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AWARENESS ABOUT FEMALE FETICIDE AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN RURAL AREAS OF HARYANA: A SCHOOL BASED CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The greatest threat in India is the menace of skewed sex ratio. The down sex ratio leads to many crimes such as illegal trafficking of women, sexual assaults, polygamy and dehumanization of society. The objective was to study the awareness regarding female feticide in blocks Beri of district Jhajjar, Haryana. The study was carried out in the rural block Beri (District Jhajjar, Haryana). The Beri block has 18 Government senior secondary schools. The students of classes 9th, 10th, 11th & 12th from all 18 government senior secondary school were included in the study. The study was of cross-sectional descriptive type. The study was conducted over a period of one year i.e September 2013 to August 2014 and included 1080 adolescents. A total of 60 students from each government senior secondary school were included in the study to complete the sample size. Fifteen students from each 9th, 10th, 11th & 12th class of every school were selected by simple random sampling. The study found that awareness about female feticide was high i.e. (87%) subjects were aware while the sex wise, majority of girls (91.5%) and boys (82.3%) were aware about female feticide. Source of information about female feticide among 940 subjects, nearly half (47.4%) of the study subjects got awareness from teachers and school activities like drama, competitions and awareness rallies. The present study intends to get chapters in school curriculum that creates awareness about female feticide across the country. It is the youth that can bring about a change in the society and mindset of people.

Keywords: *Female Feticide, School, Adolescents, Awareness, Sex Ratio*

INTRODUCTION

The greatest threat in India is the menace of skewed sex ratio. The down sex ratio leads to many crimes such as illegal trafficking of women, sexual assaults, polygamy and dehumanization of society. These acts have been increasing and making this world unsafe for women. Female feticide is one of the most nefarious crimes on this earth; perhaps what is detestable is that the people who commit crime belong to the educated class. To this menace, our ancestral and biased view about male child, lack of education, ever increasing population and dowry have been good propellants (Verma, 2010).

The issue of female child has always been a question. There is a string preference or “Son syndrome” as male child is considered assets while female child is considered a liability. Sons are considered essential to keep the family alive; run generation and for that reason all family members pray; “O God, grant the birth of son here and daughter elsewhere” (UNICEF, 2007). In India, a girl, when getting married, is given blessings for a hundred sons, never is she blessed with a hundred daughters. Birth of a girl in the family is unwelcome and bringing up of a girl is considered or thought to be “watering in neighbour’s garden” (Verma, 2010). Most of the factors that compel people to favor a male offspring are social and religious in origin.

The proliferation and abuse of advanced technologies coupled with social factors such as dowry, concerns with family name and looking up to the son as a breadwinner, contributing to the low status of women, have made the evil practice of female feticide common in the middle and higher socioeconomic

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households, more so in the north Indian states. Advances in technology and diagnostic facilities have opened up avenue for the girl haters leading to serious disturbances in the sex ratio as a result of female feticide. 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. Female feticide resulting in a decline of the child sex ratio has led to enforcement of Preconception and Prenatal diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) act since February 2003.

A study conducted by Chaudhary *et al.*, (2010) among 527 school children aged between 13 to 18 years in Ludhiana, Punjab revealed that 97.9% of the students knew correctly about female feticide. Male and female students had almost equal level of awareness (98.7% and 98.6% respectively). 98.4% agreed to the fact that female feticide is harmful for society. 56% of the students got information about female feticide from television, 33.2% from newspaper, 6.3% from their family members and remaining 4.5% got information from friends. 45.7% were of the opinion that sons are preferred because they carry name of family and they take care of their parents in old age. 37.8% were of the opinion that female feticide can be stopped by increasing awareness in the society and parents (Chaudhary *et al.*, 2010).

Murarkar *et al.*, (2013) conducted a cross sectional study among 300 junior college adolescent girls in rural area of Pune. The study revealed that 97.67% adolescent girls had heard about PNDT act. The main source of information was media (63.50%). 10.34% of the participants got information from family members, 13.8% from doctors. 7.2% from school teachers (Murarkar *et al.*, 2013). A cross sectional study was conducted by Donald *et al.*, in sub urban area of Ahmedabad from Jan to June 2013 with an objective to know the views about female feticide. The study revealed that 43.5% subjects were aware about the term 'Female feticide' (expressed in local language). 91.5% were aware of the term 'Pre-natal sex determination' in their local language. Television (39.55%) was the commonest source of information (Donald *et al.*, 2014).

Sidhu *et al.*, (2011) conducted a cross sectional study in Bhatinda (Punjab) to study the knowledge and attitude about PNDT Act and female feticide. This study revealed that 98.9% students had heard of female feticide. The two main possible reasons for female feticide elicited by study subjects were preference for a male child and dowry/marriage issues associated with the female child. 56.5% had ever heard of PNDT act. 46.7% subjects viewed that PNDT act alone is not a sufficient tool for reducing female feticide (Sidhu *et al.*, 2011). This is an alarming situation that there is an urgent need to turn the minds of people by creating awareness among community that girl child should be accepted as a gift of god. As school children are future parents, awareness and perception regarding female feticide among them is critical to combat this evil. Further Haryana is a state having lowest sex ratio in the country. Hence an attempt is being made to study the awareness regarding female feticide in block Beri of district Jhajjar, Haryana which is predominantly a rural area.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was carried out in the rural block Beri (District Jhajjar, Haryana). Block Beri is the field practice area attached to Department of Community Medicine, PGIMS, Rohtak, Haryana. The Beri block has 18 Government senior secondary schools. The students of classes 9th, 10th, 11th & 12th from all 18 government senior secondary school were included in the study. The study was of cross-sectional descriptive type. The study was conducted over a period of one year i.e. September 2013 to August 2014. A total of 60 students from each government senior secondary school were included in the study. The sample size thus calculated was 1080 students. Fifteen students from each 9th, 10th, 11th & 12th class of every school were selected by simple random sampling.

Every school was visited with prior information to the school authorities in school timings. The fifteen students were selected randomly by simple lottery method from each class; in case of any student who was not willing to participate in the study, the next student was involved. Every selected student was called one by one in separate room with the help of school personnel without any interference in the studies and other routine activities. In case of a girl subject, help from a female teacher was sought and she was asked to stay at the door of the interview room. The purpose of survey was explained and

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assurance about the confidentiality of information was given to the students. After apprising, informed verbal consent was sought from each student. Absence of the school personnel in the classrooms was ensured to encourage the student's response without reporting bias. Interview was started with general discussion to build up a rapport with respondents and to gain their confidence. A pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule was administered to the study subjects and the responses were recorded by the investigator himself.

Ethical approval and prior permission to carry out the study was sought from Institutional Post Graduate Board of Studies. Also, the necessary permission to conduct the study was obtained from all the principals of schools.

An informed verbal consent was obtained from subject prior to interview. Privacy of subjects and confidentiality of information was maintained and this was also explained to the subjects, prior to interview.

Collected data were entered in the MS Excel spread-sheet, coded appropriately and later cleaned for any possible errors in the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Studies) for windows- version 18.0. An inclusion criterion was: Those who were willing to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria were: Those who were not willing to participate in study and the student who was absent from school on the day of survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The study included 1080 study subjects, of these 518 (48%) were boys and 562 (52%) were girl. Minimum age of subjects was 13 years and the maximum age was 19 years.

The present study found that awareness about female feticide was high i.e. (87%) were aware while only (13%) were not aware. In respect to sex wise, majority of girls (91.5%) and boys (82.3%) were aware about female feticide (Table-1).

The difference in awareness about female feticide among boys and girls was found statistically highly significant ($p=0.00$).

Source of information about female feticide among 940 subjects, nearly half (47.4%) of the study subjects got awareness from teachers and school activities like drama, competitions and awareness rallies followed by electronic media (46.1%), print media like newspaper/magazine (20%), (10.5%) from peer group/society/ neighborhood, 8.9% subjects knew from family/relative while wall writing and hoardings was least source of information among adolescents.

Table 1: Awareness about female feticide among study subjects (n=1080)

Awareness	Adolescents		Total
	Boys	Girls	
Aware	426(82.3%)	514(91.5%)	940(87.0%)
Not aware	92 (17.7%)	48(8.5%)	140 (13.0%)
Total	518(100%)	562(100%)	1080(100%)

$$\chi^2 = 20.3 \text{ df}=1 \text{ p}=0.00$$

Sex wise source of information, the study found that electronic media was the major (54.1%) source of information among girls where as teachers/school activities was the major (42.3%) source of information among boys.

Wall writing and hoardings was least source of information in the both sexes (Table-2). Statistically, the sex wise difference in source of information about female feticide was found highly significant.

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Table 2: Source of information of female feticide among adolescents (N= 940)

Sr. No	Source of information*	Adolescents		Total
		Boys	Girls	
1	Teacher/School activity	180(42.3%)	266(51.8%)	446(47.4%)
2	TV/Radio/ Internet (Electronic media)	156(36.6%)	278(54.1%)	434(46.1%)
3	News Paper/Magazine (Print media)	97(22.8%)	91(17.7%)	188(20%)
4	Peer group/Society/ Neighborhood	45(10.6%)	54(10.5%)	99(10.5%)
5	Family/Relative	36(8.5%)	48(9.3%)	84(8.9%)
6	Wall writing/ Hoardings	25(5.9%)	26(5.1%)	51(5.4%)

(*Multiple responses)

$$\chi^2 = 15.5 \text{ df} = 5 \text{ p} = 0.008$$

Table 3: Awareness regarding adverse sex ratio among study subjects (n=1080)

Awareness	Adolescents		Total
	Boys	Girls	
Aware	411 (79.3%)	519 (92.3%)	930(86.1%)
Not aware	107 (20.7%)	43(7.7%)	150(13.9%)
Total	518(100%)	562 (100%)	1080 (100.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 38.1 \text{ df} = 1 \text{ p} = 0.00$$

The study revealed that majority of subjects (86.1%) was aware about adverse sex ratio. Sex wise awareness, the majority of girls (92.3%) were aware about adverse sex ratio as compared to boys (79.3%). The statistically the sex wise difference in the awareness about adverse sex ratio was found to be highly significant (Table-3).

The table 4 depict that two third (62.5%) subjects were aware about PC and PNDT act while rest of the subjects (37.5%) were not aware about this act. The present study also explored the sex wise awareness about PC and PNDT act and demonstrated that two third girls (66.5%) and maximum boys (57.7%) were aware about this act where as 42.3% boys and one third (33.5%) girls were not aware about this act. The sex wise difference in the awareness about PC and PNDT Act was found statistically significant

Table 4: Sex wise awareness about PC and PNDT Act among study subjects (n=940)

Awareness	Adolescents		Total
	Boys	Girls	
Aware	246(57.7%)	342(66.5%)	588(62.5%)
Not aware	180(42.3%)	172(33.5%)	352(37.5%)
Total	426(100%)	514(100%)	940(100%)

$$\chi^2 = 7.68 \text{ df} = 1 \text{ p} = 0.006$$

The present study ascertained knowledge of adolescents about punishment for female feticide was not adequate i.e. more than half (58.2%) of subject did not know about punishment whereas 23.3% subjects

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knew that there is provision of imprisonment for this crime while 16.8% subjects responded that there is both imprisonment and fine and also 1.7% subjects said that there is fine only for this crime in the PC and PNDT Act. This study also determined sex wise knowledge about punishment and found that 26.3% girls knew that only imprisonment is punishment and 20.7% boys knew that there is both imprisonment and fine for this crime (Table-5). This finding further supported by using statistical test i.e. sex-wise knowledge about punishment for female feticide was found to be significant.

Table 5: Knowledge about punishment for female feticide among adolescents (N=588)

Punishment	Adolescents		Total
	Boys	Girls	
Imprisonment	47(19.1%)	90(26.3%)	137(23.3%)
Imprisonment & fine	51(20.7%)	48(14%)	99(16.8%)
Fine only	03(1.2%)	07(2%)	10(1.7%)
Did not know	145(58.9%)	197(57.6%)	342(58.2%)
Total	246(100%)	342(100%)	588(100%)

$$\chi^2 = 7.62 \text{ df}=3 \text{ p}=0.054$$

Discussion

India is facing a demographic nightmare in terms of gender imbalance. Sex selective abortions have become a significant social phenomenon in various parts of India. The girl children become target of attack even before they are born. It transcends all castes, class and communities and even the North South dichotomy (Tandon *et al.*, 2006).

The present study studied the awareness about female feticide among study subjects and found that maximum number (87%) of subjects were aware about female feticide. The sex wise, majority of girls (91.5%) and boys (82.3%) were aware about female feticide (Table-16). The age and sex wise difference in awareness about female feticide was found statistically highly significant ($p=0.00$). Various studies like Chaudhary *et al.*, (2010), Walia *et al.*, (2005) Kansal *et al.*, (2010) reported the same observations in their studies. Government of India has taken several steps to improve the status of women in society. The steps primarily intend to provide them with greater opportunities for education and employment as well as empower them with inheritance rights. This provides momentum in terms of improvement of the status of women in the society (Chaudhary *et al.*, 2010; Walia *et al.*, 2005; Kansal *et al.*, 2010).

The current study found out the source of information about female feticide and reported that the nearly half (47.4%) of study subjects had source of information about female feticide was teachers and school activities like drama, competitions and awareness rallies followed by electronic media (46.1%), print media like News paper/magazine (20%), (10.5%) from peer group/society/neighborhood, 8.9% subjects knew from family/relative while wall writing and hoardings was least source of information among adolescents.

Sex wise source of information was also explored in the present study and found that electronic media was the major (54%) source of information among girls while the teachers/school activities was the major (42.3%) source of information among boys. Statistically, the sex wise difference in source of information about female feticide was found highly significant. Nearly half of adolescents were aware of female feticide from their teachers and school activities.

Therefore, the study suggested that teachers play a major role in imparting awareness about female feticide among school going adolescents. By increasing awareness among adolescents, adults, the society and parents "We can increase sex ratio and stop female feticide by doing IEC activities like to impart education to adolescents, parents and grandparent."

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The present study also accessed that two third (62.5%) subjects were aware about PC and PNDDT act while rest 37.5% subjects were not aware about this act. The sex wise difference in the awareness about PNDDT Act was found statistically significant. Murarkar *et al.*, (2013) found that 97.67% adolescent girls had heard about PC and PNDDT act. This study shows the higher awareness about PC and PNDDT Act among adolescents as compared to present study. This might be due to the fact that the present study was carried out in a rural area and also that the literacy level of adolescents in Pune is higher as compared to Haryana state. Similar observation reported by Srivastava *et al.*, (2005) that about two-thirds of the respondents were aware of the PNDDT Act (Srivastava *et al.*, 2005).

The present study ascertained among adolescents about punishment for female feticide and revealed that knowledge regarding the punishment was not adequate i.e. more than half (58.2%) of subjects did not know about punishment whereas 23.3% subjects knew that there is provision of imprisonment for this crime while 16.8% subjects responded that there is both imprisonment and fine. Statistically, the sex-wise knowledge about punishment for female feticide was found to be significant. Khandelwal *et al.*, (2012) ascertained same findings (Khandelwal *et al.*, 2012). Despite the existence of preconception and prenatal diagnostic technique (PNPCDT) Act, there is a dire need to strengthen their law. Moreover, it is necessary to gear efforts against the cultural, economic and religious roots of this social malady by woman empowerment and intensive information and communication campaigns especially in the schools.

Conclusion

The study concluded that awareness of adverse sex ratio and female feticide was optimum among adolescents. Awareness among females was more than boys and majority of the subjects had source of information were electronic media, print media, school and peer-group.

The present study intends to get chapters in school curriculum that creates awareness about female feticide across the country. It is the youth that can bring about a change in the society and mindset of people. This can be done effectively through the medium of education and school is the place where learning begins at an early age. The study has revealed high awareness among adolescents about the declining sex ratio, and also the several serious repercussions of the declining sex ratio, yet the girl child is not valued, pointing to an alarmingly volatile situation that would be hard to deal with in the times to come. Media should be encouraged to generate mass awareness about sex selective acts, gender equality to improve declining sex ratio. Nearly one third of subjects were not aware about PC & PNDDT act. Awareness about PC & PNDDT act is very important especially amongst school going adolescents. Efforts should be made to educate the students about this act by school teachers. Regarding the knowledge about punishment for female feticide, it was not adequate. There is need to educate adolescents various punishment under the PC & PNDDT act for doctors as well as for patient.

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