Original Article

Female feticide in India : A social evil

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Abstract

Objective: To study the level of awareness of pregnant women regarding sex determination, its implication and an assessment of the attitude of pregnant women towards female feticide. **Methods :** A cross sectional study was carried out among 200 pregnant women, attending ANC opd of NKPSIMS & RC & Lata Mangeshkar Hospital. Every fifth woman was selected for the study. A specially designed structured questionnaire was used to collect information. Chi-square and percentage were used for statistical analysis. **RESULTS :** 59% women preferred a male child being born to them. Education played a role in making choice. ($P < 0.05$). An analysis, the outcome of which was statistically significant was carried out in urban and rural areas as well as those who had passed 12th standard and those who had not. **Conclusions :** The preference for a male child in large sections of our society is the root cause of an imbalanced sex ratio. Pregnant women are often unaware of how female feticide affects the sex ratio of men and women.

Key words: Pregnancy, female feticide, sex ratio.

Introduction:

A skewed sex ratio is an issue of major concern and has long-term social and demographic consequences. At the heart of the problem is the inferior status of women in society, a patriarchal social framework and value system based on “son mania”¹. Sex ratio at birth is an indirect measure of female feticide. There has been a decline in the sex ratio during the present century with

substantial difference between states in sex ratio at birth². Some of the worst gender ratios indicating gross violation of women’s right are found in Asian countries such as India and China³. It is a common fact that the sex ratio in India is lower than international standards i.e. sex ratio in India is 933 while the world average is 986. A number of causes are responsible for the continuous decline in the sex ratio e.g. poverty, illiteracy, culture and preference for male child. The discrepancy in the sex ratio in the lowest age group is found in most prosperous area of Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi Gujarat, Haryana and Chandigarh. All these states have sex ratio of less than 900 females to 1000 males below the age of six. The declining sex ratio could result in a demographic and social disaster⁴. Keeping this in the mind the present study was undertaken in order to determine to what extent the pregnant women are oriented to the actual problem of declining sex ratio.

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Table 1 :
Awareness of subjects regarding sex determination
(n=200)

Awareness	Number of subjects	200 %
Place of Sex determination		
Private hospital	84	42%
Government hospital	19	9.5%
Both	7	3.5%
Not aware	90	45%
Crime		
Aware	116	58%
Not aware	84	42%
Legal Punishment		
Aware	34	17%
Not aware	166	83%
Methods		
Aware	106	53%
Not aware	94	47%
Social implication		
Aware	94	47%
Not aware	106	53%

Methods

In a cross sectional study, 200 pregnant women attending the antenatal clinic of the NKPSIMS and RC and Lata Mangeshkar hospital, Nagpur were studied from

Table 2
Association between social consequences
and education

Education	Awareness		Total
	Present	Absent	
<12th Standard	29(14.5%)	73(36.5%)	102(51%)
>12th Standard	65 (32.5%)	33(16.5%)	98 (49%)
Total	94 (47%)	106 (53%)	200 (100%)
$X^2 = 28.81, df = 1, p < 0.05$			

Sept 16 2008 to Nov 16 2008. The finding were analyzed by Chi Square test and percentage. An informed consent was taken and patents were explained the purpose of the study. A total of 200 pregnant women were enrolled in the study and a specially designed structured questionnaire was used for interview purposes.

Results:

Out of 200 pregnant women majority of them belonged to 18-25 years age groups (62%) followed by 25-30 year (34.5%) and 30-35 years (3.5%). It was observed that 57% were from urban area and 43% were from rural area. In terms of socio economic status 57.5% had a lower middle class status. Approximately 58% belonged to a joint family and 42% belonged to nuclear family. Table.1 shows that 58% felt that sex determination was a crime. 53% were aware of sex determination

Table 3
Preference for son in current pregnancy

Sex of previous child	Preference of child			Total
	Male	Female	Either	
Male	8 (36.36)%	5 (22.73)%	9 (40.91)%	22
Female	36 (65.45)%	4 (7.27)%	15 (27.28)%	55
Total	44	9	24	77

$X^2 = 6.47, df=2, p < 0.05$, Yate's correction

Table 4
Association between son preference and residential area

Residential area	Preference of son		Total
	Yes	No	
Urban	63 (55.26%)	51(25.5%)	114
Rural	55(63%)	31(15.5%)	86
Total	118(59%)	82(41%)	200

$\chi^2 = 1.53$, $df = 1$, $p=0.21$

Table 5

Association between awareness of social consequences and residential area

Residential area	Awareness		Total
	Present	Absent	
Urban	65(32.5%)	49(24.5%)	114
Rural	29(14.5%)	57(28.5%)	86
Total	94(47%)	106(53%)	200

$\chi^2 = 9.72$, $df = 1$, $p<0.05$

methods. As per Table. 2 it was observed that the awareness of consequences of female feticide grew with the literacy status, it was 32.5% among women who had studied beyond the 12th standard and 14.5 % in those whose education had not reached 12th standard level. Our study revealed that 118 (59%) women wanted to have a male child. As per Table.3 it was found that, a preference for a male was higher among women (65.45%) who had female child previously. As per Table .4 it was observed that 63% rural women gave preference to son, whilst 55.26% urban women gave the same preference. Table 5 shows that 47% were aware about the social consequences of female feticide.

Discussion:

In this study 59% of those interviewed expressed their

desire to have a male child. The reason for this were a continuation of a family name, old age support, societal responsibilities probably better dealt with by a male etc. Pakistani women also have a statistically significant preference for boys over girls. 27.6% preferred to have more boys than girls, whereas, only 4.3% desired to have more girls than boys⁵. As study in an urban tehsil, Faisalabad revealed that 26.67% pregnant patients desired a male child while 24.00% desired a female child and 49.33% had no opinion⁶ Puri et al mentioned that 65.5% women felt that sex determination was a crime and 11.65% were aware about sex determination methods⁷. In this study 58% agreed that sex determination was a crime. Awareness seemed to grow with an increase in literacy, the difference being statistically significant. ($\chi^2 = 28.81$, $p<0.05$). Similar findings were observed by the study conducted by Vadera et al . This study revealed that 63% rural women preferred a son compared to 55.26% urban women. Preference for a male child was higher among rural women than urban women¹. In this study 47% patients were aware about the consequences of female feticide. The male of social demography was statistically significant. ($\chi^2 = 9.72$, $P< 0.05$) The feeling in those against female foeticide were, “men will not find a bride”, “family cannot be run” and “sexual violence against women may increase”.

Conclusion:

That a large section of pregnant women prefer the birth of a male child, may result in practices that in turn may lead to an imbalanced sex ratio. Socio demographic factors do play a role. The sex of a previous child affects a women's choice for the next child. Residential area and education increases awareness regarding the consequence of adverse sex ratio.

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