

## Research article

**Knowledge, attitude and perception about surrogacy among urban working women**Qudusia Sultana<sup>1</sup>, Ravi Vaswani<sup>2</sup>, Vina Vaswani<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of Anatomy, <sup>2</sup>Department of Medicine, <sup>3</sup>Department of Forensic Medicine, Yenepoya Medical College, Yenepoya Deemed to be University, Deralakatte, Mangalore 575018, Karnataka, India

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction and Aim:** Infertility is a social stigma in India. Infertility affects 10% of the population in India. Surrogacy is an advanced form of assisted reproductive technique (ART) wherein one woman bears a baby for another woman. Surrogacy is an alternative for the infertile parents for whom it is difficult to have a baby due to medical reasons. The aim was to assess the knowledge, attitude, and perception about the ethical issues involved in surrogacy among urban working women.

**Methods:** A self-administered questionnaire was devised to determine knowledge, attitude, and perception about surrogacy among young working women. Questionnaire was sent for validation and then distributed to urban working women between the age group of 25-35 years. The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions with a range of 4-point response options and 1 open-ended question. Based on their response given a descriptive analysis was done using SPSS 16.

**Results:** The urban women were aware of the ethical principles. 63% believe women should not be forced and have complete autonomy in making decisions. 60% believed Surrogate mothers and the baby born of surrogacy should not be ill-treated by the community and 70% said they should be given respect like any other human being.

**Conclusion:** Altruistic surrogacy should be promoted and not commercial surrogacy as commercial surrogacy leads to the exploitation of the mother's womb for money. 70% of women in our study believe that the Indian government should not promote surrogacy and in order to protect the rights and prevent injustice suitable Laws should be made and put into action.

**Keywords:** Altruism; law; assisted reproductive techniques (ART); infertility; surrogacy.

**INTRODUCTION**

Infertility is a social stigma in India. Infertility affects 10% of the population in India(1). Surrogacy is an alternative for the infertile the infertile parents for whom it is difficult to have a baby due to medical reasons(2). Surrogacy is an advance form of assisted reproductive techniques (ART) wherein one woman bears a child for another woman (3). India is one of the world's greatest reproductive tourism centre for surrogacy to the foreigners due to its low socio-economic status(3,4). Surrogacy is legalized in India since 2002(5). Infertile couples from the foreign countries come to developing country like India to get treatment unavailable, prohibited and/or unaffordable in their own country (6).

Surrogacy can be gestational or traditional. In gestational surrogacy an *in vitro* fertilized embryo is introduced in the surrogate mothers womb and in traditional surrogacy a sperm of intended father or any other person is introduced in surrogate mothers

womb to fertilize with her ovum thus making her genetic and gestational mother(7). Another way of classifying surrogacy is altruistic or commercial. In altruistic surrogacy the surrogate mother has no monetary benefits. She is helping a childless couple to build up a family as an act of 'altruism'. Usually there will be a prior relationship between the surrogate mother and the expecting couple. Typically the surrogate mother is a friend or a relative. In commercial surrogacy, the surrogate mother receives remuneration for bearing the child other than her regular medical expenses. Agencies and professionals are usually involved with all the practical arrangements for the commissioning couple: finding a suitable surrogate mother and dealing with all the paperwork etc., (8).

In India legal Adoption is a very complex procedure with many regulations. Thus, Surrogacy is opted by many as the process of surrogacy takes less time than of adoption and the intended parents can have the genetic relation to the child (3).

Nevertheless, surrogacy is not a simple deal as one may think. Though there are many medical and legal issues that are associated with surrogacy, the intended parents are ready to face this tedious process to pursue their dreams of beginning a family. Since surrogacy has gained more importance in India, this study was undertaken to assess the level of knowledge, attitude and perception about the ethical issues involved in surrogacy among the urban working women.

In our present study we aim to assess the knowledge, attitude and perception about the ethical principles like autonomy, vulnerability, informed consent, bodily integrity and stigma involved in surrogacy among the urban working women.

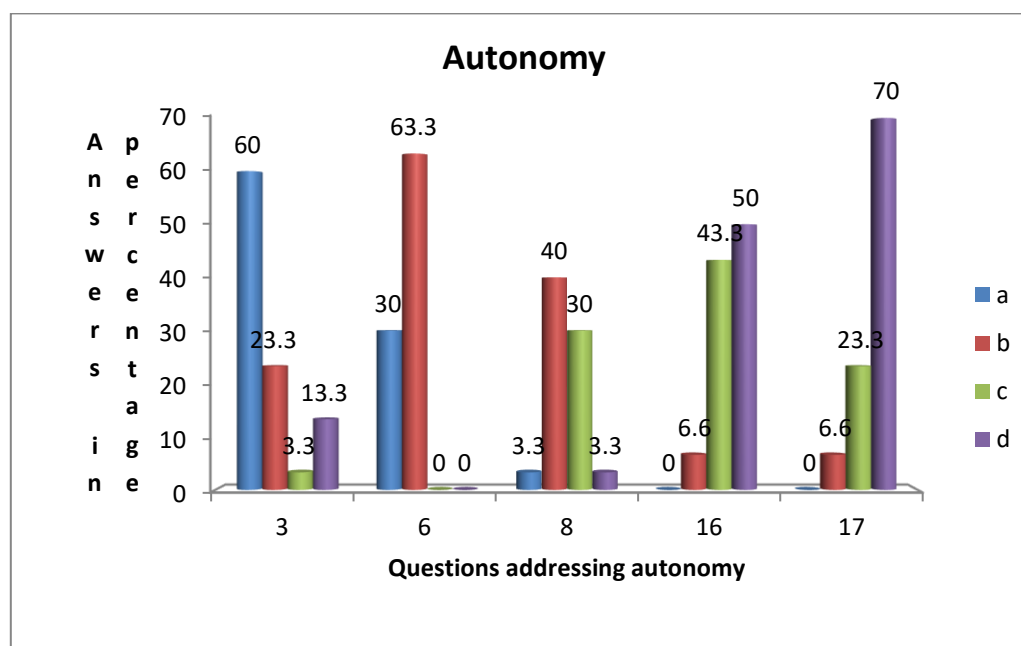
## MATERIALS AND METHODS

After taking approval from the institutional ethics committee of our university, a self-administered questionnaire was given to 30 urban working women between 25-35 age group after taking informed consent. Women with some basic knowledge about surrogacy, and willing to be a part of the study, were included in the study.

### Method of data collection

A self-devised questionnaire was devised to determine knowledge, attitude and perception about surrogacy among young working women.

### Autonomy



**Fig. 1:** Answers given by participants on autonomy (in percentage). (a) Strongly agree (b) agree (c) disagree (d) strongly disagree

In fig. 1 Question 3 which assesses the knowledge of the participant shows that 60% of the participants have the knowledge of restricted autonomy of

Questionnaire was sent for validation and after this, it was distributed to urban working women between the age group of 25-35 years. Questionnaire consisted of 21 questions with a range of 4-point response options (Likert scale) and 1 open ended question. Based on the response given a descriptive analysis was done using SPSS 16.

**Table 1:** The rubric addressing the different ethical issues in the questionnaire was formulated as given below:

Ethical principles assessed	Knowledge	Attitude	Perception
Autonomy	3	6,8	16,17
Vulnerability	5	7,9	19
Informed consent	2	11,12	
Bodily integrity		10	
Human rights	4	13	20,21
Equality/respect/stigma		14,15	18

A detailed analysis of the above mentioned ethical principles was done to assess the knowledge, attitude and perception of the participants.

## OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

The answers of the participants regarding their knowledge, attitude and perception about the various ethical issues have been shown in the form of graphs below.

### Knowledge

#### Question 3

Question 3 assesses the knowledge of the participant about the knowledge of restricted autonomy of

surrogate mother. Question 6 and 8 which assess the attitude of the participant's on surrogacy shows that

63.3% and 40% of participants believe that a lady

should be allowed to surrogacy. Question 16 and 17 which

assess the perception of the participant's on surrogacy shows that

70% and 23.3% of participants believe that a lady

should be allowed to surrogacy. Question 19 which assesses the

perception of the participant's on surrogacy shows that

19% of participants believe that a lady should be allowed to

surrogacy. Question 20 and 21 which assess the perception of the

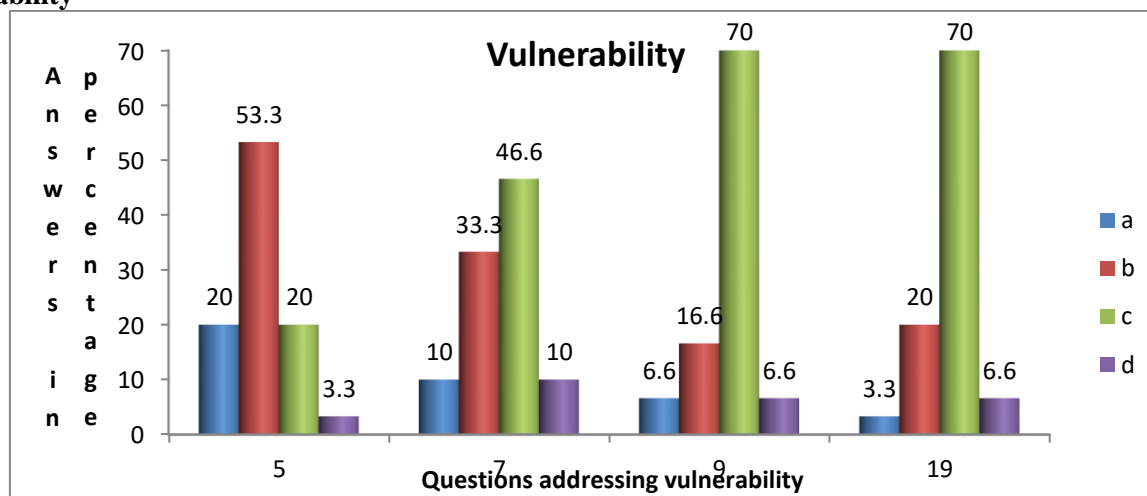
participant's on surrogacy shows that 20% and 21% of

participants believe that a lady should be allowed to surrogacy.

should have complete autonomy to decide about herself. Question 16 and 17 which assess the perception of the participant's on surrogacy shows that 50% and 70% of participants believe that

surrogacy should not be chosen as a profession by ladies to generate income and the Indian government should not encourage surrogacy.

## Vulnerability

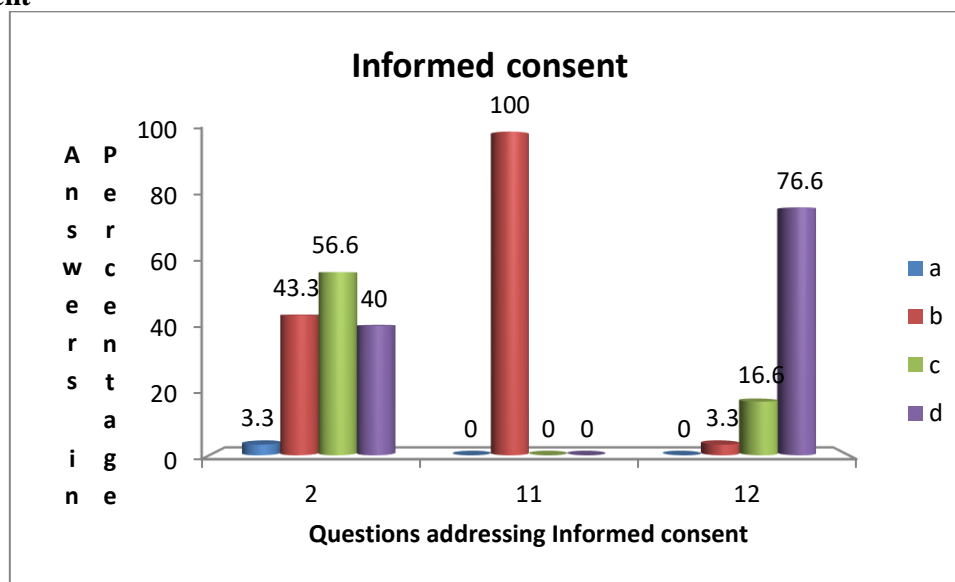


**Fig. 2:** Answers given by participants on Vulnerability (in percentage) (a) Strongly agree (b) agree (c) disagree (d) strongly disagree

In fig. 2 Question 5 which assesses the knowledge of the participants shows that 53.3% of the participants have the knowledge of vulnerability in surrogacy. Question 7 and 9 which assess the attitude of the participant's on surrogacy shows that 46.6% and 70% of participants believe that Indian ladies are vulnerable to choose surrogacy due to low socio-

economic status. Question 19 which assesses the perception of the participant's on surrogacy shows that 70% of participants believe that while undergoing the process of surrogacy, women should not leave their family and stay in fertility care centres for the whole term for her prenatal care.

## Informed consent

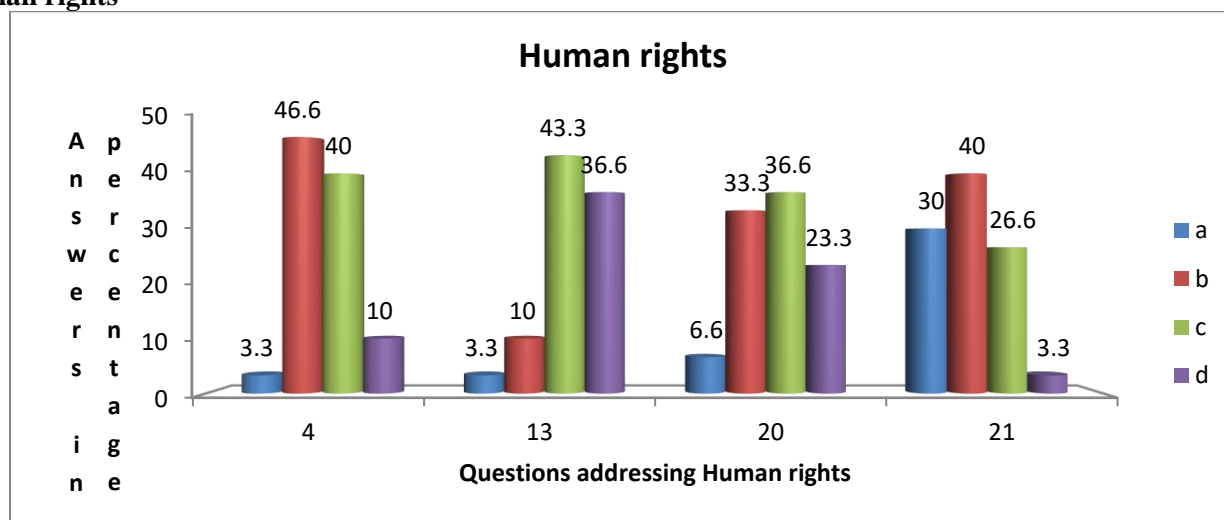


**Fig. 3:** Answers given by participants on Informed consent (in percentage) (a) Strongly agree (b) agree (c) disagree (d) strongly disagree

In fig. 3 Question 2 which assesses the knowledge of the participants shows that 56.6% of the participants have the knowledge of consent in surrogacy. Question 11 and 12 which assess the attitude of the participant's on surrogacy shows that 100% and

76.6% of participants believe that the consent form should be very clear and should include all the clauses pertaining to expected and unexpected outcome with their solutions.

## Human rights

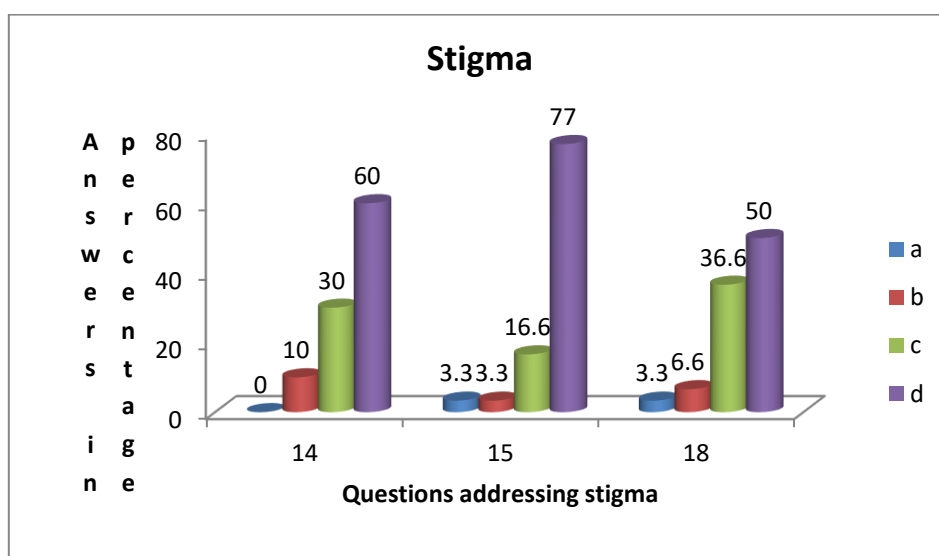


**Fig. 4:** Answers given by participants on human rights (in percentage) (a) Strongly agree (b) agree (c) disagree (d) strongly disagree

In fig. 4 Question 4 which assesses the knowledge of the participant's shows that 46.6% of the participants have the knowledge of human rights in surrogacy. Question 13 which assesses the attitude of the participant's on surrogacy shows that 43.3% of the participants believe that surrogate mother has no right on the baby born. Question 20 and 21 which assess

the perception of the participant's on surrogacy shows that 36.6% and 40% of participants believe that the child born from surrogacy has the full right to know his history of birth and the rights of the child is almost never considered as the early handover of the child hampers breast feeding and transferring the duties of parenthood.

## Stigma



**Fig. 5:** Answers given by participants on Stigma (in percentage). (a) Strongly agree (b) agree (c) disagree (d) strongly disagree

In fig. 5 Question 14 and 15 which assesses the attitude of the participants on stigma in surrogacy shows that 60% and 77% of the participants believe that surrogate mother and the baby born of surrogacy should not be ill-treated by the community and should be given respect like any other human being. Question 18 which assesses the perception of the participant's shows that 50% of them do agree that surrogate mothers should not be selected on the basis of status and caste.

Question 1 which assesses the knowledge of the participants regarding the source of information of surrogacy shows that 46.6% has acquired knowledge regarding surrogacy from books. Question 10 on bodily integrity shows that 46.6% of participants think that by accepting to be a surrogate mother their bodily integrity is not infringed upon /exploited.

Question 22, an open ended question asks the participants to mention any two issues which they do not like about surrogacy. 77% of the people said that there is no clear consent form or contract which

addresses the advantages and disadvantages of surrogacy to all the parties involved. 60% of the people were in view that commercial surrogacy should not be permitted as it infringes the bodily integrity of the woman and makes her rent her womb as a source to generate income.

## **DISCUSSION**

Although in 2014 Indian legislation has issued 'The Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2014' for the regulations of ART Clinics in India(14), these guidelines are repeatedly violated and there are many ethical issues involved regarding surrogacy with respect to surrogate mother, the child born and the intended parents. Surrogacy is a ray of hope for those infertile couples for whom it is difficult to carry a baby to term due to medical problems. India is the world's greatest reproductive tourism centre for surrogacy to foreigners as it is legalized by the Indian government, as the fee charged is very less compared to foreign countries. With the materialization of such activities, the question about the moral code of the entire process has come to the forefront. Hence this study was undertaken to understand the views of Indian women about surrogacy under following aspects

### **Knowledge**

This study shows that urban working women have knowledge about autonomy of women in surrogacy, vulnerability, clarity in informed consent/legal contract in surrogacy and also have knowledge about the human rights of surrogate mother, intended parents and the baby born. Saxena *et al.*, expressed in their article that the women who are involved in surrogacy are poor, illiterate and are from rural areas who do not have any knowledge about surrogacy and they are usually pressured by their family members or agents for earning easy money(3). Thus we can say that urban working women have some knowledge on surrogacy but the rural women have to be counselled and educated about surrogacy.

### **Attitude**

The present study shows that urban working women believe that a lady should have complete autonomy to decide about herself whereas Saxena *et al.*, in his studies say that the rural women involved in surrogacy are not given any rights to make decisions concerning to their own body and life (3). The participants of the present study believe that Indian ladies are vulnerable to choose surrogacy due to low socio-economic status and illiteracy. Many authors also accept this fact (3,4).

In the present study participants believe that the consent form should be very clear and should include all the clauses pertaining to expected and unexpected

outcome with their solutions. Deonandan *et al.*, in their study, say that the consent forms are not clear and poor women are exploited (4).

The participants of the present study are very clear about the fact that surrogate mothers have no right to the baby born. Indian law also says that the surrogate mother has no right on the baby born (14).

The participants of the present study believe that surrogate mother and the baby born of surrogacy should not be ill-treated by the community and should be given respect like any other human being but Shenfield *et al.*, (3)say that does not happen and surrogate mothers are usually disrespected (15).

In the present study participants think that by accepting to be a surrogate mother their bodily integrity is not infringed upon /exploited but Saxena *et al.*, in his study explains that most of the women who are selected in the procedure of surrogacy do not have any right to make decision about their own body and decisions on their behalf is done by their spouse or middlemen (3).

### **Perception**

Urban working women of our study believe that surrogacy should not be chosen as profession by ladies to generate income and Indian government should not encourage commercial surrogacy and they also perceive that participants believe that while undergoing the process surrogacy, women should not leave their family and stay in fertility care centre for whole term for her prenatal care. Saxena *et al.*, (3), Deonandan *et al.*,(4), Shenfield *et al.*,(15) also conclude in their studies that commercial surrogacy should not be promoted whereas altruistic surrogacy can be encouraged.

Respondents of our study also believe that the rights of the child are almost never considered as the early handover of the child hampers breast feeding and transferring the duties of parenthood. The participants believe that a baby born from surrogacy has the complete right to know his true history of birth. Shenfield *et al.*, stated in their study that frank discussion by the parents of the surrogate child regarding its history of birth is always advisable (15).

Due to commercialization of surrogacy a comprehensive understanding of ethical issues involved in surrogacy is required to minimize the risk and ensure safety to all the parties.

## **CONCLUSION**

- Many people still think about surrogacy as adultery or a baby selling process and a surrogate mother is still disrespected. Many couples including celebrities have started opting for the

process because the women are unwilling to carry on pregnancy and suffer from its consequences: the weight gain, the pain of giving birth and job related issues. Such reasons should not be encouraged for choosing surrogacy. There must be true medical indications or serious health risks and difficulties in becoming pregnant.

- Surrogacy should always be an alternative for the infertile couples who are unable to reproduce due to medical reasons and by using the services of surrogate mother can fulfil their desire of raising a family.
- Altruistic and not commercial surrogacy should be promoted as commercial surrogacy leads to misuse of the mother's womb for money.
- Adoption of a child in India is a complex and tedious procedure for those childless couples who want to give a home to these children. There is a strong need to modify and make the adoption procedure simple for all.
- The doctor who collaborates in the surrogacy project should take it as his duty to inform all the parties about the medical, social, psychological, emotional, moral and legal issues involved in surrogacy and to ensure that the parties receive appropriate counselling in order to reduce risk and promote free and well-informed decision-making.
- Appropriate rules and regulations should be framed and implemented to protect the rights and prevent injustice to all the parties involved.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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