became the “hidden” victims of the problem.

Evaluating the men’s engagement with the serial

Hence, the serial is likely to engage them in parts but would not provide believable explanations for the many questions and issues that they raised. The most serious gap is the fact that the serial does not explore their experience as “victim”.

Concluding Observations

The baseline study clearly indicated that the serial would have differential impact on the different audience groups.

The younger women were likely to have a more pro-active engagement with the serial as a whole and in particular with the central protagonist.

In the case of the older women, it was clear that the serial would encourage them to clarify and reformulate their perspectives, revisit and introspect about specific experiences, happenings and relationships.

In the case of men, they will express difficulty in accepting the messages that emerge from the serial particularly dealing with male responsibility and involvement as partner and husband.

Post Baseline Audience Feedback - Key Findings

Young Women

It is clear from the findings of the pre-telecast baseline study that younger women would actively engage with the serial in particular the experiences of the central protagonist. They would minutely analyze the decisions taken by the central protagonist.

Perceptions of the younger respondents on gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility

Kurukshetra

In Kurukshetra, young women across the board, recognised that sex determination and sex selection is a dominant practice. In trying to cope with the problem, they exercised different options.

Some preferred to confront the problem, share their views and insights with others in the family but finally take their own decisions.

Others preferred to be conciliatory, use whatever opportunity came their way to interact with the family, inform the family about their needs and ultimately demand only those rights that are in keeping with the family norms and expectations.

Rohtak

In Rohtak also we found young unmarried women more candid and forthright. They were extremely frank about the kind of discrimination that young women face in their lives, including the preference for sons and practices like sex determination.

Young married women on the other hand were highly defensive. However, they did concede that the bias does exist.

Therefore, despite this personal stand on the problem, they were keen to explore the issue of women's autonomy and rights, extend public education to the mother-in-law.

Husbands, they felt that though partisan and evasive could be educated or sensitised and made to play a decisive role on issues such as sex determination.

In the case of unmarried girls and women, there was a feeling among some respondents that despite the persistent social bias against the girl child getting education and access to media has made a big difference.

However, they also realise that it is precisely these so-called gains made by younger women that created a chasm between them and the rest of the family.

Ajmer

In Ajmer the responses altered. The women adopted a cautious approach and were keen to be seen as balancing rights and responsibilities.

The unmarried women on the other hand felt that rights awareness is extremely important to prevent their exploitation.

Married women felt that they must get these rights from the family in a gracious and accommodating manner. Such an approach, they felt, depended on the educational background and status of the family they got married to.

Amritsar

In Amritsar, the women were very politically correct and measured in their response. However, much of this change, they admitted was within well-defined limits. Barring a few respondents who resented this parental approach, most of the young women had internalised the feeling that “older generation was more experienced and they can tell what is right and wrong”.

Evaluating the younger women’s engagement with the serial

Kurukshetra

The young women wholeheartedly participated in the dramatisation of the issue. However, they selectively engaged with the issue.

While unmarried and single young women were preoccupied with the root and source of the problem, married young women were more exercised about the response to the problem.

While some dimensions appeared authentic and challenging, there were other that they felt that lacked complexity in treatment.

Rohtak

It is clear that the serial had a strong impact on them. So strong was the impact that they were keen to re-visit the response of the protagonist.

Moreover, they felt so sympathetic about the protagonist that they were uncomfortable with the kind of choices she made.

They were extremely apprehensive about the protagonist taking on the family, mother-in-law, husband and a family preacher.

They felt that by showing the family in a regressive manner, the serial did not explore alternative attitudes and behaviour.

Finally, they were extremely skeptical about the judiciousness of the protagonist leaving the house, As far as the respondents were concerned, the decision was neither practical nor desirable.

Ajmer

Given their cautious approach, it was clear that while the serial was likely to work in some ways, it would be problematic in other ways.

The focus on the injustice to younger women, worked.

However, they found the relationship with peers and friends as problematic.

As far as they were concerned, women's rights has to be located within the family and the latter has to be involved in supporting women to realize these rights and entitlements.

Amritsar

Given their politically correct and measured response, they agreed that the serial certainly depicted situations that were happening to people around them.

In fact, the problem of sex determination they stated was far more serious and deeply entrenched. "They have created a mindset, that if you have a male child the whole world will embrace you".

Having admitted to the problem, they were not convinced that the legal system could be sympathetic and supportive of women's rights.

Perceptions of older women on gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility

Across the cities, the older women found themselves getting defensive about the characterisation of the older women and her highly authoritative and dogmatic relationship with her daughter-in-law.

A few of the respondents were self-righteous and some very emphatic and even upbeat about the fact that they were the exception to the rule and had happily adjusted to the needs of younger people.

However, majority of them felt extremely confused, emotionally isolated and marginalized. Depending on the category they belonged to, they reflected those responses.

Much of their image as regressive and authoritarian, they felt had to do with the media's pre-occupation with reports of horrific atrocities committed by mother-in-law. Across the cities, the older women were anxious that the media should not stereotype older women.

On the issue of sex-determination they were extremely defensive and many respondents not willing to give up the conventional notion of son-preference.

Some even went to the extent of justifying many of their practices and perspectives and seeking all types of "compromises" and "half-way" norms of change.

Evaluating the older women's engagement with the serial

Kurukshetra

In Kurukshetra, the respondents recognized and identified with the all-pervasive growth of the issue.

They had troubled relationship with the serial, problem with the treatment of issue and characterization of the older women.

They were particularly interested in the serial fleshing out the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship.

What worked?

The protagonist evoked great admiration from respondents.

What was Problematic?

To many others, Mamta's leaving the house meant the conflict between her and mother-in-law was not properly fleshed out and the alternative of asserting her right in the household not adequately explored.

Rohtak

In Rohtak the older women were somewhat disturbed by the serial. They felt that the maker had not adequately recognized their experiences and concerns and were particularly resentful of the manner in which the older woman and the family portrayed. Hence, they responded by stating that the entire narrative was "unreal" and the characterisation of the older woman was totally "imaginary" and "unbelievable".

They were particularly distressed about the mother-in-law's relationship with the Guru. On the issue of sex determination, many of them were determined to make a distinction between being prejudiced of the girl-child or disliking the daughters and actively seeking services for sex-selection in some "special" circumstances. They held the daughter-in-law equally responsible for such decision of sex determination.

However, the serial served the purpose of catalyzing debate and discussion on the issue, to some extent even unleashed soul-searching.

What created a jolt was the decision by the daughter-in-law to leave the house.

Ajmer

In Ajmer, the older women were not so defensive. In fact, despite having some level of disagreement with the manner in which the maker depicted the older character, they did not accuse the maker of exaggerating or distorting realities.

In fact, the serial evoked was a tremendous amount of soul-searching and an internal discussion with each other.

They felt that the characterisation of the older woman was too one-dimensional.

Amritsar

In Amritsar, the older women were extremely conciliatory and in many ways more progressive than their counterparts in other cities.

They found that the approach used by the mother-in-law in the serial as completely unacceptable and unworkable.

They accepted the fact that older women, who were extremely prejudicial and susceptible to all kinds of superstition and spiritual advice, could be greatly responsible for this growing practice of sex determination.

Perception of men on gender discrimination, sex determination and male responsibility

Men responded in a contradictory manner. On moral grounds, many of them were against the practice of sex determination. They saw it as an alien technological invasion.

The men recognized that although they were to an extent influenced by traditional gender norms and expectations, they all insisted that they had made personal departures from such conventional behaviour.

So, they were intellectually prepared to examine the issue of lack of women's rights from different standpoints-wife and mother but ended up staying neutral, non-committal and to great extent passive.

Despite all the pragmatism and down-to-earth thinking they found it difficult to address many of the day-to-day concerns.

Although there was a general agreement that men have to "cope" with these issues of change and stress, much of the soul-searching on how best to cope with the problem stemmed from the anxiety to keep intact the joint family.

Evaluating the men's engagement with the serial

Given these perceptions, it was clear that the serial would not entirely succeed in engaging men or creating the necessary soul searching. From the standpoint of public education, some groups of respondents welcomed the serial.

Kurukshetra

In Kurukshetra, the men accepted the prevalence of the issue. However, when it came to specific characterization and depictions, they had their problems with it. It is obvious that the serial raised many uncomfortable issues for them but was not able to flesh out and in any significant way address their dilemmas and quandaries.

Rohtak

In Rohtak the men were extremely emphatic as far as the issue was concerned. They were morally indignant and saw sex determination as practice that was part of the technological invasion from the West.

Given this standpoint, they had no credibility problem with the serial.

This does not imply that they meaningfully engaged with related concerns such as the issue of women's rights and male responsibility.

Ajmer

In Ajmer, the men were extremely defensive, insisting that their day-to-day role in subordinating women was grossly exaggerated. They could not link the issue of sex determination with the lack of rights of women and the subordination of women by men.

Amritsar

In Amritsar, the male respondents held the mother-in-law primarily responsible for the problem and were extremely critical of the male protagonist.

What disturbed them most was the fact that Mamta, the central protagonist had left the household.

Senior respondents felt that elders and in particular mothers-in-law could be extremely biased and misleading. They cautioned the young men against the mother's instigation. However, the younger men responded very defensively and with low confidence.

This is where the alternatives presented by the serial of adopting a more caring male attitude, did not seem to work.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

FGD	:	Focus group discussion
CFAR	:	Centre for Advocacy and Research

GLOSSARY

Atmajaa	:	Born from the soul
Bechara	:	Pathetic person
Guruji	:	Spiritual mentor
Kendra	:	Center
Saas-Bahu	:	Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law
Sadhu	:	Mendicant
Devdasi	:	A girl ostensibly sold to the temple and dedicated to God, using traditional and customary norms and practices to perpetuate prostitution

2. INTRODUCTION

The five-city audience feedback study on the thirteen episodes *Atmajaa* serial was done with the objective of gauging and assessing the overall impact and effect the popular communication had on specific target audiences.

The serial *Atmajaa* attempted to use the format of *edutainment or infotainment* to convey messages on the inalienable rights of the girl-child and the illegality of sex determination and sex-selection. To highlight these aspects the serial contextualised the problem in an urban upper middle class North Indian family.

Within this familiar context, the tele-fiction plays out the relationship dimension between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, husband and wife, making the older woman and the son jointly responsible for perpetuating entrenched patriarchal values and the anti girl-child attitudes.

Simultaneously the serial exposes the unethical role of doctors and shows how in such an environment, they exploit the situation and act as the critical link in institutionalizing and scaling up this malpractice of eliminating the female fetus.

However, none of this goes unchallenged and the daughter-in-law, the central protagonist, decides to take recourse to the law and fights this malpractice in the public and private domain. Hence, the serial not only focused on the problem but also explored legal solutions and attitudinal shifts and alternatives.

Given this thrust it was essential to assess whether the serial has had the desired effect of catalyzing a household and community discourse on the different aspects of the issue. Whom did the viewers hold responsible for the situation? To what extent were the viewers open to an attitudinal rethink? Did they understand the relationship and link between gender inequality and sex determination? Were the audiences aware of the ban on sex selection? How did they assess the attitudinal biases, prejudices, dilemmas and conflicts that the various protagonists in the serial experienced in taking a stand on this issue?

3. PROCESS

3.1 DESK RESEARCH

The desk research helped us to understand the issues and messages in the serial and aimed at deconstructing and interpreting the characters, issues and messages involved.

We began with scanning regional newspapers to get an understanding of the programmes of Regional Kendras. We identified the programme genre and the slots. This helped us to create an inventory of the National and Regional Kendras' programmes in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), Jalandhar (Punjab) and Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh).

Meanwhile, a sample of seven episodes were selected to look at the communication elements such as characters, quality of dialogues, plot, storyline, issues and the messages. For this purpose, the first three and last four episodes were transcribed and the visuals deconstructed. The first three episodes dealt with the issue of Sex Determination, Abortion, Reproductive Rights, Superstition, Dowry, Sex Selection, Domestic Violence and the *Devdasi* system. In the last four episodes the focus was on developing appropriate solutions such as developing a support group, dealing with medical malpractice such as last trimester abortion and illegalities of sex selection.

We prepared a matrix on the main protagonist in order to understand the different phases of depiction. This included:

- *Phase of negotiation/ defensive fighting:* The protagonist tries in her own way to mend the situation and makes a strong effort to avert threat to her pregnancy.
- *Phase of single/ separated women:* When she is purposeful, avoids any small talk with neighbours, prefers to appear like a recluse and discourages any intrusion into her privacy.
- *Phase of building a support system:* Turns the personal network into a professional network and association. Transforms the problem from an individual one into a social problem.
- *Phase of resolution:* Rebuilds past life- asserts right to daughter and marital home, asserts the woman's right to full-term pregnancy, legally opposes the practice of sex selection, sensitizes the social network on the importance of ethics and human relationship.

Based on this deconstruction, we designed the methodology and tools for the study.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative study – two phases

- Phase I: Baseline indicators (pre-telecast)
- Phase II: Episode specific feedback (post-telecast)

We conducted the study in two phases. Phase one was a baseline study, done pre-telecast to establish some baseline indicators about the potential response to the serial. Phase two tracked the audience response in different cities, during the period of telecast to check out whether the expectations were validated.

The phase one aimed at establishing baseline indicators as to what extent was the serial likely to succeed among different audiences. What kind of engagement would the different audience groups have with the narrative- the story line, the pace, the messages, the characterization etc. Based on this preliminary feedback to assess the actual response of the viewers to the serial and document the specific feedback of different audience groups.

Tool of Enquiry

- Focus Group Discussion (FGD)
- Audience Panel Feedback

The **Focus Group Discussions** (FGD) were semi-structured, enabling an open-ended discussion around specific attitudinal and situational challenges, immediate feedback to assess levels of knowledge, empathy and aspirations.

Audience Panel Feedback: A panel of eight viewers in each of the five cities gave us structured feedback on production values of the serial. These pertained to specific episodes-first, fourth, ninth and thirteenth.

Respondents' Profile

In keeping with the kind of characterization that emerges from the serial, targeting the family as a unit and positioning the mother-in-law, daughter-in-law and son as distinct target audience, we accordingly segmented the groups. We dealt with three distinct groups-younger women, older women and men and explored their actual and potential role and relationship within the family as daughter-in-law, mother-in-law and as sons and husbands.

The young women consisted of married, unmarried, working and housewives between the 24-35 age group.

The older women consisted of mothers-in-law working, non-working between 45 to 60 years representing joint and nuclear families.

The men included sons and husbands from age group 35 to 60 years. Many were self-employed, small businessmen, supervisors and young executives from the public and private sectors.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The respondents were from the upper and middle class socio-economic categories of A1, A2, B1 and B2. However, in the case of men we had some respondents from category-C. This bias towards the upper strata emerged from the Census data. It is clear from the data that the higher the income and educational attainment of the community, the greater is the tendency to take recourse to female feticide.

Before conducting the focus group discussions, we also administered a recruitment questionnaire to ensure that respondents meet certain critical criteria. This includes being a loyal Doordarshan viewer, ensuring a balanced representation of married and single women, joint and nuclear family etc.

Selection of Cities

We selected A, B, and C class cities such as Delhi, Ajmer, Amritsar, Kurukshetra and Rohtak because Census 2001 shows that all these cities are witnessing adverse sex ratio in the 0-6 age group.

Focus Group Discussions

We used multiple methods to investigate knowledge, attitude and perceptions. This included the following:

A spontaneous and rapid feedback on identifiable role models to gauge the dimension of aspiration and what they view as socially desirable and supportive behaviour.

A more considered response through a moderated discussion on a highly recognisable problematic real-life situation. This interaction helped to assess attitudinal paradigm of the respondents.

Based on this preliminary feedback we used specific clips, denoting different aspects of the issue to assess their identification and quality of engagement with the issue and the manner in which it is represented in the serial.

Audience Panel Feedback

We constituted an eight-member panel in five cities. The panel consisted of equal proportion of young married/ unmarried and elderly women. The audience panel was given a structured format to fill up after viewing specific episodes. The audience had to rate the entertainment and production value of the program. This included identification with characters, quality of dialogue, appropriateness of setting, visual appeal and satisfaction with the musical score.

4. BASELINE-PRE-TELECAST STUDY IN DELHI

4.1 KEY OBJECTIVES

To assess prevailing attitudes, values, mindsets on the issue of sex selection, son preference and discrimination against the girl-child.

To ascertain levels of readiness of key target sections of the programme to the theme and its treatment and the quality of messages that emerge.

To identify areas, which the viewers were likely to support and areas likely to cause stress, etc.

Focus Group Discussions

Locations

Younger Women- South Delhi

Older Women- West Delhi

Men- East Delhi

4.2 MAJOR FINDINGS

The baseline study made it very clear that young women across the cities were likely to be the most decisive supporter of the serial.

We can attribute this decisive support to the fact that the maker linked sex selection to the larger reality of gender inequality, the denial of basic rights and entitlements to women particularly in the marital household. This was likely to evoke a responsive chord among younger women.

The older women would have a compelling but uneasy and disturbed relationship with the serial. Given the construct of the older character and the serial clearly indicting her for perpetuating this practice, the older women will get defensive and reactive. However, in the process, they would re-visit their apprehensions and anxieties. This soul-searching exercise would help them to engage with the issue and deal with some of their attitudes and experiences.

The men would have a critical relationship with the serial. They would feel personally excluded and marginalized. Given their capacity to deal theoretically with issues, they would not express any disagreement with the larger focus of the serial on gender discrimination and its links with practices such as sex selection. However, when it comes to its reflection in the day-to-day practices adopted by the characters in the serial, they

would get extremely agitated and even harbour the feeling that the challenges confronting men have not been inadequately represented.

4.3 PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNGER WOMEN ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION, SEX DETERMINATION AND MALE RESPONSIBILITY

The feedback from young women indicated that across the board, whether married or unmarried, there was a consensus about the need to be empowered. They attributed much of the barrier to women's empowerment, to the intrusion and interference from the marital family and mother-in-law.

Within this segment a small and critical mass of unmarried girls were extremely combative, highly conscious of their personhood and anxious to preserve it even in a marital household.

The rest of the unmarried girls, though conscious of their rights, tended to be quietly assertive and in some ways even prepared to make some unavoidable adjustments.

Sowmya (unmarried): *“Just give some time... The problems get discussed, they come out, both sides negotiate and then things are solved”.*

However, a majority of married young women though conscious of their rights, put more emphasis on developing the skills and mechanisms to cope with the problems of inequality, disrespect and lack of autonomy.

Sarita (housewife): *“Whenever I have any argument with her I just keep quiet. I leave the place and go to my room. After some time matters cool down”.*

The mechanisms they were looking for ranged from the simple to the more complex. This included being able to handle disagreements within the family to being economically independent and setting up a nuclear household.

Monika (unmarried): *“If you are working you get full respect. Economic independence is very necessary for women”.*

Despite some differences in approach between married and unmarried women, what united both groups was the discomfort and unease with in-laws and marital family. The mother-in-law was perceived as a common source of anxiety and the major threat to the couple trying to work out a marriage. In comparison, since the relationship with husband seemed more critical, they were determined to work it out at all cost. Despite the high stakes, it caused less anxiety for women.

Somya (unmarried): *“Before agreeing to marriage, I will first check out my mother-in-law and then only think about the boy”.*

All the respondents were aware of the sex determination issue. Since, many of them have also seen it happen within their family, they indirectly took responsibility for the issue.

Somya (unmarried): *“In my family itself the couple went for the sex determination and then aborted the baby girl and told everyone that it was miscarriage”.*

What they were most distressed and a few even furious about the practice of sex selection was the fact that it was demonstrating a negative social attitude to the girl-child. In fact, all of them felt that the malpractice came from the larger bias and discrimination against the girl-child and everyone, including the doctor, is party to it.

In relation to solution, much of the focus was on preventing such exploitation and discrimination. The unmarried girls emphasised the need to select the spouse carefully after checking out the man and the family. However, once in a marital relationship, then the women have no choice but to make it work, because there was a near universal perception that it is not easy to divorce or walk out of marriage.

It was clear that given such a definite approach the younger women would find it extremely challenging to engage with Mamta’s decision to leave the house and assert her right to motherhood with the support of peer and sympathetic friends.

4.4 EVALUATING YOUNGER WOMEN’S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SERIAL

How and why is it likely to work with this primary target audience? Some of the major reasons for the serial having the potential to involve this target audience were as follows:

- The selection of a highly relevant and “emotive” issue and the serial’s ability to confront the problem.
- With injustice as a strong hook the “black” and “white” contrast of the Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law was likely to evoke among young women a strong identification and involvement with the story line and treatment of the issue.
- The quick transition of the protagonist from “oppression” to “resistance” would help to create an action-packed pace and sustain the interest of the viewers.
- The strong body language of the protagonist, the responsiveness of the law to the concerns of women and the decisive finish would enhance its appeal.

Some of the major problematic areas identified during the baseline study and in fact persisted across the telecast phase were:

It is clear from the feedback that while women were extremely conscious and even aggressive about the need to select the right partner, check out the antecedents of the family, but once married they have to make it work. Therefore, Mamta’s decision to leave the house caused a lot of problem. During the telecast, this created across the cities

a credibility gap bordering on personal discomfort as far as the issue was concerned. There was and continued to be an uncertainty about how to perceive the act of leaving the marital home. The respondents could not make out whether it was an act of courage or an act of cowardice. Whether it was a sign of rebellion or an act that signified that the protagonist was not trying enough to influence or change the attitude of her husband.

Even less believable would be the protagonist or Mamta's destiny with motherhood and re-forging ties with her first child. This would be dispensable.

Finally, the manner in which the protagonist leveraged the law would also evoke diverse responses-some getting motivated but many others not finding it believable and feeling that such situations are easier to envisage in fiction than in reality.

4.5 PERCEPTIONS OF OLDER WOMEN ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION, SEX DETERMINATION AND MALE RESPONSIBILITY

The older women would have an uneasy but compelling relationship with the serial. They tend to look at their present from the standpoint of the past. When they looked back, what impressed them was the fact that in their younger years they had been useful, physically and mentally strong and had been noticed and appreciated.

Subhadra (grandmother): *“Earlier we had the strength both physical and mental. When I look myself 30 years back I used to walk all the way to the hospital and I took my kids also with me”.*

In contrast, the challenge in the present was to sustain the quality of life they had led and preserve the values they had grown up with and nurtured. The objective was to evoke the much-deserved respect and cope with the generation gap.

Subhadra: *“Mothers-in-law yearn for a grandson. This is a natural desire. So the daughter-in-law should also take care while talking to the mother-in-law. She should not talk in the manner she did”.*

From this perspective, they found the younger generation physically inactive, aggressive about leisure time, disrespectful about tradition and, though strong willed and economically independent, immature and disconnected.

4.6 EVALUATING OLDER WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SERIAL

It was clear that older women were likely to have a difficult but compelling relationship with the serial. They would view the story line and the treatment of the issue of sex determination from the perspective of a society that has lost its moorings. The issue of

sex determination will not seize them as much as the fragility of marriage and relationship because much of the ills of present they associate with lack of bonding.

With the storyline focusing on antagonistic relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, they would have a defensive relationship with the characterization of the older woman and the situation. Moreover, with conflict coming to a head and the daughter-in-law leaving the house, there will be a sense of familiarity and pain.

Under these circumstances, it was clear that they were likely to have an argumentative and active relationship with the serial. Each one would have their reason to argue with the serial. We would find respondents exercised about different aspects of the serial. Some would be extremely distressed about the mother-in-law and her crude understanding of tradition. Others were exercised about daughter-in-law's decision to leave the house. Many of this potential viewer response got borne out from the audience feedback we got after telecast of the serial.

4.7 PERCEPTIONS OF MEN ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION, SEX DETERMINATION AND MALE RESPONSIBILITY

The serial would evoke mixed reactions from men. While empathizing with the younger women, accepting the magnitude of the problem, they will have serious misgivings about the manner in which the serial constructed relationships.

They intellectually accept and attribute the fact that the age-old socialization on gender has created a male dominated society. Their personal experiences have shown that patriarchal attitudes are deeply entrenched. However, they would not be prepared to view the problem as solely male-driven. They stressed the fact that in a patriarchal society, men often found themselves marginalized and became the “hidden” victims of the problem.

Neeraj Jain (husband): *“It is true that from childhood males are given more importance. This stems from the division of labour. Since we expect men to take care of the economic needs of family, they take decisions for the family”.*

They accept that whatever change is happening as far as male attitude is concerned, is slow, superficial and inconsistent. While men are partly responsible for perpetuating male dominated attitudes, they feel women have their own interest in not challenging these attitudes. This is most evident when it comes to issues such as sex determination. They find that women are equally responsible for such biased attitudes.

Ghosh (husband): *“If the husband helps his wife in the household work then it becomes gossip among the women. The wife should think that he is not doing any favour rather it is his duty to help her”.*

In their personal experience, they found that sensitive males were not adequately supported. Women are as much interested in perpetuating machismo as the men were. Even when the men took personal stand on many issues such as sharing household work, content with a family size of one or two daughters, they found it difficult to fight back the social biases. They found that even as men you pay a price if you go against the tide.

Neeraj Jain (husband): *“I have two daughters. Even today in society people call me ‘bechara or poor thing’. No family member takes an exception to such remarks”.*

4.8 EVALUATING MEN’S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SERIAL

There is no doubt that the men would be sympathetic to the younger woman. They will find male behaviour in the serial extremely predictable, but will not trivialize the concern or deny the male behaviour. However, they would have a problem with how the serial depicts the process of “change”. They would not be convinced that empowered women,

sensitive law and supportive men could come together to bring about change. On this aspect, they would have different takes on it.

Hence, the serial is likely to engage them in parts but would not provide believable explanations for the many questions and issues that they raised. The most serious gap is the fact that the serial does not explore the men's experience as "hidden victims" and this will create a problem of association with the story line and the characterization of the major protagonists.

4.9 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The baseline study clearly indicated that the serial would have differential impact on the different audience groups. All the three sections-younger women, older women and men were likely to engage with the serial. However, it was clear that the quality of engagement would be different.

The younger women were likely to have a more pro-active engagement with the serial as a whole and in particular with the central protagonist. Since the serial maker links sex-determination with the issue of women's empowerment and autonomy, younger women are likely to respond decisively to the issue and the need to address it.

In the case of the older women, it was clear that the serial would encourage them to clarify and reformulate their perspectives, revisit and introspect about specific experiences, happenings and relationships. In the process of trying to understand, even explain the excesses of the older protagonist, they would actually engage with the entire situational challenges that older women are facing. From this perspective, they would relate to the issue of sex determination.

In the case of the men, it was clear that since the representation of the main male protagonist is extremely one-sided and depicts the "not-so-empowered", regressive male, the men would distance themselves from this protagonist. They would recognize the concerns of younger woman in the serial and would be extremely concerned about the pressures and influence the mother-in-law is exercising on the younger woman. While this would allow them to get involved with the story, it would not help them to engage with the regressive attitude of the male protagonist. They would express difficulty in accepting the messages that emerge from the serial particularly in dealing with aspects such as male responsibility and involvement as partner and husband. In the process they would develop a critical relationship with the issues, question many of the assumptions being made about male behaviour and would emotionally engage with many of these concerns.

5. POST BASELINE AUDIENCE FEEDBACK - KEY FINDINGS

Young Women

It is clear from the findings of the pre-telecast baseline study that younger women would actively engage with the serial in particular the experiences of the central protagonist. Much of the feedback and their assessment of the issues took place from the standpoint of extreme empathy and concern. It was clear to them that since the issue of sex determination was linked to women's autonomy and rights in the marital home, they had to take into account different experiences they associated with marriage and rights of women. Therefore, they minutely analyzed the decisions taken by the central protagonist. They supported some, were critical of some and even strongly rejected others.

5.1 PERCEPTIONS OF THE YOUNGER RESPONDENTS ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION, SEX DETERMINATION AND MALE RESPONSIBILITY

5.1.1 Kurukshetra

In Kurukshetra, young women across the board, recognized that sex determination and sex selection is a dominant practice. Some of the married women have personally experienced it. Others, some whom are single, have seen it happening among close kin and relatives. All felt pressured. Some felt humiliated and angry. Others appeared less decisive as they were not prepared to take a strong personal stand or preclude the possibility of not taking recourse to it, voluntarily or by force.

The manner in which some respondents expressed their views indicated their personal position on the issue. Some respondents revealed anger and frustration. For instance:

Minu Sahwa (married): *“Whenever we make a plan about the future, my in-laws ask me to take herbal medicine so that I could give birth to a male child ...and it leads to an argument”.*

Anita Sharma (married): *“People who say all this, don't they think that they themselves are women?”*

Others though aware of the concern, found themselves not being able to take a strong personal stand.

Simran (married): *“My daughter has a set of three dolls. One day she came out with her dolls. My mother-in-law said – what have you brought? Take it away, we don't want sisters. See, toy should also be in the form of male. She got it removed from the room”.*

Others were keen to pose as “different”

Monika Modgil (married): *“Boys and girls are differentiated but girls are doing better than boys in each field. However, in my house this sort of feeling is absent. My mother-in-law has two sons and they were quite happy on the birth of a baby girl”.*

In trying to cope with the problem, they exercised different options. Some preferred to confront the problem, share their views and insights with others in the family but **finally take their own decisions.** For instance, some of the respondents stated that:

Palki Arora (unmarried): *“Inform them and then conceive and if they asks for test then it is not acceptable. That decision is mine”.*

Deepika Mazumdar (unmarried): *“I am unmarried but I will take my own decision and I will never encourage interference”.*

Others preferred to be conciliatory, use whatever opportunity came their way to interact with the family, inform the family about their needs and ultimately **demand only those rights that are in keeping with the family norms and expectations.** This is clear from the following observations made by the respondents:

Bhavna (married): *“We should keep our parents and in-laws informed. Whenever we go out, we inform our parents. Similarly, if we take any decision then we should inform our in-laws respectfully”.*

Samera (unmarried): *“After marriage I will keep my in-laws informed to avoid the allegations. I have seen saas-bahu arguing on this issue that you didn’t inform me earlier”.*

5.1.2 Rohtak

In Rohtak also we found young unmarried women more candid and forthright. They were extremely frank about the kind of discrimination that young women face in their lives, including the preference for sons and practices like sex determination.

Reena: *“If we take the larger society, even today the son preference is very strong. Wherever the family succeeds in having a son after a daughter the situation is okay but if the family has two girls then they have problems with it. If they can accept two sons then why not two daughters”.*

Agreeing with this, **Jyoti** stated, *“If we conduct a survey in this city you will realize how strong the son preference is”.*

Young married women on the other hand were highly defensive. With only one or two willing to admit about the concern, we found that a majority of them were half-hearted in the recognition of the problem, particularly at the personal level.

Kamlesh Mehta (married): *“I don't agree, I have two daughters but I never felt this way”.*

Mrs. Bhatia (married): *“When my daughter was born we celebrated her birth with zest. But such celebration was not there on the birth of our son. Girls love their parents very much but the boys never love their parents”.*

However, they did concede that the bias does exist. For instance one of the experiences they shared was:

Sneha: *“When my friend got the ultrasound test done she was wrongly told that it was a male child. Till today her husband taunts her about it and her mother-in-law feels that she deliberately told a lie to save the fetus”.*

Despite this personal denial and disassociation with the problem, they were keen to explore the issue of women's autonomy and rights. They stressed that **any public education and messaging should also target the mother-in-law as they have unrealistic expectations from the daughter-in-law.**

Kamlesh: *“Along with husbands we also need to inspire the mothers-in-law to change their attitude. They have very unrealistic expectations from daughter-in-law and if those are not met they start maligning the daughter-in-law”.*

Husbands they felt that though partisan and evasive they could be educated or sensitized and made to play a decisive role on issues such as sex determination.

Nisha: *“My husband told me in the beginning that if anybody in the family tells you anything then you please keep quiet in order to maintain peace in the house. If the husband so desires he can solve any problem that crops up in the family”.*

Kamlesh: *“After the birth of two daughters my in-laws asked me to try for a son. But my husband strongly refused to go for ultrasound”.*

In the case of unmarried girls and women, there was a feeling among some respondents that despite the persistent social bias against the girl child, particularly in rural Haryana, their lives had changed for the better. **Getting education and access to the media has made a big difference.**

Nisha: *“These days, girls need not to take suggestions from others. They know about*

their rights through serials and newspapers and they are fighting their own battle”.

However, they also realize that it is precisely these so-called gains made by younger women that have created a chasm between them and the rest of the family.

Reema: *“The main concern is education. If everyone in the family is educated then there is no problem, people understand each other”.*

5.1.3 Ajmer

In Ajmer the responses altered. The women were far more cautious in their attitude. **The younger women adopted a more cautious approach.** They and in particular the married women were keen to be seen as balancing rights and responsibilities. Married women were particularly anxious not to talk about rights without also expressing their views on responsibilities.

The unmarried women on the other hand felt that rights awareness is extremely important to prevent their exploitation. At one level, there was a feeling among young unmarried girls that their lives had changed for the better and much of this they attributed to their exposure to better educational opportunities. At another level, they also saw rights in a far more formal legalistic manner and realised that they need to do much more to secure these rights. They stressed the fact that knowledge of legal rights requires education and in a State where there is so much female illiteracy and low education, they felt that this is going to be a major challenge.

Married women on the other hand personalised their understanding of rights and saw much of it reflected in their daily transaction. Therefore, they felt that these rights must be secured from the family in a gracious and accommodating manner. Such an approach, they felt, depended on the educational background and status of the family they got married to.

In their experience, they found that men who came from business background had lesser exposure to education and tended to be more authoritative in their attitude to women. In such context, if they demanded rights the family would misunderstand their intentions. They would be seen as women who are not committed as caregivers. The only exceptional situation was when women took on the family to protect the inheritance rights of the children. Such aggression often pays off once the dispute gets resolved in their favour.

5.1.4 Amritsar

In Amritsar the young women tended to be very politically correct and measured in their responses. They felt that in comparison to the older generation, they have gained far more

say in the family on decisions taken about their marriage and career. The families were consulting the young women, giving them the right to decide whether the family should solemnize the marriage commitment or not. They do believe that some basic change in the attitude to girl-child has happened. Being educated, they admit, has given them an edge over the older generation.

However, much of this change, they admitted, was within well-defined limits. In fact, the freedom to choose is still limited as the older people insist that the choice of the marital partner should be from the boys that they have selected for this purpose.

Most elders, they felt had no confidence in the ability of the girls to choose their partner. Any such relationships would be broken on grounds of incompatibility of status and class. "Parents do not even allow us to chat with boys," they stated.

Barring a few respondents who resented this parental approach, most of the younger women had internalized the feeling that "older generation was more experienced and they can tell what is right and wrong". These respondents had the feeling that some of this restriction was "beneficial" to them.

Given this perspective, there was a feeling among young women that older people were tradition-bound and unresponsive to change because they were extremely protective about the children. Given the social turmoil and even degeneration, they felt that parents were justified in being apprehensive and even over protective towards younger people. It was more an expression of lack of confidence in society rather on the young women per se.

5.2 EVALUATING YOUNGER WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SERIAL

It is clear from the varying perceptions of young women that while the serial would evoke positive and affirmative response from them, they would have specific challenges in the kind of alternatives and solutions that the serial tries to explore. This could range from Mamta leaving the marital home, to building a support network of peers and friends to taking recourse to law to resolve the issue.

5.2.1 Kurukshetra

The young women wholeheartedly participated in the dramatization of the issue. There was no question of "neutrality". In fact, everyone had a personal stand on the issue. There was a strong identification with the dilemma of the protagonist. All the respondents felt that the protagonist was denied her personhood in the marital family.

However, they selectively engaged with the issue. While unmarried and single young women were preoccupied with the root and source of the problem, married young women were more exercised about the response to the problem.

The single women engaged with that part of the narrative that dealt with the root of the problem. To some, it was the oppressive intention of the mother-in-law. Others were more exercised about the disappointing behaviour of the husband and cautioned against the dangerous influence of spiritual mentors.

The married women were more preoccupied with the response to the problem. The respondents got fixated on different aspects of the story line. Many were extremely anxious about the daughter-in-law's decision to leave the house. They were worried that such a set of action could jeopardise the marriage and even result in divorce. They would have preferred it if the narrative had created a distinction between the husband and mother-in-law and provided some space for dialogue and reconciliation with the husband.

While some dimensions appeared authentic and challenging, there were others that they felt that lacked complexity. What was believable was the preference for a male child. The daughters-in-law had all experienced a favoured treatment when they had a male child. However, although this helped them to identify with the protagonist, they could not entirely identify with the treatment of "rebellion" by the daughter-in-law. **They wanted the serial to depict the "rebellion" by the daughter-in-law in a more complex way and would have preferred greater degree of hard "negotiations" within the family.**

5.2.2 Rohtak

It is clear that the serial had a strong impact on them. So strong was the impact that they were keen to re-visit the response of the protagonist. Moreover, they felt so sympathetic about the protagonist that they were uncomfortable with the kind of choices she made.

"In this narrative the girl alone suffers and is forced to carry the burden and pressure of everyone. She has no other alternative but to rebel".

They were extremely apprehensive about the protagonist taking on the family, mother-in-law, husband and a family preacher. They felt that by showing the family in a regressive manner, the serial did not explore alternative attitudes and behaviour.

"It is important that the husband should be depicted as playing a decisive role, At the end of the narrative, the message that emerges is the central role men need to play to change entrenched attitudes".

“He has to be motivated to stand up to the pressure of his mother”.

“It is important to depict the situation as a husband-wife issue, where they should jointly decide on when to have a child and in this joint decision the consent of the woman is critical”.

Finally, they were extremely skeptical about the judiciousness of the protagonist leaving the house, As far as the respondents were concerned, the decision was neither practical nor desirable.

“The protagonist should not have left the house, it is not possible for her to sustain on her own”.

“She should have stayed back and fought for her right to have the child”.

“Even if she decided to leave the house, she should have ensured support from her own family and returned to her mother”.

“By leaving the house she has lost her right”.

“By deciding to separate and stay independently, she burns her boat with her-in-laws and her husband and in our social context, they can accuse the woman of all kinds of wrong-doing, and even justify marrying another woman”.

It is clear from the above feedback that the serial and the messages evoked extremely strong responses and revealed their day-to-day stakes in the issue and the responses that the serial advocated. **Given these stakes, they were anxious that the response is not just of women driven but more broad-based with men and the family also taking a stand on the issue.**

Women clearly informed the producer that any social messaging or influencing mindset has to target men and the family. To do this it has to present shades of grey and project supportive behaviour by men.

5.2.3 Ajmer

Given the cautious approach of the respondents, it was clear that while the serial was likely to work in some ways, it would be problematic in other ways. The serial worked in a critical manner as it focused on the injustice to younger women.

Across the board, the younger women identified with the characterization of the mother-in-law. They agreed that they could be highly biased and prejudicial in their behaviour and expectations from the daughters-in-law. If they do not challenge or

reform the mother-in-law, they would impose their will and decision in every situation, even insist that the daughters-in-law do not pursue career.

However, it is also clear that the clip that we used to catalyze a discussion on the treatment of issues in the serial created some concern and discomfort. Since they were very firmly of the view that the family was the essential unit for change, **the maker had to handle the role of friends and peers in abetting this change with greater complexity. They found the latter aspect problematic.**

Therefore, when the clip explored the dilemma of a supporting character, a friend of the central protagonist who did not want to bear children because she wanted to pursue her career, the representation alienated them. At the same time, the fact that she did not counter her husband's preference for a male child to ensure his smooth inheritance to property also put them off and they wondered what the serial was trying to suggest.

As far as they were concerned, women's rights had to be located within the family and the latter had to be involved in supporting women to realize these rights and entitlements. The first pre-requisite for women to realize their rights was economic independence. However, that right, they felt, should not be pitted against the decision not to have a child because this would give wrong messages to the family coming to terms with the growing aspirations of younger women.

Given the kind of definite stakes the respondents had on this issue, they were extremely specific about what they liked and did not like. **They did not support any messages or representation that was too radical or too assertive. At the same time, they were unconvinced about the manner in which the protagonist was ambivalent on certain critical issues such as the husband's preference for a male child.** They found her not strong and assertive enough where it mattered and at the same time over ambitious about her career and professional life. It created a serious credibility gap.

5.2.4 Amritsar

Given their politically correct response, they agreed that the serial certainly depicted situations that were happening to people around them. However, in the serial they found that the presence of the family priest and the kind of superstition that he propounded unnecessary.

In fact, the problem of sex determination they stated was far more serious and deeply entrenched. "They have created a mindset, that if you have a male child the whole world will embrace you".

Having admitted to the problem, they were not convinced that the legal system could be sympathetic and supportive of women's rights. As far as they were concerned, the society was so "male-dominated" that even among educated and working couples, no meaningful attitudinal change had taken place among men and women. The

family continues to exploit working women, often making them work at home and outside. Like all other cities, the respondents found that the serial had oversimplified the process of resistance and change.

5.3 PERCEPTIONS OF OLDER WOMEN ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION, SEX DETERMINATION AND MALE RESPONSIBILITY

Across the cities, the older women found themselves getting defensive about the characterization of the older women and her highly authoritative and dogmatic relationship with her daughter-in-law. The serial characterized older people as facing a life-style crisis, incapable of adapting to change and developing the much-needed partnership with younger people.

Did this lack of comfort with the older character alienate them or discourage them from viewing it. On the contrary, they developed a compelling fascination for it. **Across the cities when we tried to gauge their views and perspective on the issues, we found a range of responses. A few of the respondents were self-righteous and some emphatic and even upbeat about the fact that they were the exception to the rule and had happily adjusted to the needs of younger people. However, majority of them felt extremely confused, emotionally isolated and marginalized.**

Depending on the category they belonged to, they reflected those responses. If it was the former, they admitted that they experienced a lot of strife within the family, particularly from their daughters-in-law and did not feel adequately supported by their sons. They insisted that they were always been correct in their behaviour, often driven by the conviction that whatever they were saying and doing were for the long-term good of the family. As in the case of all conscience-keepers, they felt that with the passage of time, everyone would agree with their views.

The small segment that celebrated their status as senior citizen insisted that they had re-invented their role as mother-in-law and had established a new equation with their daughters-in-law. The equation was no longer based on prerogative and privilege but on love and understanding. They were keen to stress that they could be fair, mature and flexible in their relationship with younger women.

However, the majority of respondents did not feel self-righteous. They were feeling extremely misunderstood and confused. They agreed that they would “have to change” their “thinking and attitude on this issue”.

Much of their image as regressive and authoritarian, they felt had to do with the media's pre-occupation with reports of horrific atrocities committed by the mother-in-law. “These reports of mother-in-law burning daughters-in-law are not happening everywhere. May be such incidents happen in rural areas. In fact in urban areas if there is any problem then the first step the son and daughter-in-law takes is to separate and set up independent household” they stated.

Across the cities, the older women were anxious that the media should not stereotype older women. If any attitudinal change had to be brought about it was essential to understand older people and be considerate to their feelings and perspectives.

On the issue of sex-determination they were extremely defensive and many respondents were not willing to give up the conventional notion of son-preference. They were not willing to accept the fact that preference for the son implied a bias against the girl-child. From their own personal experience, they insisted that they were able to reconcile these sentiments. Some even went to the extent of justifying many of their practices and perspectives and seeking all types of “compromises” and “half-way” norms of change.

5.4 EVALUATING OLDER WOMEN’S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SERIAL

5.4.1 Kurukshetra

In Kurukshetra, the respondents recognized and identified with the all-pervasive growth of the issue. Some felt overwhelmed and some had personally experienced and resisted the problem as mothers and hence were demoralized about society’s attitude to the girl-child.

They had troubled relationship with the serial, problem with the treatment of issue and characterization of the older women. They were particularly interested in the serial fleshing out the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. They were critical that the serial over-focused on saving the fetus rather than in the family relationships and dynamics.

What worked?

The protagonist evoked great admiration from respondents. As far as they were concerned, she was ethically correct in taking on her mother-in-law, safeguarding her self-respect and trying to break away from the “stereotypical” daughter-in-law. From this standpoint, some respondents even agreed with Mamta’s decision to leave the house. They found it justifiable and credible as she had a strong reason and proved capable of handling the situation.

What was Problematic?

To many others, Mamta’s leaving the house meant the conflict between her and mother-in-law was not properly fleshed out and the alternative of asserting her right in the household not adequately explored.

This alternative would have helped them to participate more fully in the serial because it was important that the conflict was resolved in favour of the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law forced to come to terms with the wishes of the daughter-in-law.

5.4.2 Rohtak

In Rohtak the older women were somewhat disturbed by the serial. They felt that the maker had not adequately recognized their experiences and concerns and were particularly resentful of the manner in which the older woman and the family portrayed.

Since they felt alienated from the serial, they insisted that much of the representation was not logical and consistent. They found that it went against what they saw as a "reality check".

"No one makes such a crude distinction between boys and girls, in fact our day to day experience shows that daughters give more love and care than the sons".

Hence, they responded by stating that the entire narrative was "unreal" and the characterization of the older woman was totally "imaginary" and "unbelievable".

"How can a woman who experienced great upheavals and struggles, asserted her autonomy would give such undue importance to only delivering a male child".

"No educated family behaves like this".

They were particularly distressed about the mother-in-law's relationship with the Guru. According to them, his portrayal was not at all believable and wondered:

"How is it possible that any sadhu says something and the woman just laps it up. Nobody is so credulous these days".

On the issue of sex determination, many of them were determined to make a distinction between being prejudiced against the girl-child or disliking the daughters and actively seeking services for sex-selection in some "special" circumstances.

"I had a second granddaughter, my friend started sympathizing with me. I made it clear that whatever we are fated to have we will have and when one of my relative offered to adopt the baby girl my son refused".

"When my son had the second child, he was all prepared to stop with the two children. But, when we found that it was a baby girl it was decided that they would plan a third child and this time we will get an ultrasound test done. This is important for us to perpetuate the lineage".

They were also eager to counter the notion or perpetuate the stereotype that the decision to practice sex selection was solely that of the mother-in-law. **They found that daughter-in-law was equally responsible for such decisions.**

“In our neighbourhood a daughter who had two daughters aborted the third child when she found the fetus was a female”.

Like in all other cities we find that the older women had an uneasy but compelling relationship with the serial. From the feedback, it is evident that they actively engaged with all aspects of the narrative. However the engagement was defensive and reactive and in some sense, they felt estranged and not properly understood.

Hence, **it served the purpose of catalyzing debate and discussion on the issue, to some extent even unleashed soul-searching.** What created a jolt was the decision by the daughter-in-law to leave the house. This aspect of the narrative had a greater impact on the women than even the process of law enforcement. This appeared extremely threatening and subversive.

Therefore, we find that much of this engagement is defensive and argumentative particularly with the characterization of the older women, the family and the decision by the younger woman to leave the house.

5.4.3 Ajmer

In Ajmer, the older women were not so defensive. In fact, despite having some level of disagreement with the manner in which the problem was depicted, they did not accuse the maker of exaggerating or distorting realities. They admitted that much of the depiction in the serial was happening around them.

In fact, the serial evoked a tremendous amount of soul-searching and an internal discussion. What troubled them was that the serial did not explore the emotional hang-ups of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. They would have like the maker to use the opportunity to project alternatives for older people, empower them and convince them that they need to maintain their own space and be prepared to lead a life on their terms.

The characterization of the older woman revealed the harsh reality that many of them do tend to overreact to different situations. They had no dispute with this characterization. However, they felt that the serial could have been more constructive on this aspect and shown how such misunderstandings occur are prevented.

They felt that the characterization of the older woman was too one-dimensional. Most of the older people had already realized the futility of such an attitude. They stated that they knew that: *“The mother-in-law should not be stubborn. She can tell the daughter-in-law once or twice that she would like a grandson but she cannot insist that it becomes a decree”.*

5.4.4 Amritsar

In Amritsar, the older women were extremely conciliatory and in many ways more progressive than their counterparts in other cities. This response was catalyzed by small and articulate segment of respondents, who were mothers-in-law that were working.

Given the majority perception that change was inevitable and to an extent even beneficial for older people, they kept stressing the fact that much of the onus of coping with the change lay with the older people. They felt that since both tactically and in principle it was going to be difficult for older people to impose their views on younger people, it was essential for them to be more persuasive towards younger people.

In the light of this understanding, they found that the approach used by the mother-in-law in the serial was completely unacceptable and unworkable. Given their attitude to the rights of women in the family, many of them were more empathetic to the central protagonist and found themselves as much recalling their own experiences as daughter-in-law. It was interesting that as mothers-in-law they flagged those concerns that they saw as indicating an ability to grow and adapt to new circumstances. This included living independently of their children, being employed, accepting daughter-in-law who is a foreign national and living as single woman or as widow with son and daughter-in-law.

However, they accepted the fact that older women, who were extremely prejudicial and susceptible to all kinds of superstition and spiritual advice, could be greatly responsible for this growing practice of sex determination. What they objected to was the fact that in their milieu, the in-laws put a lot of pressure on the younger women to bear male children. However, they found from their personal experience that if they were determined to bear the child the family could not stop them. Therefore, it was also important to understand the attitude of young women and accordingly influence them. So they were quite emphatic that apart from the law banning sex determination, there should be other forms of disincentives for women who take recourse to sex determination.

5.5 PERCEPTION OF MEN ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION, SEX DETERMINATION AND MALE RESPONSIBILITY

Men responded in a contradictory manner. On moral grounds, many of them were against the practice of sex determination. They saw it as an alien technological invasion, a development that goes against the cultural ethos of the country. However, when it came to women's rights and empowerment they were more conservative in their approach.

The men recognized that although they were to an extent influenced by traditional gender norms and expectations, they all insisted that they had made personal departures from such conventional behaviour. This included doing household chores, celebrating the birth of a girl-child and realizing the importance of daughters.

They find that they are not alone in showing greater gender sensitivity. They find the world around them is changing. Many educated families prefer having a daughter and in many households the day-to-day authority of the man is declining and eroding. However, even in these households they felt it was essential to preserve this structure of male authority in specific situations that helps them to act as a moral force and play a ceremonial role during marriage and other festivals.

So, they were intellectually prepared to examine the issue of lack of women's rights from different standpoints-wife and mother but ended up staying neutral, non-committal and to a great extent passive. They had no strong desire to break new grounds or decisively deal with limitations. At best, they liked to work with obvious and predictable assessment of the situation. They realized that domestic differences and conflicts could hurt men too.

They all aspired for educated daughter-in-law and wife and sound finances because these they felt were essential for compatibility and stability. **Despite all the pragmatism and down-to-earth thinking they found it difficult to address many of the day-to-day concerns.**

The older men seemed to be more objective about the challenges they were facing. Often, looking back at their lives they found that whenever they established effective partnerships with their wives, they were able to cope with many situations both economically and in bettering relationships. In many households, the older men act as a natural ally of the daughter-in-law. **However, the younger men found it difficult to apply any of their attitudinal shifts to the real situations.**

They wanted the best of both worlds. The women should be educated, work and at the same time conform to traditional norms and expectations. Majority of the male respondents believe that men's evasive attitude stems from the fact that in a joint family the women- mother and wife- play a decisive role. In fact, even on issues like sex determination, they insisted, that it was often the women who clamoured for a male child.

Since the women determined the quality of relationship, they felt that men tend to only play a supportive role and on such issues any expression of support can prove one-sided and add to the domestic discord.

However, in their supportive role they realize that they can only be effective if they are able to prevail upon their wives to “compromise” and “adjust” to the entrenched norms and practices of the family. Younger men realize that this role is no longer “realistic”.

Talking about this a respondent stated that:

“We are also extremely intolerant to women. We demand that they take our permission to do anything. How can the woman of today tolerate such restriction? If they are refusing to submit to such orders then they are doing so given their views on this issue. It is high time we considered their viewpoint. In fact we should be extremely accommodating to her, understand her needs and upbringing before we decide how to deal with it”.

They believed that if the joint family structure had to continue the older people would have to “adjust” and “compromise”. The domestic discord they felt would work to the advantage of the woman because since she ultimately aspired for a nuclear household, she would use the conflict to set up an independent household.

“The change has to come from older people. They have to reduce their expectations from the daughter-in-law. One major expectation that they need to give up is that the daughter-in-law would do all the household work. It is no more possible unless she is properly supported by the entire family”.

Although there was a general agreement that men have to “cope” with these issues of change and stress, much of the soul-searching on how best to cope with the problem stemmed from the anxiety to keep intact the joint family.

5.6 EVALUATING MEN’S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SERIAL?

Given these perceptions, it was clear that the serial would not entirely succeed in engaging men or creating the necessary soul searching. From the standpoint of public education, some groups of respondents welcomed the serial because many of them do harbour the feeling that the technology is creating a crisis as far as moral values are concerned. **However, this group did not necessarily engage with the social dimensions of the issue.** So while in Kurukshetra the men had a problem with the social dimension of the issue, in Rohtak they only validated the issue of sex determination and did not engage with the more critical aspect of women’s rights. In Ajmer, also the men had a problem with the characterization of the main male and female protagonist. They found that it was not believable and over simplified their reality.

5.6.1 Kurukshetra

In Kurukshetra, the men accepted the prevalence of the issue, saw it as a characteristic of some community, attributed it to practices such as dowry, family planning and even women's empowerment. This newfound empowerment, they felt, was contributing to the backlash. Given these perceptions, they did not argue with the serial from the larger or broader perspective. In fact, they did not feel upset with or alienated by the characterization of the family. Nor did they argue with the fact that society was male dominated or that the women subordinated. All this was intellectually acceptable to them.

However, when it came to specific characterization and depictions, they had their problems. The characterization included both men and women. Among the male characters, they were put-off, by the depiction of the spiritual teacher or *Guruji* and husband. Nor were they convinced about the depiction of both the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and in fact felt that in many ways the depiction of the younger women was also unreal.

They explained their lack of engagement with the serial on the ground that they had a problem in identifying with the distorted men, unreal young women and hard-to-believe older women. **It is obvious that the serial raised many uncomfortable issues for them but was not able to flesh out and in any significant way address their dilemmas and quandaries. Even a mild effort to portray their complexity would have helped them to identify with the depiction of the issue from the male standpoint.**

5.6.2 Rohtak

In Rohtak the men were extremely emphatic as far as the issue was concerned. They were morally indignant and saw sex determination as a practice that was part of the technological invasion from the West. They felt that doctors were exploiting people's biases and misusing the technology. **They totally supported a strong enforcement of the law and if possible, an imposition of total ban on the practice of sex selection and went as far as to seek a ban on abortion.**

Given this standpoint, they had no credibility problem with the serial. They seemed to feel that "men like Ajay were merely reflecting the upbringing and the deeply entrenched influence of his mother". The fact that such men exist particularly among educated people who were susceptible to all kinds of spiritual advice was also "plausible" as far as they were concerned. They had no illusion that society or people can change. Despite the day-to-day experiences showing that the girl child is more caring, a better achiever, society refuses to change.

In fact, they concluded by advising the national television channel such as Doordarshan to have many more such serials that address such hard-hitting issues and even portray it in such a stark manner. **They largely saw the problem as a legal violation and**

demanded strong laws and deterrents. This does not imply that they meaningfully engaged with related concerns such as the issue of women's rights and male responsibility.

5.6.3 Ajmer

In Ajmer, the men were extremely defensive, insisting that their day-to-day role in subordinating women was grossly exaggerated. The serial did not motivate them to engage with the issues. They could not link the issue of sex determination with the lack of rights of women and the insubordination by men.

As far as they were concerned, the depiction showed not just women's oppression but also the marginalisation of the men. They felt that man's agency and role in the entire situation was extremely peripheral. Since the husband largely acted on the instigation and pressure of the mother, they felt, he did not even realize the implications of what he was doing.

Moreover he was also not prepared to cope with the changing attitude of his wife, who was no longer willing to tolerate any infringement of her rights. In such a situation men found they were caught between their family, parents and the wife. They lacked the power to mediate and resolve such differences and the serial shows that he was the biggest loser and as in many cases was more the hidden victim of the "women of the family", rather than a perpetrator.

5.6.4 Amritsar

In Amritsar, the male respondents held the mother-in-law primarily responsible for the problem and were extremely critical of the male protagonist. What disturbed them most was the fact that Mamta, the central protagonist had left the household. This was tantamount to divorce and they squarely blamed the mother-in-law for the situation. Hence, the main message that they drew from the serial was that men should clearly understand where their interests lie.

Senior respondents felt that elders and in particular mothers-in-law could be extremely biased and misleading. They cautioned the young men against the mother's instigation. However, the younger men responded very defensively and with low confidence. They seemed unprepared to adapt to any of the emerging challenges, be it in the joint family or nuclear family. They were clearly looking for change to happen without their active intervention and participation. When it came to family they were totally reactive and not prepared to address any of the challenges. This is where the alternatives presented by the serial of adopting a more caring male attitude, did not seem to work. It is essential to address this attitude of men and make a serious effort to get them to engage with their concerns.

6. ROLE MODEL APPRAISAL- SPONTANEOUS RESPONDENT FEEDBACK

Respondent ⇒	Delhi		Rohtak		Kurukshetra		Ajmer		Amritsar	
Role Model ↓	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %
Politician	28.6	23.1	11.1	--	14.2	--	62.5	--	--	--
Social Activists	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	6.2	--	--
Bureaucrat	14.3	7.6	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Actor/Actress	--	15.3	--	15	--	10	--	--	12.5	--
Religious/ Spiritual Leader	14.3	15.3	22.2	--	--	--	12.5	18.7	12.5	6.3
Sports Person	28.6	--	--	--	--	--	--	6.2	--	--
Familial	14.3	23.1	44.4	70	71.4	80	25	62.5	62.5	93.7
Neighbour/ Friend/ Colleague	--	15.3	22.2	5	14.2	5	--	--	--	--
School/ College Teacher	--	--	--	10	--	5	--	6.2	--	--
Industrialist	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	12.5	--

It is clear from the above table that despite so much exposure to mass media most women respondents across the cities barring Delhi expressed an overwhelming preference for familial role models. In Amritsar, almost all the respondents, barring one preferred familial role models. Public figures had no influence on them. In Kurukshetra, we find that both men and women recall familial role models. In all other cities men have other alternatives. In Ajmer, an overwhelming number of them are in favour of political figures such as Lal Bahadur Shastri, Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Mahatma Gandhi

In Delhi, both among men and women, the familial role models had to compete with political figures such as *Sushma Swaraj* and *Indira Gandhi* and to lesser extent with spiritual leaders such as *Mother Theresa*.

The criteria, they used to identify the familial role model reveals the aspiration that the respondents have. They identified those individuals, who transact day to day problems and overcome major challenges and barriers. It is interesting that among women many of these role models are male figures.

“Despite being uneducated, my grandfather educated all his children and really struggled to better all our lives. I always feel so inspired by his tremendous patience and wisdom”.

“My uncle is my greatest role model. He led a very simple life, taught all of us to struggle and reach our goals. It is because of his influence I am working now.”

“My father because he is a truthful person, never lets down anybody and always believes in the higher power of God”.

“My mother because whatever I am it is only because of her. She inspires me a lot.”

“My role model is my mother. She is an understanding person. She handles every situation coolly and in a smart way”.

“My role model is my elder sister. She is confident and has positive thinking”.

In the case of the political figures the criteria was:

“Lal Bahadur Shastri was a patriot”

“Indira Gandhi knew how to take the country forward”

“Subhash Chandra Bose served the nation without any expectation”

7. AUDIENCE RATING ON PRODUCTION VALUES

Aspects	Delhi	Rohat	Kurukshetra	Ajmer	Amritsar
<i>Visual appeal</i>	Ok	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
Setting for the story	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good
Dialogues	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Good
Music	Fair	Good	Fair	Good	Good
Title song	Good	V. Good	Fair	Good	V. Good
Characters	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	V. Good
Title of the serial	Fair	Good	V. Good	V. Good	Good

Rating scale: Bad: 10-20, Ok: 20-40, Fair: 40-60, Good: 60-80, V. Good: 80-100

Character they liked

Respondent ⇒	Delhi (%)	Rohtak (%)	Kurukshetra (%)	Ajmer (%)	Amritsar (%)
Mamta	75	57	75	87.5	100
Mrs. Jharia	25	0	0	0	0
Ajay	0	0	12.5	0	0
Ranveer	0	43	12.5	12.5	0

Character they disliked

Respondent ⇒	Delhi (%)	Rohtak (%)	Kurukshetra (%)	Ajmer (%)	Amritsar (%)
Mrs. Jharia	0	62.5	57	62.5	50
Jaya	0	12.5	0	25	0
Ajay	75	0	43	12.5	0
Amit	25	0	0	0	0
Guruji	0	12.5	0	0	50
Dr. Nadkarni	0	12.5	0	0	0

Across the different categories of respondents the most common rating used has been “fair”. This indicates that the serial was predominantly “average” in its ranking. When we qualitatively translate this rating, it indicates that across the different categories the serial proved watchable, comparable with other serials and held their attention.

Among the different cities, we found audiences reacting differently. While audiences in Delhi were more restrained in their assessment and audiences in Amritsar and to a lesser extent the viewers in Ajmer more generous in their appreciation.

The title song and to a near similar extent the title of the serial was rated high across the cities and obviously was evocative for the viewers.

The audiences were reasonably satisfied with the etching of the characters. However, it is clear from the tables on the characters they liked and most disliked most, that while Mamta was a positive role model, the husband and mother-in-law, were recognized for their negative hook.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Sustain the Support to the Endeavour

The 13-episode serial worked in many ways. As an experiment in communicating social messages through infotainment, it was worthwhile undertaking. It is critical and vital, to sustain support to this endeavour because we are witnessing one of the most horrific social phenomena of systematic elimination and annihilation of the girl-child. It is important to facilitate public discourse on such issues, as it will compel people to confront their biases and prejudicial behaviour, be challenged and given the opportunity to adopt or accept new behavioural norms.

Recognize the Importance of Edutainment

It clearly showed that across the different segments of audiences it catalyzed a discourse, encouraged soul searching and debate about the dominant value paradigm on gender and other specific concerns. These ranged from issues such as sex determination, rights of the girl-child, male involvement, reproductive health and family planning, rights of women in the marital household.

Make Communication Endeavour Responsive to People and Community's Needs

Given this multi-dimensional debate and discussion, we found that the respondents developed very personal stakes in the different aspects of the issue. They worked out their rationale for understanding the linkages between the issues and identified within the narrative what they saw as necessary to bring about change in the mindset of people.

It is also evident that any attempt to impact mind-set has to be extremely persuasive, give people the scope to dialogue, share their experiences and views and work out their own process of coping and dealing with the issue.

Motivate Men, Older Women to become Change Agents

Despite the overall approval of the audience, the feedback has made it very clear that there are many areas where the programme can improve both in content and treatment. It is clear from the findings that any sequel to this programme would have to deal with some of the complex perceptions and needs of the different groups. Older women and men have to be motivated to become change agents, made an active part of the discourse and given a greater personal and not a vicarious stake in the issue.

Use Different Communication Formats and Medium to Sustain the Messages- Television Soaps, Magazine Programme for Local and Community Radio and Cable Channels, Street Plays and Folk Theatre and Local Art Forms

It is important for such efforts to continue and if edutainment and behavioural change is the objective of such effort then we could use different communications formats to sustain this process.

If it is edutainment then it is best if it is in the format of long soaps rather than a 13-episode serial. It also has to assume the scope to be interactive, where the producer could allow viewers to determine how the issues, should be addressed on the programme. What options would the viewers like the protagonist to use and why?

To make it interactive and truly responsive to a felt need of the people, the programme should be accompanied by real time feedback research. This would enable the maker to design the communication in a manner where content challenges the viewer and the packaging is friendly.

However, given this rich feedback, other low cost communication formats can also be used to sustain the persuasive dialogue particularly with difficult segments of the community. The low cost communication formats could include local radio and cable channels, use of popular folk and people's theatre to communicate the message of gender and the ban on sex determination.