

FEMALE FOETICIDE ISSUES – AN OVERVIEW

Ekta M. Patel¹, Parmar Neha²

¹*Asst.Professor, Department of Community Health Nursing, Sumandeep Nursing College,
Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed to be University,
Piparia, Waghodia, Vadodara - 391760, Gujarat, India*

²*Under graduate Nursing Student, Sumandeep Nursing College,
Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed to be University,
Piparia, Waghodia, Vadodara - 391760, Gujarat, India*

Corresponding Author

Ekta M. Patel,

*Assistant Professor, Department of Community Health Nursing,
Sumandeep Nursing College,*

*Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed to be University,
Piparia, Waghodia, Vadodara - 391760, Gujarat, India*

E-mail:ekta318@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Female foeticide in India is the **abortion** of a female foetus outside of legal methods. The frequency of female foeticide in India is increasing day by day. The natural **sex ratio** is assumed to be between 103 and 107, and any number above it is considered as suggestive of female foeticide. According to the decennial Indian census, the sex ratio in the 0 to 6 age group in India has risen from 102.4 males per 100 females in 1961,¹ to 104.2 in 1980, to 107.5 in 2001, to 108.9 in 2011.²

The western states of Maharashtra and Rajasthan 2011 census found a child sex ratio of 113, Gujarat at 112 and Uttar Pradesh at 111.³

The Indian census data suggests there is a positive correlation between abnormal sex ratio and better socio-economic status and literacy. This may be connected to the dowry system in India where dowry deaths occur when a girl is seen as a financial burden.⁴

highsex ratioimplication

Significant deviations in birth sex ratios from the normal range can only be explained by manipulation, that is sex-selective abortion.⁵

Sen pointed to research that had shown that if men and women receive similar nutritional and medical attention and good health care then females have better survival rates, and it is the male which is the genetically fragile sex.⁶

Reason for female foeticide

Gender discrimination: The bias against females in India is grounded in cultural, economic and religious roots. Sons are expected to work in the fields, provide greater income and look after parents in old age. In this way, sons are looked upon as a type of insurance.⁷ In north India, girls currently constitute about 60% of the unwanted births and the elimination of unwanted fertility in this manner has the potential to raise the sex ratio at birth to 130 boys per 100 girls.⁸

Gender discrimination manifests itself in the form of delay in seeking medical care, seeking care from less qualified doctors and spending lesser money on medicines when a daughter is sick. It is no wonder that the prevalence of malnutrition and stunting is higher in girls than boys.⁹

dowry :The evil practice of dowry is widely prevalent in India. As a result, daughters are considered to be an economic liability. The dowry system is more rigid in the northern states of India which is likely to contribute to the lesser child sex ratio.¹⁰ In the Muslim community, paying of high dowry is not a prevalent practice.¹¹

Female feticide is a symptom of an underlying malady. Its incidence is increasing as families perceive that bearing daughters does not make economic sense and does not provide any social advantages. Added to that is generations of bias that favors bearing a male child. The successive Indian governments have taken several steps to improve the status of women in the society. The steps primarily intend to provide them with greater opportunities for education, employment and greater say in the matters of governance. They have included steps to correct the bias in terms of inheritance rights. The PNDT Act is a law made with good intentions. It bans sex selection before and after conception, and further regulates the use of prenatal diagnostic techniques for strictly medical purposes.

MTP providers need to be more vigilant when performing second-trimester abortions. While the feminist discourse on abortion advocates that abortion is a right over one's body, sex-selective abortion in itself is a form of female violence.

Intensive Information: Education and Communication (IEC): campaigns for raising awareness: The Government has recently launched a "Save the Girl Child Campaign". One of its main objectives is to lessen the preference for a son by highlighting the achievements of young girls. To achieve the long-term vision, efforts are afloat to create an environment where sons and daughters are equally valued. Boys need to be educated at an early level with regard to giving respect and equal regard to girls. The mass media must be involved in promoting a positive image of women. School and college girls should be the target audience. However, this should be combined with highlighting the issue and dangers of female feticide and skewed gender ratio. Analysis of content of information provided regarding abortion and sex determination showed that the message emphasized upon the illegality of sex-selective abortion instead of describing the difference between sex-selective abortion and other abortions.¹²

NGOs may be encouraged to promote formation of self-help groups, organize non-formal education for adult females and school dropouts, create employment opportunities for women as well as provide counselling and support services to newly married and pregnant women to discourage them from undergoing sex-selective abortion.

Role of medical colleges and professional bodies:

- Sensitizing medical students regarding the adverse sex ratio while stressing upon the ethical issues involved in female feticide.
- Conduct regular workshops/ Continuing Medical Education sessions which would greatly help to reiterate the importance of this problem in the country. Private practitioners should also be encouraged to participate in such programs.
- Organize awareness campaigns in field practice areas.

Time is quickly ticking away. A shortage of girls would lead to a shortage of eligible brides thus making the girl a "scarce commodity". According to UNFPA projection, by the year 2025 a significant share of men above 30 would still be single, and that many will never be able to marry at all.¹³ A concerted effort by the medical fraternity, the law, political leaders, NGOs, media, teachers and the community itself is the need of the hour.

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