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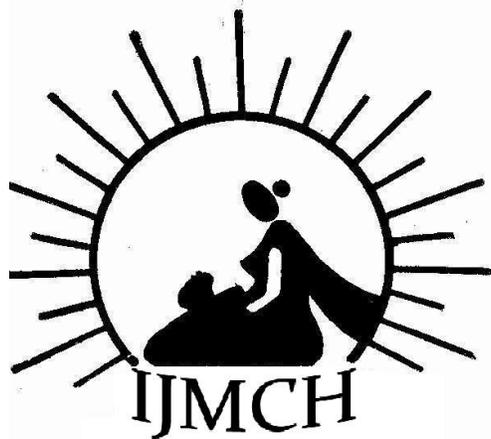
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What is the level of knowledge and attitude of adolescent girls from rural area regarding PNDT act and female feticide?

A study of Knowledge and attitude of adolescent girls in rural area regarding prenatal sex determination and female feticide

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ABSTRACT

Research question: What is the level of knowledge and attitude of adolescent girls from rural area regarding PNDT act and female feticide?

Settings: Junior college in rural field practice area of Department of Community Medicine

Study design: Cross-sectional study

Participants: All adolescent girls from selected Junior college

Methodology: A cross sectional study is carried out in rural field practice area of medical college. A predesigned and pretested questionnaire was given to all the adolescent girls. The data was entered in Microsoft excel and analyzed in terms of percentages.

Results: Out of 300 adolescent girls 293(97.67%) had heard about PNDT act. Major source of information about PNDT act for 221 (63.50%) adolescent girls was media (TV/Newspaper/radio). 129(28.53%) adolescent girls thought that main reason for female feticide is that people consider girl child as a liability. According to 231(64.70%) adolescent girls effect of female feticide on society in future will be that girl population will be less.

Key words: Adolescent girls, rural area, PNDT act, female feticide

Introduction

The discrimination against girl child has led deteriorating sex ratio in the country and below national averages in the most of the proposed states.¹ Declining sex ratio is an issue of grave concern in India.²

When a son is born, sweets are distributed to announce his birth. When a girl is born the sound of tears rents the air. Sons are seen as an asset, essential to light funeral pyres, to ensure the continuation of the lineage and provide economic support to their parents in the latter's old age. The girl is seen as a liability, a drain on the family's resources.³

As per the 2011 Census reports, National Child Sex Ratio (CSR) is of 914 girls per 1000 boys (Children aged 0-6 yrs.) as compared to 927 in 2001. This CSR at India level is lowest since independence.⁴

With the availability of new technologies sufferings of female gender is extended from womb to tomb. Today girl child discrimination begins even before birth. Various medical technologies have been put into practice to identify the sex of the child before the birth and selective abortion if found female.²

To counter this disconcerting trend Government of India enacted legislation in 1994 entitled "Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act" to regulate and prevent the misuse of technologies for sex determination. The PNDT act was implemented in 1996. Its scope was further expanded in 2003 with the prohibition of a whole range of activities that might facilitate deliberate sex selection. Despite of the PNDT Act skewed sex still continues with odds against females.⁵

The root cause of sex determination is certainly a socio-cultural one. This can't be tackled alone by law making without active community participation. Awareness about PNDT act is very important especially amongst women.

As today's adolescent girls will be the future mothers, present study was conducted to assess the knowledge of adolescent girls regarding PNDT Act in rural area.

Material and Methods

A cross sectional study was carried out in rural field practice area of a medical college. All adolescent girls from 11th & 12th class were included in the study. After taking permission from the principal of the junior college from rural area, purpose of the study was explained to the adolescent girls. A predesigned and pretested questionnaire was given to all the adolescent girls and asked them to fill the questionnaire in the presence of investigators and class teacher. They were not permitted to discuss with each other while filling the proforma. After filling the proforma a lecture on Girl child and PNDT act was given to them by principal investigator. The data was entered in Microsoft excel and analyzed in terms of percentages.

Results and Discussion

Adolescents constitute a large section of the population: 19% globally and 21.4% in India. It is a period of heightened energy which if channelized and guided properly, can result in highly constructive outcome. Given opportunity adolescents can improve and accelerate the process of positive social change.⁶

Table 1: Distribution of the adolescent girls according to Socio -demographic characteristics

Age (years)	Total (%)
16	130(43.33%)
17	128(42.67%)
18	35(11.67%)
19	4(1.33%)
20	3(1.00%)
Religion	
Hindu	268(89.33%)
Buddhist	23(7.67%)
Muslim	7(2.33%)
Christian	2(0.67%)
Total	300(100%)

In the present study 130(43.33%) adolescent girls were 16 years old followed by 128(42.67%) were 17 years old. Out of 300 adolescent girls 268(89.33%) were Hindu followed by 23(7.67%) were Buddhist. (Table 1)

About 293(97.67%) adolescent girls had heard about PNDT act. But out of those who had heard, the correct knowledge regarding PNDT act was very less. (Table 2)

Table 2: Distribution of the adolescent girls according to awareness about PNDT act

Awareness about PNDT Act	Number(%)
Yes	293(97.67%)
NO	4(1.33%)
Not answered	3(1.00%)
Total	300(100%)

According to 221 (63.50 %) adolescent girls major source of information about PNDT act was from media which includes newspaper /TV/Radio. (Table 3)

Table 3: Source of Information about PNDT act

Source of information	Number (%)
Family Members	36(10.34%)
Friends	09(2.58%)
Doctors	48(13.8%)
Media(Newspaper/TV/Radio)	221(63.50%)
School teacher	25(7.20%)
Not answered	09(2.60%)

Multiple responses

Table 4: Prenatal sex determination is legally permitted

Legal permission for sex determination	Number (%)
Yes	22(7.33)
No	237(79.00)
Don't Know	41(13.67%)
Total	300(100%)

237(79%) adolescent girls answered that prenatal sex determination is legally not permitted. (Table 4)

According to PCPNDT act 1994 any medical geneticist, gynecologist, registered medical practitioner or radiologist doing prenatal sex determination shall be punished with imprisonment for 3 years and with fine which may extend to Rs 10,000.¹

In the present study though adolescent girls had heard about PNDT act 239 (79.67%) girls did not know about the punishment for the person doing prenatal sex determination. (Table 5)

Table 5. Punishment to the person doing prenatal sex determination

Punishment	Number (%)
Fine and punishment	55(18.33%)
Legal action	3(1%)
Removal from job	3(1%)
Don't know	239(79.67%)
Total	300(100%)

249(83%) girls answered that in future during their pregnancy they will not do prenatal sex determination. (Table 6)

Table6: In future will you do Pre natal sex determination?

Prenatal sex determination in future	Number (%)
Yes	044(14.67%)
No	249(83%)
Can't say	007(2.33%)
Total	300(100%)

The girl child is the most vulnerable member of the society in India. There is a strong element of discrimination at every step of her life. This discrimination arises mainly because society considers her as a liability and not as an asset.

Table7: Reasons for female feticide

Reasons for female feticide	Number (%)
Dowry	106(23.45%)
Girl child is a liability	129(28.53%)
For family planning	047(10.39%)
To take responsibility of family son is imp.	120(26.54%)
For funeral son is important	050(11.06%)

Multiple responses

Adolescent girls in the present study also thought that main reason for female feticide is that people consider girl child as a liability.120 (26.54%) girls answered that to take responsibility of family son is important.106 (23.45%) girls thought that dowry is the main reason for female feticide (Table 7). Anurag choudhary et al⁷ in their study also found that 22.1% responses were in favor of dowry as the only reason for not preferring girl child.

Table 8: Effect of female feticide on society in Future.

Effects of female feticide	Number (%)
No girls for the boys to marry	023(6.40%)
Girl population will be less	231(64.70%)
Rape on girls will be increased	006(02.00%)
Females will be insecure	031(09.00%)
No mothers & sisters in future	51(15.00%)
Decreased sex ratio	15(03.00%)

Multiple responses

Even though women today can work almost in every field like men, the common misconception still remains that it is the male who will help run the house and look after his parents. Nurturing daughters is considered as planting the neighbour's tree, as due to patriarchal society after marriage girls becomes member of the husband's family and doesn't contribute to maternal family.

According to 231(64.70%) adolescent girls effect of female feticide on society in future will be that girl population will be less, 51(15%) girls answered that due to female feticide there will be no mothers and sisters in future. Other effects of female feticide on society are there will be no girls for boys to marry 23(6.40%), females will be insecure31 (9%), rape and violence on girls will be increased 06(2%), decreased sex ratio15 (3%). (Table 8)

Recommendations

1. Female feticide should be treated as a crime and stringent action should be taken to curb this crime.
2. The legislative measures such as Prohibition of Dowry Act, PCPNDT act should be strictly implemented.
3. Media should be encouraged to generate mass awareness about sex selective acts, gender equality to improve declining sex ratio.

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