

Female Feticide: Awareness and Perception among Secondary School Children in an Urban Slum Area of Mumbai, Maharashtra”

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Abstract

Introduction: Maharashtra might claim to be among the most progressive states in the country, but the girl child continues to remain under threat. Present study was conducted to assess awareness and perception about female foeticide among secondary school children.

Objectives: To assess the awareness and perceptions of school children regarding female feticide.

Materials and Methods: Study Design: A Cross-sectional study. A total of 300 students who were in 8th to 10th class, English medium were enrolled for study. The information was collected by administering a pretested semi structured questionnaire to the students that had both multiple choice and open ended questions. After taking the consent of the head teacher (principal) of school, the purpose of the study was explained to the students. The students were asked to fill the questionnaire in the presence of investigators and class teacher. Data was entered and analysed by means of simple comparisons and proportions using SPSS16.

Results: Out of total 300 students, 285(95%) were heard about female feticide. Main source of information was TV among 174(58%), followed by newspaper 77(25.66%), 227(75.66%) felt that female feticide is harmful for society and 210 (70%) felt that it is a crime. Answer to female feticide should be stopped? Revealed that punishment 85(28.33%) and equal status to girls 88(29.33%) will help to solve this problem.

Conclusions: Students were aware about this social evil. They felt that this social crime will be harmful for society and it should be stopped.

Keywords: Awareness, Female feticide, Gender preference, School children, Urban slum

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Introduction

Sex ratio, an important social indicator measuring extent of prevailing equity between males and females in a society, is defined as number of females per 1000 males. Changes in sex ratio reflect underlying socioeconomic and cultural patterns of a society. The overall sex ratio in India has increased to 940 as per 2011 census against 933 as given by 2001 census. However, the area of grave concern is that the child sex ratio plummeted to 914 from 927 in 2001.¹

Maharashtra might claim to be among the most progressive states in the country, but the girl child continues to remain under threat. The latest figures available with the state government indicate that the sex ratio is 908 per 1,000 boys in the 0-6 age group, a drop from the 2001 census figure of 913 girls per 1,000 boys.² Mumbai's per capita income is currently poised

at a healthy Rs 1.25 lakh, but it has emerged as the worst performer in Maharashtra in terms of its male-female balance, with only 838 women per 1,000 men. Its suburban areas come second from the bottom at 857.³

Objectives

- 1 To assess awareness and perception about female feticide.
- 2 To assess perception about gender preference among study group

Materials and Method

A cross sectional study conducted in different schools of cheetah camp-urban slum of Mumbai during Nov- Dec 2011. A total of 300 students who were in 8th to 10th class (secondary school), English medium were enrolled for study. Students who were absent on the day of interview were omitted from study group. The information was collected by administering a pretested semi structured questionnaire to the students that had multiple choice and open ended questions. Consent of the head teacher (principal) of school had taken prior to conduct interview. Purpose of the study was explained to head teacher, teachers in the class room and the students. The students were asked to fill the

questionnaire in the presence of investigators and class teacher. Data was entered and analysed by means of simple comparisons and proportions using SPSS16.

Results

The study subjects consist of 189 (63%) male and 111 (37%) female students. Age wise distribution of subjects showed in table 1. Study result showed 285(95%) students were heard about female feticide. Source of information for 174(58%) students was from television, 77(25.66%) from newspaper, 30(10%) from other source like internet, audio-visual aids, pamphlets etc., 10(3.33%) and 11 (3.66%) from family and friends respectively. Male and female students had no more difference regarding awareness (93.57% and 95.81%) respectively. Out of 300 subjects 227(75.66%) felt that female feticide will be harmful for society and 210 (70%) felt that it is a crime. 189(63.33%) students felt

that there is gender discrimination, Out of those 189 Majority 120(40%) felt society is most common place of gender discrimination followed by 55(18.33%) at home, 15(5%) at school and 110(36.67%) felt there is no gender discrimination at any place.

Out of 300 students 199 (66.33%) felt there is preference to male child in family. There was significant association between Student's sex and child preference ($p < 0.05$) (Table 2). Reason to male child preference revealed that 85(42.71%) students felt that male child is source of income to family and 54(27.13%) students still feel female child is burden of family (Table 3 & 4).

Answer to how female feticide should be stopped? Showed that equal status to girls 88 (29.33%) and punishment 85(28.33%) will help to solve this problem (Table 5).

Table 1: Age & Sex Composition of Students

Age	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
14	21 (19.26)	41 (21.46)	62 (20.66)
15	52(47.70)	76 (39.79)	128 (42.66)
16	20 (18.34)	55 (28.79)	75 (39.26)
17	18 (16.51)	17 (8.90)	35 (11.66)
Total	111	189	300

Table 2: Perception about Child Preference

Sex	Gender Preference		Total
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Female	62(56.88)	47(43.11)	109
Male	137(71.72)	54(28.27)	191
Total	199(66.33)	101(33.66)	300

Chi-square = 6.201 with 1 degree of freedom; $P = 0.013$

Table 3: Reason for Male Child Preference

Reasons	n	%
Source Of Income	85	42.71
Name Of Family	53	26.63
Intelligent	35	17.58
Brave	26	13.06
Total	199	

Table 4: Reason Why Female Child Not Preferred

Reasons	n	%
Burden Of Family	54	27.13
Go To Other Home	41	20.6
Dowry	34	17.08
Weak	47	23.61
Shy	23	11.55
Total	199	

Table 5: How Female Feticide Should Be Stopped?

Measures	Female n(%)	Male n(%)	Total
Giving equal status to girls	19(17.43)	69(36.12)	88(29.33)
Punishment	26(23.85)	59(30.8)	85(28.33)
Stop dowry system	34(31.19)	32(16.75)	66(22)
Ban on sex detection technique	21(19.26)	21(10.99)	42(14)
Enforcing strict law	09(8.25)	10(5.23)	19(6.33)

Discussion

Overall awareness about female feticide was found to be considerably high in the study subjects (95 %), in a study done by Anurag Chaudhary et al showed awareness regarding female feticide was found to be very high 99.4%.⁴ Another study done by Walia among adult population in three districts of Punjab having low child sex ratio i.e. Ludhiana, Bhatinda and Ferozepur, though the awareness regarding female feticide was found to be very high, yet majority of the respondents approved of this heinous act.⁵

Source of information among 174(58%) students was from television, 77(25.66%) from newspaper, 30(10%) from other source like internet, audio-visual aids, pamphlets etc. and 10(3.33%) and 11 (3.66%) from family and friends respectively. In a study by Metri Siddharam S et al 90% of the participants said that they got the information about female foeticide from the mass media, 8% said that they got it from neighbours and 6% said that they got it from friends.⁶ Anurag Chaudhary et al showed that 56% of the students got the information about female foeticide from the television, 33.2% got it from the newspapers and that 6.3% and 4.5% got information from family and friends, respectively.⁴

In the present study, 85(42.7%) school students answered source of income as the main reason for male child preference whereas another 53(26.63%) were of the view that in addition to carrying the family name, the sons also take care of their parents. A study conducted by MOHFW in 2002 among 530 adult respondents in Delhi observed that the reasons for son preference were that they carry on the family name and inherit property; they are providers in old age.⁷ Another studies had the reason for wanting a son is to attain moksha, power, prestige, to perform the last rites and to continue the family lineage.^{8,9,10}

Out of 300 students 199 subjects were of the opinion that girl child is not preferred as the girls are burden on the family 54 (27.13%), dowry system 34 (17.08%) and girls go to other place after marriage so cannot take care of their parents 41 (20.6%). Voluntary Health Association of India (2003) has published its research report that "the immediate cause for the practice of female foeticide is that daughters are perceived as economic and social burden to the family due to several factors such as dowry, the danger to her chastity and worry about getting her married.¹¹ As per study done by NIPCCD in 2008 in Delhi and Haryana, dowry was perceived as the main reason for not preferring the girl

child by the respondents.¹² In a study by Siddharam S et al. revealed that A majority of the study subjects (51%) were of the opinion that a girl child was not preferred because of the dowry system, 35% thought that they were a burden for the family and 9.4% were of the opinion that they could not take care of the parents.⁶

After analyzing answers to how female feticide should be stopped? A variety of answers were obtained among that by giving equal status to girls (29.33%) were the majority one followed by giving punishment (28.33%), by eliminating dowry system (22%), Ban on prenatal sex determination (14%) and by enforcing strict law (6.33%). A study by Nath et al., mentioned that 88.3% of female and 70.2% of male interns stated raising status of women and 46% of males and 65.5% of females opined that strict and deterrent punishment of persons involved are important measures to reduce female feticide.¹³

Recommendations:

1. More emphasis should be given to women and girls empowerment.
2. Only laws are not efficient to stop this so increase community awareness with use of IEC package.

Conflicts of Interest: Nil

Source of Support: None

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