

A COMMUNITY-BASED STUDY ON AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND SEX PREFERENCE AMONG MARRIED WOMEN (IN REPRODUCTIVE AGE-GROUP) IN A RURAL POPULATION OF DISTRICT BAREILLY UTTAR-PRADESH

Srivastav Shalini¹, Kariwal P¹, Kapilasrami MC²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Shri Ram Murti Smarak Institute of Medical Sciences, Bareilly (UP), ²Ex-Director, NIHFV, New-Delhi

Correspondence:

Dr. Shalini Srivastav

C/o Dr. K.K Srivastav, "Shanti-kunj" 408/20,

L/1 Buxsi-Khurda, Daraganj, Allahabad (UP) - 211006

Email: gud009@gmail.com Mobile: 09451660069

ABSTRACT

Background: Skewed sex ratio is an issue of major concern. The problem is getting worse with the misuse of technology that facilitates pre-natal sex determination. This is happening across the country in spite of a massive influx of legal regulations banning the same. In this light, the study of awareness of same becomes very relevant and needs to be evaluated. At the heart of problem of female feticide is impact of advertisement about the facility of prenatal sex determination, and the unawareness about legal rules and regulations forbidding the same as PNDA Act.

Aims: To study the awareness and perceptions of rural women regarding sex determination and gender discrimination

Settings and Design: A Community based cross-sectional study.

Methods and Material: Multistage sampling was used and 317 rural married women in reproductive age group were interviewed.

Statistical analysis used: Result expressed in percentages and chi-square test.

Results: 80% of females irrespective of their literacy status were aware about prenatal sex determination. However 67% were unaware of PNDA Act and the unawareness was significantly associated with literacy status of women. Regarding perceptions, 94% felt that females still do not enjoy equal rights as males. Eighty eight percent wished to conceive for male child if there family would have been complete with female children.

Conclusions: : It is necessary to gear the efforts against this social malady by intensive IEC campaigns for raising awareness about rules forbidding pre-natal sex determination and strict implementation of PNDA Act. At the heart of problem is impact of advertisement about the facility of prenatal sex determination and the unawareness of legal regulations forbidding feticide as PNDA Act.

Key-words: Female feticide, Sex-ratio, PNDA-Act

INTRODUCTION

Declining sex ratio is an issue of grave concern in India. A preference for boys cuts across caste and class lines and results in discrimination against girls even before they are born. The United Nations Children's fund states that

systematic gender discrimination has resulted in upto 50 million girls and women "going missing from India's population".¹These findings are supported by abnormal sex figures found in Census 2001.²

With the availability of new technologies sufferings of female gender is extended from womb to tomb. Due to traditional preference for male child in India, it is not very surprising right from the first census in 1871, India has consistently shown an abnormal sex-ratio (940 women for every 1000 men). In India female feticide has been practised from age old times, the earliest evidence being provided by Sir Jonathan Duncan in 1979. ³Son preference has been one of the most evident manifestations of patriarchal Society. It has worked against the female sex particularly in their infancy and early childhood. Today, with technological advancement in medical diagnosis this discrimination begins even before birth. Various medical technologies have been put into practice to identify the sex of the child before the birth and selective abortion, if found female. A steep decline in sex-ratio in recent years has been due to recent technological advancements and easy availability of ultra –sound machines. ^{4,5} About 70% of all abortions in Delhi is because the female fetus. Sex ratio is an important social indicator measuring status of equity between male and female prevailing in society. ⁶ Changes in sex-ratio reflect cultural and socioeconomic pattern of society. As per Census 2001 prevailing sex ratio of India is 933, which still lags and lowest among the top 10 most populous countries of the world. ⁶ Desire for male child manifests so blatantly that parents have no qualms about repeated, closely spaced pregnancies, premature deaths and even terminating child before it is born. Therefore present study was conducted with rationale of finding out awareness of rural women regarding sex determination and their perceptions and attitudes on gender discrimination.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study is a community based cross-sectional study carried out in rural catchment area of a Medical College. The rural centre of Medical College serves a population of approx. 50,000.

Duration of Study: The study was carried out from October 2009 to February 2010.

Sample Size: The rural health centre serves the population of 50,000 covering 24 villages, with different population structures. In the first stage simple random sampling was used and of the total 6469 eligible couples in all the 24 villages, considering constraint of resources 10% of

eligible couples (married female in reproductive age group) were selected for interview. In the second stage of sampling every 10th house was selected randomly, to be visited for interview. This constituted 324 females, however seven females 2% did not give consent thus 317 women in reproductive age group were interviewed on pre-designed questionnaire.

Data Collection: Data collection was done by a team of Social Health workers who were first acquainted with the objectives of the study and then, trained for taking interview. A predesigned pre-tested proforma was used to elicit information on the knowledge of sex determination techniques and perceptions regarding gender discrimination from married women in rural areas. Verbal consent was taken before filling the questionnaire.

A) Sources of basic data: Door to door visits

B) Types of Data and Method: Participant Interviews

Data Analysis: The data was entered in Microsoft Excel and analyzed in terms of percentage.

The Chi-square test for proportion was used as test of significance.

RESULTS

Out of 317 women selected for interview, 69% were unaware of the legal age of marriage but 80 % knew that pre-natal sex determination can be done and 70% were also knowing that it is an out-patient service done by USG technique. However 68% were unaware about PNDDT Act. (Table1). Regarding perceptions 94% were of view that females still do not enjoy equal rights as males. 88% of females expressed views that they would prefer to go for son even if the family gets completed with females, and 32% were willing to go for pre-natal sex determination. 20% accepted that they would prefer to go for feticide if female fetus conceived. (Table2). Our study clearly shows that unawareness regarding PNDDT Act and preference for male child was significantly associated with the literacy status of females, 62% of those who studied upto secondary were aware of PNDDT Act as compared to less than 26% were aware among the illiterate group and 93% women in illiterate group had male preference as compared to 57% in those educated upto higher secondary (Table3&4). However there was no significant association between literacy status and awareness about the

facility of prenatal sex determination, as an impact of strong advertisement by diagnostic centers even illiterate group was quite aware of the facility. (Table 5)

Table 1: Awareness of Females regarding issues of Sex determination

Awareness	No. of Subjects	%
Legal age of marriage		
Aware	99	31.23
Not Aware	218	68.76
Pre-natal Sex determination can be done		
Aware	254	80.13
Not Aware	63	19.87
USG technique used for sex determination		
Aware	224	70.66
Not Aware	93	29.34
Knowledge regarding PNDT Act		
Aware	103	32.49
Not Aware	214	67.51
Implication for female feticide		
Aware	150	47.31
Not Aware	167	52.68

Table - 2: Perceptions and Practices of Females regarding Sex related Issues

Perception and Practices	No.	Percentage
Females enjoy equal rights as males		
Yes	18	5.68
No	299	94.32
Prenatal Sex determination is justified		
Yes	110	34.70
No	207	65.32
Family complete with girl child, will try for male		
Yes	279	88.01
No	38	11.99
If Yes, will go for sex determination		
Yes	103	32.49
No	214	67.51
In case female fetus is conceived, will go for feticide		
Yes	63	19.87
No	254	80.13

Table 3: Association between Literacy Status and Awareness regarding PNDT Act

Variables	Awareness of PNDT Act (%)	No Awareness (%)	Total
Illiterate	65 (25.79)	187 (74.21)	252
Primary	13 (43.33)	17 (56.67)	30
Secondary	22 (62.86)	13 (37.14)	35
Total	100 (31.54)	217 (68.45)	317

$$X^2 = 21.79, P < .001, d.f=2$$

Table 4: Association between Literacy Status and Preference for Male child

Variables	Prefer son (No.)	Do not prefer son (%)	Total
Illiterate	235 (93.25)	17 (6.75)	252
Primary	14 (46.67)	16 (53.33)	30
Secondary	20 (57.14)	15 (42.86)	35
Total	269 (84.86)	48 (15.14)	317

$$X^2 = 38.13, p < .001, d.f=2$$

Table 5: Association between literacy status and awareness about Facility of prenatal sex determination

Variables	Aware	Not aware	Total
Illiterate	204 (80.95)	48 (19.05)	252
Primary	22 (73.33)	8 (26.67)	30
Secondary	28 (80.00)	7 (20.00)	35
Total	254 (80.13)	63 (19.87)	317

$$X^2 = 0.94, p > 0.05, d.f=2$$

DISCUSSION

The present study shows that though 79% females were illiterate and of them 69% were unaware even of the legal age of marriage but they were quite updated about the facility of prenatal sex determination as 80% knew that prenatal sex determination can be done. Ironically 70% were also knowing that it is determined by USG technique. However in spite of massive influx of legal rules and regulations regarding female feticide and prenatal sex determination only 31% females had ever heard of PNDT Act. Forty seven percent were aware of the implications of female feticide. The most

common implications stated by them was “increase in crime and molestations”, followed by “men won’t find bride” Similar implications were reported by Vadera et.al in a study “Study on knowledge, attitude, practices regarding gender preference and female feticide among pregnant women”.⁷ A study by Ajinder Walia also had similar views.⁸

In present study, perceptions of females regarding gender discrimination and sex determination were also taken. Eighty eight percent were of view that even if family is complete with female child then also they would prefer to go for male child. A study carried out by Puri.et.al also concluded that 56 % females had preference to male child.⁹ The preference to male child was significantly associated with literacy status of women. Our study also brings it to light that 35% perceives that prenatal sex determination is justified, and 20% accepted to go for feticide if they discovered the gender to be female. Similar findings were reported in a study by BN Vadera et.al.⁷ Ajinder Walia reports about the attitude towards the female feticide to be 41.25% in his study on “Female Feticide in Punjab”: Exploring the Socio-economic and cultural dimensions⁸. Though the Government is making tall claims regarding implementations of laws and regulations for preventing female feticide, but still the advertisement of prenatal diagnostic procedures are so strong that even the illiterate women were quiet aware of the facilities and provision of

prenatal sex determination techniques. To bring the skewed sex ratio to normal there is dire need to strengthen this PNDT Act, moreover it is necessary to gear efforts by women empowerment and intensive Information, education and Communication campaigns.

REFERENCES

1. Female foeticide in India. C2007. Available from http://www.unicef.org/india/media_3285.htm. [cited on 2008 Jun 26]
2. Census Figures of 2001. Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, New Delhi, India.
3. Pakrasi KB, Haldar A. Sex ratios and sex sequences of births in India. *J Biosoc Sci* 1971;3:327-37.
4. Bardia A, Paul E, Kapoor SK, Anand K. Declining sex ratio: Role of society, technology and government regulation in Faridabad district, Haryana. *Natl Med J India* 2004;17:207 -11.
5. Sahni M, Verma N, Narula D, Varghese RM, Sreenivas V, Puliye JM. Missing girls in India: infanticide, feticide and made to order pregnancies? Insights from hospitals- based sex- ratio- at -birth over the last century. *PLoS ONE* 2008;3:e2224.c2008
6. Focus -Population Environment Development : A Bulletin of Population Foundation of India : 2004
7. Vadera BN, Joshi UK, Unadakat SV, Yadav BS, Yadav S. Study on Knowledge, attitude and practices regarding gender preference and female feticide among pregnant women. *Indian J Community Med* 2007;32:300-1.
8. Walia A. Female feticide in Punjab: Exploring the socioeconomic and cultural dimensions. *Idea J* 2005;10:1-24.
9. Puri S, Bhatia V, Swami HM. Gender preference and awareness regarding sex determination among married women in slums of Chandigarh. *Indian J Community Med* 2007;1:60-2.