

Knowledge and perception among anganwadi worker regarding gender discrimination and female foeticide

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ABSTRACT

The present investigation was undertaken to know the perception of Anganwadi workers regarding female foeticide on a sample of 100 respondents. The sample was selected from ICDS projects, Jammu and Gandhinagar. Random sampling technique was used to draw a sample for the study. A self devised interview schedule was used as a tool for data collection. The results revealed that majority of the respondents were aware of the prevalence of gender discrimination. They were also aware about the declining sex ratio and repercussions of missing girls. Contributing factors for son preference found were like sons bring dowry, perform last rites, support provider in old age and carry on the family lineage. Awareness of AWW's regarding Medical Termination of Pregnancy and Pre-natal diagnostic techniques (PNDT) act was negligible. They were not aware about guidelines and legal aspects regarding PNDT.

KEY WORDS : Anganwadi, Foeticide, Amniocentesis, Foetus

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The Atharvaveda says, "The birth of a daughter, grant it elsewhere, here grant a son". This saying in the holy scripture sums up the Indian attitude towards female children who are subjected to multifarious travails inflicted by the society on them. The girl child in India has been the most vulnerable for centuries and is even today, vulnerable to the insults of deprivation as well as discrimination. Whatever the natural biological laws of human reproduction had given mankind for balancing its natural sex ratio, has been taken away by manmade laws, customs, traditions, religions, beliefs and sophisticated medical technology, resulting in a lower status in society for girls as well as women.

Girls are often treated as inferior and are socialized to put themselves last, thus undermining their self-esteem. In India, the girl child is considered economically as a bad bargain for parents.

They considered son as asset and daughter as a burden (Prasad, 2001). According to religious belief, a man can't attain Moksha unless he has a son to light his funeral pyre (Yadav and Badri, 1997). The major reason for not wanting girls and the gender discrimination is that bringing up girls is a costly affair and wasted investment as they have to be married off and arranging for dowry is difficult (Srivastava *et al.*, 2005). For too long they have been facing discrimination throughout their entire journey

from cradle to grave. It is agonizing to know that the gender bias and deep rooted prejudice and discrimination against girl child are now found to begin in the womb that face the peril of pre-birth elimination *i.e.* female foeticide which is increasing alarming day by day and dowry was found as the major reason for it (Walia, 2005). This is dualistic attitude towards the girl child as on one hand she is deprived of rights and equal opportunities for development (Sampark, 2008).

The latest advances in modern medical sciences- the tests like amniocentesis and ultra sonography are being misused. These tests were originally designed for the detection of gender related congenital abnormality of the foetus which are now being abused particularly in India, to detect the sex of the foetus with the intention of getting it aborted if it happens to be a female. Laws banned this heinous practice but still this abuse of girl child is violation of her human right to life and continue to prevail not only in India but also across many countries. Studies revealed that many Indian women in UK (United Kingdom) came to India to abort their female fetuses.

The increasing incidence of female foeticide has led to a drastic decrease in the number of girls to boys in India in the 0-6 age group. The practice of eliminating female foeticide is believed to be one of the main reasons for the adverse child sex ratio (Sen, 2002). Pre-birth