



Female Feticide/Infanticide in India – A Survey Based Study

KEYWORDS

Feticide, infanticide, law related to PNDT Act

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ABSTRACT *In the global scenario India is becoming a reckon with and we are very proud of this fact, but there are some home truths that we are unaware of or we are turning a deaf ear to them. Female feticide/infanticide is one of them. Infanticide is the homicide of the infant. According to recent reports by the UNICEF up to 50 million girls are missing from Indian population as a result of systematic gender discrimination in India. In most countries in the world there are approximately 105 female births/100 male births. In India there are less than 93 women for every 100 men in the population and United Nations said that an estimated 2,000 unborn girls are illegally aborted every day in India.*

The study is based on survey conducted in the areas of Dandupalya, Hoskote and MVJ Medical College & research Hospital, Karnataka state with 200 samples in the age group of 18 to 45 years old.

The aims and objects of this study are to establish the various causes for female feticide/infanticide, to establish the role of impact of socio economic status and educational status on female feticide/infanticide and to establish the role of law related to female feticide/infanticide and its strict implementation

Introduction

There is an expression in India that “bringing up a daughter is like watering a neighbor’s plant”. In India the constraint is mostly economic – daughters will require a sizable financial dowry in order to marry. Because daughters leave their families of origin, they are often regarded as temporary members of their families and a drain on its wealth.

Feticide is the destruction of fetus at any time prior to birth. Unlike infanticide, feticide is not homicide in India. Female infanticide is the intentional killing of baby girls due to the preference of male babies and from low value associated with the birth of the female babies. Infanticide means unlawful destruction of a newly born child and is regarded as murder in Indian law. The legal bearing on infanticide is the same as in culpable homicide; expect that the law presumes that the child was born dead. Hence in a trail for infanticide, the prosecution is required to prove that the child was born alive and that it died from criminal violence inflicted after birth. The charge of infanticide is punishable by death sentence or imprisonment for life and also fine under section 302 IPC. Infanticide will not include operative procedures like craniotomy, decapitation etc, causing death of the fetus during labor. According to Indian law, birth of a child means when any part of it has come out of the mother’s birth passage during labor

Owing to certain social customs prevailing in the different communities of India, feticide/infanticide was very common but with the spread of education and restrictive action by the government, it is now rare, expect in cases of illegitimate children born of widows or unmarried persons.

Even in the 21st century female feticide/infanticide is prevalent in many parts of the world especially in developing countries like India and China. The united nations say an estimated 2,000 unborn girls are illegally aborted everyday

in India. 5 million girls were eliminated between 1986 and 2001 because of fetal sex determination done by unethical medical profession. The rate of killing of female fetus is continuous even after 2001. The PNDT Act was amended subsequently in 2002.

Factors that favor the female feticide/infanticide are evil of dowry, social security, religion, small children norm, urban living, educational status and society.

In India birth of a son is considered to be essential in family life particularly among Hindu families. Hence female feticide/infanticide has taken place since time immemorial. Religious and caste based faiths have lowered the status of girl child in India even among well to do educated Indian families. Female babies are endangered by these mistaken beliefs. The practice of dowry has spread too heavily in all communities irrespective of religion or region. Many Indian families dread the birth of a daughter. In some parts of the country there are advertisements for sex determination tests though it is banned by laws in India.

Materials and methods

For the present study a survey was conducted by me in the areas of Dandupalya, Hoskote and MVJ Medical College & research hospital, Karnataka.

We have been taken 200 samples in the age group of 18 to 45 years old with the help of a proforma which consists of name, age, occupation, caste, marital status whether married or not, economical status with income per annum, educational status of husband and wife, type of family whether combined or nuclear, number of children, preference of the sex of the child with reasons, causes of female feticide/infanticide, whether they were aware of PNDT Act etc.,

Results

Women are murdered all over the world. But in India, most brutal form of killing of females taken place regularly even before they have the opportunity to be born. Although female infanticide has long been committed in India. Feticide is relatively new practice emerging concurrently with the advent of technological advancement in prenatal sex determination on a large scale in 1990's, while abortion is legal in India, it is a crime to abort pregnancy solely because the fetus is female. Strict laws and penalties are in place for violators. These laws however have not stemmed the role of this abhorrent practice.

Every unethical act like this has some age old lane reasoning behind it which is used as genuine justification by its staunch supporters. The root cause for female feticide lies within the cultural norms as well as the socioeconomic politics of the country where this practice prevails.

Though this survey is sample study, we tried to establish the socio legal conundrum for female feticide present in the society and to reveal the reasons for the same like

- Economical status
- Educational burden
- False belief and customs
- Dowry system
- Female harassment
- Assault on female
- Male dominant society etc...

In our study, first most important cause for female feticide is preference for the male child in 88 cases (44%). Our own tradition and beliefs tells everyone prefers male child

In our study, second most important cause for female feticide is dowry system in 62 cases (31%). In India, dowry is money or goods or property brings into marriage. Persons for dowry include provisions of base funds for the husband to start a new family, to establish his households to feed and protect. Because of this illegal dowry system, parents believe that having a female child is economical burden oem. Feeling of economical burden is not only due to dowry system but also due to big fat Indian wedding. Therefore the birth of female child indicates huge amount of expenditure later in her life

In this present study, financial burden is one of the cause for female feticide in 30 cases (15%). To have a female child is an unnecessary financial burden as they feeling bringing up a female is like "watering of a plant of a neighbor". This is prevalent in such an extent that most of the small clinics performing illegal sex determination tests.

In this study, in 12 cases (6%), illiteracy is the cause for female feticide. But our survey revealed that it is not a factor as literate people also exposing for the illegal sex determination tests. But as for this study there is tremendous change in the view of the parents who are well educated and regarding the awareness of antenatal sex determination tests and its legal implementation when compared to the illiterate people.

In this study, in 8 cases (4%) parent's false belief regarding the safety of female child is also one of the causes for female feticide. In parent's view, unwanted status of the female child is the burden on her parents regarding her safety. Incidents of girls subjected to rape, molesting, sexual abuse, illicit trafficking, domestic violence, dowry harassment, etc... are growing everyday and parents does not like to risk their girl child's safety and it's a psychological burden on them.

Discussion

While children around the world continue to face various forms of adversity in the 21st century, girl children in particular are subjected to multiple forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination due to their gender. Forms of discrimination against girl children are numerous and vary depending on the traditions, history and culture of a particular society.

Medical technology has made it possible for parents to discover the sex of a fetus at earlier stages of pregnancy. So many women from communities with a preference for boys practice selective abortion. These practices occur most frequently in societies when a girl child is viewed as culturally and economically loss advantageous than a boy child. Female infanticide has been reported in China, North Korea, South Asia, Middle East and parts of Africa.

Female infanticide and feticide are predominantly practiced in regions of significant poverty and over population. One reason boys are more valued than girls is preserving linkage, as family linkage and family name are carried only by males in most societies. Also, children are expected to care for parents in their old age in many countries, so raising a son becomes a better investment because once a girl marries, she becomes the property of her husband and of virtually no value to her parents.

Some women resort to female infanticide and feticide in order to protect their daughters from a life of objectification and subjugation in a society dominated by men, where there is a prevalent anti girl attitude.

Economically, girls often have a lower earning potential than boys, as boys are more likely to find work and receive higher pay. This is significant in poor communities where each family member is expected to add to the household income. A girl can no longer contribute to her family's income after marriage. In many situations, it is much more of an economic burden to raise a girl, as many cultures require religious and social ceremonies for girls but not boys. Holding a proper ceremony for the purpose of maintaining respectable social stature can be very expensive, often leaving poor families with nothing.

A wealth of information on female infanticide and selective abortion has come from the world's two most popular nations, India and China. In both countries it is the cultural norm for a girl to leave her family for her husband's after marriage. India continues the practice of dowry, although illegal, which makes female children especially undesirable as large sums of money must be paid at the time of marriage. For this reason female infanticide is especially prevalent in rural areas and among lower castes. In China, the practice of female infanticide was abolished in 1949. However cases of missing women increased in 1980's. In 1979, one child policy was launched to control the population growth. With this stringent law, many families chose to keep a boy child over a girl child because sons can take

care of their parents through old age, while daughters are handed over to another person's family.

Conclusion

Sex selective abortion and female infanticide have consequences beyond the loss of many families' lives. They have contributed to the dramatic change in the ratio of men to women in some countries. Countries like India and China have criminalized female infanticide, although local law enforcement often ignores cases. Many doctors in India and China, whose practices are limited to providing sex selective abortion, are not reprimanded as legislation and law enforcement cannot guarantee the elimination of these practices.

Public awareness of the issues and grassroots support of the local communities is essential to prevent and eradicate female infanticide and sex selective abortion. Progress has been made in India, where the government has taken steps to implement programs to educate the public and encourage the NGO'S to take action against these practices.

If we are interested in helping to stop female infanticide and sex selective abortion, we can start by embracing an attitude of sensitivity to the specific issues girls face and disseminating ideas of gender equality to people we interact with colleagues, students, children, law makers and friends. We can support organizations like youth advocate program international, whose work addresses discrimination against the girl child, write letters to government officials to raise their concerns and encourage them to act aggressively against a specific practice and get involved in grassroots organizing which can lead to local, national and international improvement.

Steps initiated by government: - The government has initiated many steps and to bring an end to this social evil and to bring a change in the attitude of the people in society. It is in this direction that many laws, acts and schemes have been initiated like the laws favoring girl education, the laws favoring women's right, the laws favoring equal property share for a daughter and other schemes for girl child.

To control female feticide, the government of India enacted the prenatal diagnostic technique act-1994. The act which came into operation on 01.01.1996, restrict the determination and revelation of gender of the fetus. The act also specifies the code of conduct for medical practitioners. Under the PNDT act, an individual or institution found guilty of advertising prenatal determination of gender in any form is subject to imprisonment and/or fine.

Regarding the preventive measures, majority of the group opine that spreading the awareness regarding the legal status of the PNDT ACT and regarding the laws related to punishments for the doctors who are practicing act and the effects of female feticide/infanticide in the future by stage shows, workshops, group discussion, seminars, counseling and debates to change the mind set of parents.

Majority of the group survey opining that heavy penalty should be imposed against parents who knowingly kill their unborn female baby

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