

ORIGINAL RESEARCH**Awareness and Perception about Female Feticide among Children Attending Pediatric OPD in a Tertiary Care Hospital in Punjab****Harshindar Kaur¹, Sukhmani Kaur², Sanjana Saholi³, Devina Singh³**¹Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, GMC Patiala, Punjab, India.²Medical officer, PCMS, Patiala, Punjab, India.³Junior Resident, Department of Pediatrics, GMC Patiala, Punjab, India.**ABSTRACT**

Background:The practice of gender based killing of females has been prevalent in the Indian society since eons. In the recent years, medical research in prenatal sex determination has given a fillip to the practice leading to female feticide at a large scale resulting in skewed sex ratio.**Objectives:**To assess the perception and awareness about female feticide among school children.**Study Design:**A crosssectional study

Materials and Methods: The study collected information regarding awareness and perception about female feticide among school children in the age group of 11-18 years using multiple choice questionnaires. A total of 548 students were included in the study. They were drawn from patients who had come to attend the Pediatric OPD of Rajindra Hospital and Government Medical College, Patiala.

Results: Out of 548 students, 58.57% were aware of female feticide. Majority of students (70 %) felt that discrimination among boys and girls was prevalent in the society.86.3% of students who were aware of the continuing female feticide were of the opinion that female feticide should be stopped as it had a deleterious effect on the society. Regarding the perception about stopping the practice of female feticide, 27% expressed the opinion that awareness at the level of society would be effective, while 12 % opined in favour of school education ,abolishing dowry was supported by 25 % and 18 % were of the opinion that equal rights to girls would be effective.

Conclusion: The level of awareness about the practice of female feticide was abysmal among school children in Patiala district and almost all who were aware of the practice were of the opinion that it should be stopped.

Keywords: Pediatric OPD, Feticide.

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INTRODUCTION

Even in the 21st century, killing of female child n the womb or immediately after birth is continuing which is a matter of great concern. The declining sex ratio in India is a matter of grave concern. The United Nations Children’s Fund states that 50 million girls are missing from the population of India aptly supported by the census figures of 2001 and 2011.^[1]

The entry of prenatal sex selective techniques as Ultrasound and amniocentesis has given a fillip to this old age gendercide.

Despite national level awareness activities and the PC-PNDT law prohibiting prenatal sex determination, the practice of abandoning female child or aborting her is still a major social evil in the India subcontinent. Hence the need of the hour is to increase awareness about this heinous crime at school level and strengthening laws so that this problem can be curbed.

To bring about the desired change, young educated boys and girls need to be involved to spread awareness in the community against this social evil. Chapters in the school curriculum, regular debates, declamation contests at state and national level painting competitions is the need of the hour so that these young minds change the scenario when they are adults. Young minds can disseminate knowledge more rapidly and can act as an effective preventive tool.

Noteworthy is that adolescents aged 10-19 years comprise 23 % of Indian population (Planning commission of India, 2000 report),^[2] almost 230 million can act as major human resource and they being the future parents are capable of bringing change.

MATERIALS & METHODS

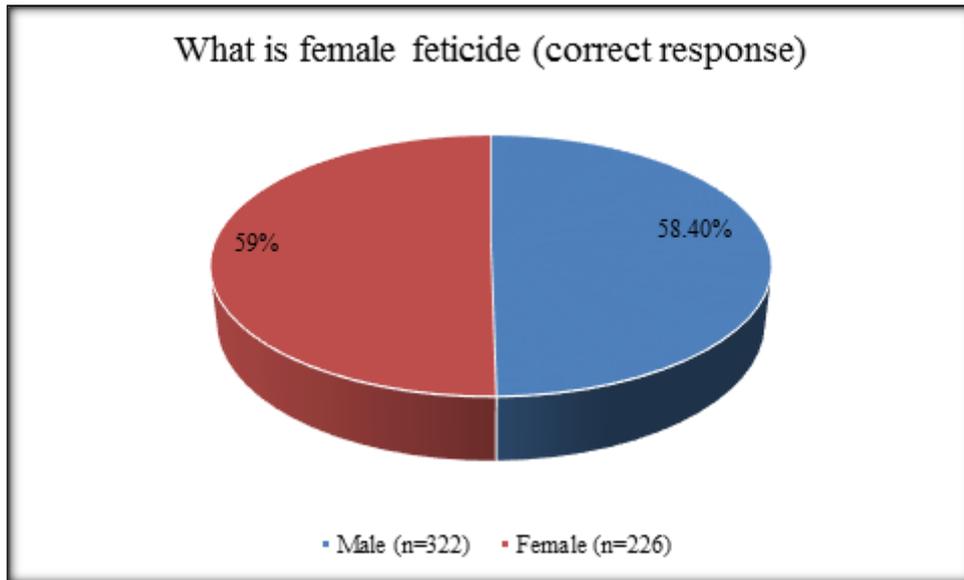
The present study was conducted in the OPD of department of Pediatrics, Rajindra Hospital and Government Medical College, Patiala. A total of 548 children who had come to the Pediatric OPD were the subjects of the study. Out of 548 students, 498 were studying in Government and aided schools. Only 50 were studying in private schools. Age of the students ranged from 11 to 18 years. Information was collected on a prepared questionnaire with multiple choice and open ended questions. The questions were asked in vernacular language.

Students were called one by one into the OPD and after explaining the procedure and taking consent of the parents, were asked the choices in the questionnaire. They were not allowed to communicate with their parents. Data was analysed by means of simple comparisons and proportions.

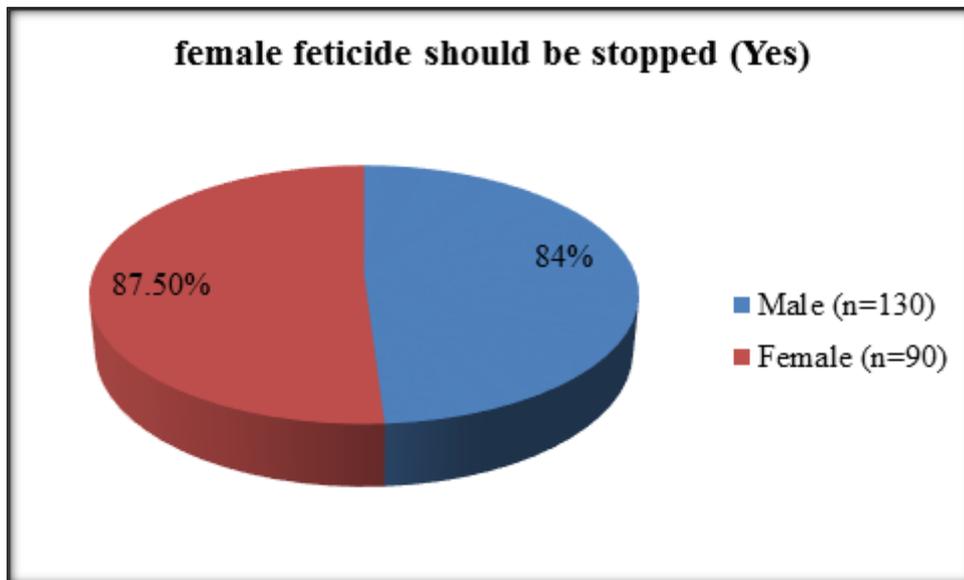
RESULTS

The study included 548 students, 322(58.75 %) were boys while 226 (41.25%) were girls. 498 (91%) were studying in Government schools and 50 (9 %) were studying in private schools.

The awareness about female feticide was quiet abysmal only 321 (58.6 %) students were correctly aware of female feticide. 101 (18.5%) were of the opinion that it was happening some years in the past but since then has stopped. Females and males had approximately same level of awareness. (58.4% and 59 % respectively) 190 students out of 220(86.36 %) who were aware that female feticide is still prevalent were of the opinion that this practice needs to be stopped. 28(2.7%) out of 220 said that their parents are the decision makers while 2(0.001 %) supported female feticide.



Graph 1:



Graph 2:

On questioning about the prevalence of discrimination among , a majority (70 %) opined that it was widely prevalent in the society, in the family (27 %) and in the school (3%)

Table 1: Whether discrimination present

| Variable | Male (n=322) | Female (n=226) | Total (n=548) |
|----------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Society | 209 (65%) | 169(75%) | 383(70%) |
| Family | 74(23%) | 70(31%) | 148(27%) |
| School | 10(3%) | 7(3%) | 17(3%) |

Regarding the source of information about female feticide, 47 % got information about female feticide from school, 31 % from mobiles and Internet and 22 % from TV.

Table 2: Source of information

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Source of information | n=321 |
| School | 151(47%) |
| Mobile and Internet | 99(31%) |
| Television | 70(22%) |

The perception of students about the reasons of male preference and no preference for girls were asked through multiple choice questions. The reasons for male preference were: belief that males carry the family name (48.75% and 60 % male's vs females), taking care of the family (25% and 28% males vs females), asset to the family and business (28.4% and 12 % males vs females). When asked the reasons why girls are not preferred the reasons given were girls are a burden on the family (12.7% and 11% males vs females), dowry (10.3% and 19 % males vs females), girls cannot take care of parents (14% and 6 % males vs females), gender violence (1 % and 5 % males vs females) and all of the above (62 % and 59 % males vs females).

Table 3: Perception of student about male preference

| Choices | Male (n=322) | Female (n=226) | Total (n=548) |
|--|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Why male is preferred | | | |
| 1 Carries family name | 157(48.57%) | 135(60%) | 292(53.1%) |
| 2 Taking care of family | 80(25%) | 63(28%) | 143(26%) |
| 3 Asset to family | 91(28.25%) | 27(12%) | 118(21.2%) |
| Why girl child is not preferred | | | |
| 1 Burden on family | 41(12.7%) | 25(11%) | 66(12%) |
| 2 Dowry | 33(10.3%) | 43(19%) | 76(13.8%) |
| 3 Cannot take care of family | 45(14%) | 14(6%) | 59(10.7%) |
| 4 Gender violence | 3(1%) | 11(5%) | 14(2.55%) |
| 5 All | 200(62%) | 133(59%) | 333(60.8%) |

On enquiring about the share of household work done by boys and girls and their perception about gender roles, 80 % of girls agreed that their brothers did not help them in household chores and 96 % of boys agreed that the household work is the domain and responsibility of their womenfolk. 92.5% of boys were of the opinion that they would not be helping their wives in household chores.

Upon analysis of open ended questionnaires about the ways to tackle female feticide a variety of answers were obtained.

- Creating awareness in society -27%
- Abolishing dowry -25%
- Equal rights to girls -18%
- School education -12%
- Strict implementation of laws-10%
- Punishment to doctors -8%

Table 4: Corrective measures

| Choices | Male (n=322) | Female (n=226) | Total (n=548) |
|---------------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1 Awareness | 85(26.5%) | 63(27%) | 148(27%) |
| 2 Abolition of Dowry | 74(23%) | 65(27%) | 137(25%) |
| 3 Equal rights to females | 58(18%) | 41(18%) | 99(18%) |
| 4 School education | 38(12%) | 28(11.9%) | 66(12%) |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|---------|
| 5 Strict laws | 30(9.3%) | 25(11%) | 55(10%) |
| 6 Punishment to doctors | 26(8%) | 17(7.5%) | 43(8%) |

DISCUSSION

The awareness about the practice of female feticide was quiet low in the present study, only 58.6 % of adolescents were aware of it. 18.55% were of the opinion that this was a thing of the past and since then has stopped. Walia et al^[3] found a very high prevalence of awareness among adult population. Kansal et al^[4] documented prevalence of 74.9% among pregnant females. In a study by Chaudhary et al^[5] among adolescent children of Ludhiana, the prevalence of awareness was quiet high of the magnitude of 86.5%. The reason for the abysmal low level of awareness in our study could be ascribed to the majority of students belonging to deprived section of the society and studying in government schools. They were deprived of the sources of information due to paucity of information channels.

In the present study, 53 % of subjects were of the opinion that boys are preferred because they carry the family name forward, 26 % were of the opinion that they take care of their parents and 21 % opined that boys are an asset to the family and business. Vadera and Joshi^[6] revealed in their study on pregnant females that fulfilling social responsibility by sons, propagation of family name, support of old parents and performing the last rites were the main reasons of son preference. A study conducted by MOHFW^[7] in 2002 observed that reasons of son preference were that they carry the family name and are providers in old age and perform last rites.

When asked about the reasons of girls not being preferred, the reasons given were: burden on the family (12 %), dowry (14 %), inability to take care of old parents (10.7%), gender violence (2.5%) and all of the above reasons (60.7%). Puri^[8] in his study from urban slums of Chandigarh noted that dowry was the main reason for not preferring girls. A study by NIPCCD^[9] in 2008 in Delhi and Haryana also documented dowry as the main reason for not preferring girls.

CONCLUSION

The present study revealed adolescents did not have optimum level of awareness about female feticide despite the efforts being put in at National and State level to raise awareness. Equality of division of labour among boys and girls is alarming and often leads to domestic violence and suppression of females. A significant proportion of students imagined that this practice was a thing of the past. A miniscule number of respondents supported female feticide.

The students who are unaware of the consequences of female feticide are at risk of continuing this practice as a legacy of their families. Hence there is ample scope of schools playing an active role in raising awareness among adolescents and is the need of the hour.

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