

Original Article

PERCEPTION REGARDING FEMALE FETICIDE AMONG FEMALES ATTENDING OUT PATIENT DEPARTMENTS OF SELECTED HOSPITAL OF LUDHIANA CITY

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Abstract :

Background : Although the Indian girl child's position is precarious throughout the country, she remains the most vulnerable in Punjab.

Objectives : To assess the perception of females regarding female feticide.

Study Design: Cross-sectional study.

Materials and Methods: The study involved collection of information regarding perception of females about female feticide using multiple-choice questionnaire. Two hundred and fifty female patients attending medical and surgical OPD's of selected hospital were recruited in the study by using simple random sampling.

Results: Majority of the females perceived that male child is more preferred in society. Moreover, majority of subjects have the view that female feticide has harmful impact on the society and should be stopped. The suggestion given by subjects to curb this evil practice included enforcement of strict laws, punishment to people and doctor involved and creating awareness regarding the issue.

Keywords : Perception, female feticide, Declining Sex Ratio.

Introduction:

Female feticide is an extreme manifest of violence against women. In India feticide, especially female feticide & sex selections are the worst conditions. It tends to be serious decline in sex ratio in states of India. A sloka of Atharvaveda says "The birth of a girl, grant it elsewhere. Here, grant a son." Thousands of years later, this thing stands very true in modern times as well, when, despite the so called modernity, industrialization, literacy and equality, parents still pray the same. (Nilanjana Mukherjee)¹

Female feticide is a major social problem in India and has cultural connection with the dowry system that is ingrained

in Indian culture, despite the fact that it has been prohibited by law since 1961. In India, a strong preference for sons exists by abuse of medical technologies. Pregnancies are planned by restoring to

differential contraception. Contraception used is based on the number of surviving sons irrespective of family size. Following conception, fetal sex is determined by prenatal diagnostic techniques after which fit female fetus are aborted. (Das Gupta)²

The preference for a male child and discrimination against the female child are causing the rapid disappearance of female children in India. 35 million females were found to be missing according to the census of 2001, which was 32 million during 1991. ³As per the census of 2011, the child sex ratio of India has declined from 927 to 914 females per 1000 males, which is the lowest since the country's independence⁴. The inhabitants of Punjab, who pioneered the green revolution in the last century, are now heading for a devastating economic and social fall out in the near future due to sharply declining (882 in 1991; 874 in 2001) sex ratio.

In India, a women's status is associated not only with her reproductive capability but also on her success in delivering a male child, which enhances women's will to

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give birth to a male child (Baligar PV) ⁵. However, females can play a significant role to curb this evil, as they are primary person to carry female fetus in their womb. Therefore, present study was conducted to assess perception of females on female feticide.

Materials and Methods:

The cross sectional study was conducted in the outpatient departments of selected Hospital, Ludhiana. Eligibility criteria for inclusion included OPD female patients who can understand or read Punjabi language, and are willing to participate in the study. Two hundred fifty female patients attending medical and surgical OPD's were recruited in the study by using simple random sampling. Information was collected by administering a pretested questionnaire to the subjects. Questionnaire consisted questions regarding perception of females related to ideal family size, male child preference, reasons for male child preference, reason for less preference for female child, reason for the practice of female feticide, view point supporting and against female feticide. Before finalizing the questionnaire, pre-testing was done on 10% of females to see appropriateness of tool and based on it necessary changes were made, and then the questionnaire was administered to the study subjects. The subjects were not permitted to communicate with each other. Data were entered and analyzed by means of simple comparisons and proportions

Results and Discussion:

Maximum 59.2% subjects were in age group of 21-40 years followed by 30.4% subject in 41-60 years of age group and least 10.4% subjects were in age group of \geq 60 years. Maximum 60% of subjects studied below graduation and 40% were with educational status of graduation and above. Majority 90.4% of subjects were married, 8.4% were unmarried however only 1.2% of subjects were divorced. Maximum 74.8% of the subjects were homemaker followed by 17.2% doing service and least 8% were businesspersons. Majority 93.6% of the subjects perceived one boy and one girl as ideal family size (Table 1). Maximum 80.80% (202) of subjects agreed to the statement that male child are being more preferred in the society. Among them,

32.1%, 31.6% and 31.1% of the subjects perceived male child are important to run a family, they carry name of family and they take care of parents in old age respectively as the reasons for male child preference (Table 2). A.H. Gilany and E.Shady conducted a similar study to measure determinants and causes of son preference among women delivering in Mansoura, Egypt. The main reason found for son child preference over girl child were that the male child inherit family business/land (37.7%), contribute to family income (33.3%), help family in business/land (45.2%), provide Old age care/support (21.5%) and Continue family name (14.5%).

Table 1: Perception of subjects towards ideal family composition and size. N=250

Ideal Family size	Number of Subjects (f)	f (%)
a. One boy, One girl	234	93.6
b. Two boys	08	3.20
c. Only one boy	06	2.40
d. Only one girl	02	0.80

Table 2: Perceived reasons for male child preference by subject. n=202

Reasons for male child preference	Number of Subjects (f)	f %
a. Male child are important to run a family	65	32.2
b. They carry name of family	64	31.6
c. They take care of parents in old age	63	31.2
d. Help family in business/land	07	03.5
e. Any other*	03	01.5

* They raise power/status to the family

* They are needed for death ceremonies of parents

Majority 72% (180) of the study subjects agreed to the statement that the female child is being less preferred. Among these maximum 35% and 33.9% of subject perceived dowry system and increase crime towards girls as the reasons for less preference of female child. However 19.5% of the subject had a view point that female child are considered as burden on family, which enhances female feticide practice (Table 3). Srivastava et al. (2005) interviewed 200 married men and women to elicit their attitude towards the girl child and the declining sex ratio in Bhopal. The study found that the reasons for not wanting girls include that bringing up girls is a costly affairs and a wasted investment, they have to be married off, arranging for dowry is difficult, there is fear of providing safety even inside home, and she is subjected to harassments.

Table 3: Perceived reasons for less preference of female child
n=180

Reasons for less preference to female child	Number of Subjects (f)	f (%)
Girls cannot take care of their parents in old age	17	09.4
They are consider as burden on family	35	19.5
Due to dowry system	63	35.0
Due to increase crime towards girls	61	33.9
Any other*	04	02.2

*Marriage expenses

* Due to social norms

Maximum 40.4% (101) of the study subjects had viewpoint that illiteracy is responsible for female feticide. Poverty (19.6%) and family pressure with rituals and customs (17.2%) were also perceived as contributory factors for this evil. However, least 11.4% each believed that determination of sex and desire of son are responsible for female feticide. Maximum 91.6% (229) subjects responded that practice of female feticide is morally wrong, however 8.4% (21) responded that practice of female feticide is morally right. Females who were in favor of this practice supported this reason that it is easy to rear up male child than female child (33.3%), boys are important to run a family(28.6%) and multiple girl child can cause burden on the family(23.8%). (Table 4) Females opposing this practice perceived that girls deserve equal status in family (38.9%), girls are important part of society (24.9%) and girls are more responsible towards parents and family (16.6%). (Table 5) Shashi Manhas and Jabina Banoo in their attempt to study the perception and beliefs regarding female feticide among Muslim community of Jammu found that majority of fathers (96%) and mothers (82%) believes that female feticide is morally wrong. However, (18 %) mothers responded that it is morally right (4%) fathers responded that there is no harm in this practice.

Table 4: Females view points for supporting the practice of female feticide.
n=21

Females view points for supporting the practice of female feticide.	Number of Subjects (f)	f (%)
Boys are important to run a family	6	28.6
It is easy to rare up male child than female child	7	33.3
Multiple girl child can cause burden on the family	5	23.8
Due to social norms	3	14.3

Table 5: Females view points for opposing the practice of female feticide.
n=229

Females view points for opposing the practice of female feticide.	Number of Subjects (f)	f (%)
Girls are more responsible towards parents and family.	38	16.6
Girls deserve equal status in family	89	38.9
Girls are important part of society	57	24.9
Every individual has right to live	31	13.5
Girls take care of parents in old age	14	06.1

Maximum 82.4% (206) of the study subjects perceived that female feticide has harmful impact on society. Among these 36.8% and 29.1% opinioned that social problems in society and marriage problems for males will arise due to female feticide respectively. (Table 6) However, 17.6% of the subjects perceived female feticide as beneficial to the society. They support this belief with reasons, as female feticide will decrease crime towards females (15.9%), decrease population (38.6%), and increase power of females in the society (15.9%). (Table 7)

Table 6: Perceived harmful impact of female feticide on society.
n=206

Perceived harmful impact of female feticide on society	Number of Subjects (f)	f (%)
Marriage problem for male will arise	60	29.1
It will effect mother psychological health	28	13.6
It will lead to social problem in society	76	36.9
Number of rape cases and other crime will develop	34	16.5
Raise power status of male in family	08	03.9

Table 7: Perceived beneficial impact of female feticide on society.
n=44

Perceived beneficial impact of female feticide on society	Number of Subjects (f)	f (%)
Crime towards female will decrease	07	15.9
Population will decrease with female feticide	17	38.6
Female feticide will decrease when number of girls will decrease	10	22.7
It will be easy for government to Run a country	03	06.8
Value of woman will increase	07	15.9

Majority 96% females responded that female feticide has an impacts on mothers as it arise psychological problems among mothers (55.2%), develop feeling of guilt or crime among mothers (36.4%), and can cause behavioral changes in mothers(4.4%). Majority 98% (245) subjects had an opinion that female feticide can be stopped by taking various measures. (Table 9)

Table 9: Perceived ways to stop female feticide

n=245

Perceived ways to stop female by the subjects	Number of Subjects (f)	f (%)
By giving punishment to people and doctor	83	33.8
By enforcing strict law	100	40.8
By providing financial aid to families with girls child	17	06.9
By creating awareness regarding this issue	35	14.8
Giving equal status to men and women	10	04.0

Conclusion and Recommendations :

The study reveals that majority females have awareness about causes and harmful impact of female feticide, and oppose this evil practice. However, maximum females have an opinion that Government should strictly enforce laws against female feticide and punish people and doctors involved in this practice. In addition to this, efforts should be taken to create awareness regarding this issue and to ensure equal status among men and women. As females are important stakeholders in elimination of the practice of female feticide, it is recommended that this group should be equipped with ample amount of knowledge so that they can act as change mediators in the society.

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