

A Study of Beliefs and Perceptions Related to Female Foeticide among Muslim Community in Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir, India

Shashi Manhas and Jabina Banoo

P.G Department of Home Science, University of Jammu, Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir, India

Mobile: 9906068051, 9469296156**;*

*E mail: *<shashimanhas@hotmail.com>, **<jabinamschd@gmail.com>*

KEYWORDS Female Foeticide. Declining Sex Ratio. Belief. Perception

ABSTRACT The present research is an attempt to study the perception and beliefs regarding female foeticide among Muslim community of Jammu. Samples of 100 parents (50 mothers and 50 fathers) were selected from four selected Muslim dominated areas of Jammu district. The tool consisted of a self-devised interview schedule to determine the perception and beliefs of parents regarding female foeticide/declining sex ratio. Results of the study revealed that majority of the parents were aware of the sex determination methods and considered it a right and safe method for having a son. The reason behind this belief was stated to be economic liability, lack of safety and fear of family honor and it was also revealed that major cause of female foeticide in this community was son preference. The paper also suggests few recommendations based on data to eliminate this evil practice.

INTRODUCTION

The adverse sex ratio has been linked with low status of female in Indian communities, both Hindu and Muslim. The status of girl in a society can be determined by the education, health, economic role, presence in professions and management, and decision making power within the family. It is deeply influenced by beliefs and values of society. In India social disadvantage outweighs natural biological advantage of being a girl. A whole range of discriminatory practices including female foeticide, female infanticide, female genital mutilation, early marriage and dowry have buried the future of the nation. According to a study conducted by Bardia et al. (2004) to assess the role of society (preference for a male child, awareness and acceptability of the practice of sex determination), technology (availability and affordability) and government regulation in the adverse ratio for girls in the Ballabgarh block of Haryana in northern India, showed that the practice of sex determination is prevalent and the attitude of the society is ambivalent. The increased availability of ultrasound machines in the area in the past 10 years correspond to decline in sex ratio. Another study conducted on 200 married men and women to elicit their attitude towards the girl child and the declining sex ratio in Bhopal, found that the reasons for not wanting girls include that bringing up girls is a costly affairs and a wasted investment, they have to be married off, arranging for dowry is difficult, there is fear of providing safety

even inside home, and she is subjected to harassments (Srivastava et al. 2005).

Muslim clerics while giving religious discourse from the mosques during prayers speak about increasing number of cases of female foeticide among Muslims; the All India Muslim Personal law has created awareness among community people on social evils like female foeticide. In the Islamic law, female foeticide is equivalent to murder and is a crime. People should be aware with it, community members told a news agency. They said people's lack of knowledge regarding importance given to women in Islam had resulted in this social evil and to create awareness among Muslims, it has been decided that *imams* (religious scholars) will give the message to those on *Jumma* (*Jumma* means Friday prayer). This could be an effective and easy way to propagate the idea and sensitize the community people. In the first phase, the campaign would be launched from big cities, where *imams* would be prepared to give this special message. In the next stage campaign will be extended to districts and later on to block and *Tehsil* level. While discussing the measures to protect rights of Muslims, deliberations were also held on as how to check social evils. Female foeticide is considered as crime in Islam and should be banned by enforcing the law. Islam prohibits female infanticide and foeticide and they are considered as murder. Allah says "when the female (infant) is buried or killed, it is questioned, for what crime she was killed." Islam not only prohibits female infanticide and

foeticide, but it forbids all types of infanticide and foeticide irrespective of whether the infant is a male or female as mentioned in surah Al-Anam chapter 6, verse 151 (6:151).

According to 2001 census, sex ratio was 941/1000 males in Jammu and Kashmir and according to census 2011, sex ratio is 859/1000 males in Jammu and Kashmir. And overall ratio of the state has also declined from 892 in 2001 to 883 and 0-6years ratio has declined from 927 in 2001 to 914 as per census 2011. The drop in the sex ratio is shown in different districts of Kargil 837 to 775, Poonch 919 to 890, Rajouri 878 to 863, Kathua 898 to 877, Jammu 871 to 865. The situation is worse in Jammu region as Samba district has lowest girl-child ratio in the state at an alarming 787. Jammu district is placed at 795. "Jammu and Samba districts have been cause for concern and the trend is continuing, but Kashmir, which seemed untouched by female foeticide is cause for worry. According to 2011 census, there has been a sex ratio decline in six districts of Kashmir. Pulwama 836(-173 change since 2001), Budgam 832 (-170 change since 2001), Kupwara 854 (-167 change since 2001), Anantnag 831 (-130 change since 2001), Srinagar 869 (-82 change since 2001), Baramulla 866 (-83 change since 2001). A survey conducted on female foeticide by law faculty members of Kashmir University in 2007, says that not only illiterate and poor people were found indulging in the illegal act but also people belonging to well- to- do families were following the same path (Gul Afroz Jan 2007). Jha et al. (2011) reported that more and more Indian families with one girl are aborting subsequent pregnancies when pre-natal tests show another female is on the way. This decline in the number of girls is more pronounced in richer and better educated households. The study said that between 4 million and 12 million girls are thought to have been aborted from 1980-2010. Raw data from India's census released in March showed 914 girls under age 6 for every 1000 boys. A decade ago, many were horrified when the ratio was 927 to 1000 boys. The ratio was 906 girls under age 6 to every 1000 boys in 1990 and had declined further by 2005, when it was 836 to every 1000.

The present study has been conducted on Muslim community. The major reason for choosing this group to study this specific topic concerning females' foeticide was to examine the

perception of community members towards this issue. The objective of the research was to study the perception of Muslim parents related to female foeticide/declining sex ratio and to find out the causes behind this.

Ashu (2012) reported that 78% of women here approved of female foeticide since the child would not be happy in this world. According to study, 64% women feel that the parents should decide if they want a girl or a boy. So that can have one girl and one boy. As far as mother-in-laws are concerned, 12% believe that female foeticides are not wrong and 78% neither approved of female foeticide nor did they call it wrong, 77% of daughter in-laws disapproved of female foeticide. Six villages of Ludhiana were covered in the study.

Study conducted by students of various colleges which covered middle class and working – class localities and has thrown light on practice of illegal sex determination tests and female foeticide. Study revealed that child sex ratio is worse among better off and educated families. There were just 685 girls for every 1000 boys in better off families as against 802 girls in working class households. Further study revealed that in six month period, 16 cases were registered in Pune against doctors for flouting pre- conception and PNDT act, 2003 (Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre 2012).

Justification

A district by district study of sex trends in India derived from comparing census results from 2011 and 2001 shows that sex selective abortion continues to spread in untouched communities and regions. The census 2011 results shows that among children up to the age of six years, the number of girls per 1000 boys has reduced to 914, a drop from 927 in 2001. In a disturbing trend, Jammu and Kashmir has also shown a decline in the child sex ratio in 2011 census and the overall sex ratio of the state has also declined from 892 in 2001 to 883 as per census 2011. Child sex ratio measured as the number of girls for every 1000 boys in the 0-6year age group has declined in districts of Jammu and Kashmir included Leh from 823 to 583, Kargil 837 to 775, Poonch 919 to 890, Rajouri 878 to 863, Kathua 898 to 877, Jammu 871 to 865 and also decline in six districts of Kashmir. Pulwama 836 (-173 change since

2001), Badgam 832 (-170 change since 2001), Kupwara 854 (-167 change since 2001), Anantnag 831(-130 change since 2001), Srinagar 869 (-82 change since 2001). Decline in sex ratio according to 2011 census means that female foeticide practice is prevalent in Muslim community also. Declining child sex ratio is a major concern for the state since it would lead to serious socio-cultural problems including gender imbalance in population. The above picture of child sex ratio at different districts indicates the prevalence of sex selective abortion an alarming misuse of sex selective techniques lead to decline in sex ratio which shows that there is an urgent need to conduct this type of study to find out the causes/reasons responsible for decline in sex ratio. So the present study has been designed to study the perception of Muslim parents regarding female foeticide.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted on Muslim community in selected Muslim dominated areas (Bathindi , Channi , Sunjuwan and Gujjar Nagar) of Jammu district. The data was collected in the month of January-February 2012.

Sample Size:

Sample consists of 100 parents (50 mothers and 50 fathers) having both sexes children.

Sample Technique

Purposive sampling technique was adopted for sample selection.

Tools Applied

A self-devised interview schedule was used as a tool for data collection with various questions framed like awareness of respondents about sex determination methods, perception of parents regarding practice of female foeticide,

causes of female foeticide in Muslim community and awareness of respondents about legal aspects of female foeticide etc.

Data Collection

Data was collected personally by making home visits. Data collection involved two phases:

Pre-testing: Before finalizing the interview schedule pre-testing was done on 10% parents including mother and father to see appropriateness of the interview schedule in the form of addition and deletion and then interview schedule was finalized and applied on respondents.

Data Collection: For collecting data home visits were made in different areas of Jammu (Muslim dominated areas). Visits were made to know the perception related to female foeticide.

Data Analysis

Data collected was coded and tabulated. It was analyzed by both quantitatively and qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background Information of Respondents

It is depicted in Table 1 that most of the mothers (52%) were in age group of 20-30 years and (59%) of fathers were in the age group of 25-35years. While most of mothers (44%) were educated up to matriculation and fathers (24%) were educated up to higher secondary level. It was found that most of fathers (86%) were employed while most of the mothers (58%) were housewives. Most of the selected sample was from nuclear families.

Awareness about Sex-determination Methods

Table 2 shows that majority of mothers (80%) were aware about sex-determination method like

Table 1: Background information of respondents

Background information of mothers	No.	%	Background information of fathers	No.	%
Age (20-30yrs)	26	52%	Age (25-35yrs)	26	52%
Education (Matric)	22	44%	Education (12 th)	12	24%
Occupation(Housewives)	29	58%	Occupation(employed)	43	86%

Table 2: Awareness about sex determination methods

<i>Mothers awareness</i>			<i>Fathers awareness</i>		
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Aware	40	80%	Aware	48	96%
Unaware	10	20%	Unaware	2	4%
Total	50	100%	Total	50	100%

ultrasound and majority of fathers (96%) were also aware about ultrasound method of sex-determination whereas (20%) mothers and (4%) fathers were unaware about sex determination methods. Major sources of sex determination methods for mothers are relatives and doctors and for fathers major sources are media and doctors. Bose (2001) also reported that those familiar with the situation in Punjab, Chandigarh and Delhi know that the ready availability of doctors during the ultrasound test and consequent female foeticide, growing transportation network and the ability to pay for the services of the mobile doctors are the factors responsible for the widespread recourse to ultrasound in rural areas.

Causes of Female Foeticide

It is evident from Table 3 that majority of mothers (72%) and fathers (70%) responded that son preference is the main cause of female foeticide in this community. And (38%) mothers and (40%) fathers responded that due to lack of religious knowledge female foeticide occurs and (34%) mothers and (36%) fathers responded that due to lack of awareness regarding status of women in Islam it occurs and few parents

responded that lack of safety and fear of family honor is responsible for declining sex ratio. Srivastava et al. (2005) reported that 200 married men and women to elicit their attitude towards the girl child and the declining sex ratio in Bhopal, found that the reasons for not wanting girls include that bringing up girls is a costly affair and a wasted investment, they have to be married off, arranging for dowry is difficult, there is fear of providing safety even inside home, and she is subjected to harassments.

Perception of Respondents about Female Foeticide (Sex Determination) Practice

It is evident from Table 4 that majority of fathers (96%) and mothers (82%) responded that this practice is morally wrong. (18 %) mothers responded that it is morally right (4%) fathers responded that there is no harm in this practice. Mothers who were in favour of this practice felt that sex determination should be a must for ensuring the birth of male child whereas fathers who supported this give reason like lack of safety for girls in the society in so many aspects. Moreover both the parents were of view point that social pressure is the main reason for supporting female foeticide.

Table 3: Causes of female foeticide according to respondents in Muslim community

<i>Causes according to mothers</i>			<i>Causes according to fathers</i>		
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Lack of awareness regarding status of women in Islam	17	34%	Lack of awareness regarding status of women in Islam	18	36%
Preference of son	36	72%	Preference of son	35	70%
Discrimination with girls	2	4%	Discrimination with girls		
Lack of religious knowledge	19	38%	Lack of religious knowledge	20	40%
Lack of safety	2	4%	Lack of safety	1	2%
Fear of family honour	1	2%	Fear of family honour	1	2%

Table 4: Perception of respondents about female foeticide (sex determination) practice

<i>Perception of mothers on sex determination (Female foeticide)</i>			<i>Perception of fathers on sex determination (Female foeticide)</i>		
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Morally wrong	41	82%	Morally wrong	48	96%
Morally right	9	18%	Morally right	2	4%
Total	50	100%	Total	50	100%

Reason for Son Preference

Table 5 revealed that the majority of mothers 80.43% viewed that son is preferred with the belief that he will be the only one who carries family lineage, 73.91 viewed that son is preferred with the belief that he will be the one to care for his parents in their old age. Majority of fathers 90.90% viewed that son is preferred with the belief that he will be the one to care for his parents in their old age, 75% viewed that son is preferred for family lineage. Similar kind of study conducted by National Commission for Women, New Delhi (2004) in urban and rural areas of Agra and Uttar Pradesh to assess the root causes of son preference that resulted in harmful and ethical practices like infanticide and sex selection before birth. It is found from the study that around 50% rural men and 64% rural women preferred a son with the perception that they got *moksha* if they cremated by his son, while 72% urban men and 78% urban women mentioned they would prefer a daughter. Around 90% rural men, 38% urban men, all the rural women and 72% of the urban women preferred educating a son since they felt a boy would earn and add to the family income. Many respondents mentioned that they wanted to educate a boy there was no fear in allowing a son to go outside his village.

Awareness of Respondents about Legal Aspects of Female Foeticide

Majority of parents were aware about legal provisions taken by government to eradicate this practice but some of them violate these legal provisions. Majority of (96%) mothers and (92%) fathers were aware about legal aspect of this issue. Mothers, who were aware, responded that they get information regarding these aspects through television, newspapers and from Anganwadi and fathers who were aware got information from newspapers, doctors and also by television.

CONCLUSION

Picture that arises from the results is that female foeticide is now common in the Muslim community also. Illegal abortion of female fetuses has been on the rise because of increasing dowry demands, son preference, and easy access to sex-determination of foetus and sex-determination methods. People find foeticide easier than infanticide nowadays. Majority of parents in the present research were aware about sex determination methods and considered it right and safe method for having a son. Most of the parents said that it was morally wrong to kill a girl child in the womb but simultaneously it was considered better to kill the girl child through foeticide by spending little amount on it and to save marriage expenses in future. During the study, it was found that laws and legislation were violated in each and every aspect. People were aware about legal aspects of this issue but they still go for such practices. Study reveals that they were unaware about the status of women in this community, due to this their attitude towards girl child was not good. The present research conducted on Muslim community in Jammu reveals that desire for son is rising, and due to this, girl child suffers in each and every aspect of life. So there is need to change the people's attitude towards girl child.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create awareness in community regarding laws/Act like MTP (Medical termination of pregnancy) Act and PNDT (Pre-natal diagnostic technique) Act for female foeticide and there is need to ensure strict implementation of these laws. Steps should be taken by government to eradicate female foeticide and stringent punishment should be given to those who indulge in this practice as prescribed under PNDT Act. There should be ban on sex-selective techniques before and after conception. Private organizations and government must initiate campaigns

Table 5: Reason for son preference in Muslim community according to respondents

<i>Reasons according to mothers</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Reasons according to fathers</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Brings dowry	2	4.34	Brings dowry		
For performing last rites	1	2.17	For performing last rites	1	2.27
Support provider in old age	34	73.91	Support provider in old age	40	90.9
Carries on family lineage	37	80.43	Carries on family lineage	33	75

to remove the biased attitude towards girls and to offer educational and vocational training to poor girls to make them self dependent. Religious leaders can also help to create awareness in their communities and issue directives to stop this inhuman practice.

REFERENCES

- Ashu K 2012. 78% Women Approve of Female Foeticide. *Daily Bhaskar*, 16th January, P. 3.
- Bose A 2001. Fighting female foeticide. Growing greed and shrinking child sex ratio. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(36): 3427-3429.
- Bardia A, Paul E, Kapoor SK, Anand K 2004. Declining sex ratio. Role of society, technology and government regulation in Faridabad district, Haryana. *The Medical Journal of India*, 17(4): 181-183.
- Census of Jammu and Kashmir 2001. *Series-8, Jammu and Kashmir*. Director of Census Operations, Jammu and Kashmir.
- Census of Jammu and Kashmir 2011. *Series-8, Jammu and Kashmir*. Director of Census Operations, Jammu and Kashmir.
- Jarul Tufail 2012. Declining Sex Ratio in Jammu and Kashmir. *Daily Excelsior*, April 2nd, 2012, P. 6.
- Jha P, Maya KA, Rajesh K, Faujdar R, Usha R, Lukasz A 2011. Trends in Selective Abortions of Girls in India: Analysis of Nationally Representative Birth Histories from 1990 to 2005 and Census Data from 1991 to 2011: *Medical Journal Lancet*, Vol. 377 No. 9781 pp 1921-1928 Official home page of the Medical Journal lancet. From <www.thelancet.com> (Retrieved on March 21, 2012).
- Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women Studies Center 2012. Sex Determination Act Strongly to Kill This Ill. *Daily News and Analysis*, University of Pune, 14th January.
- National Commission of Women 2004. Discrimination of Girl Child in Uttar Pradesh. *Roshinia Research Study*. New Delhi: NCW P. 46.
- Official Home Page of Journals Online. From <<http://jurisonline.in>> (Retrieved: May 11, 2012)
- Official Home Page of Zee News. From <<http://zeenews.com>> (Retrieved: March 13, 2012).
- Official Page of National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development. From <<http://nipccd.nic.in>> (Retrieved: March 21, 2012).
- Srivastava A, Das Gupta P, Rai S 2003. *Darkness at Noon: Female Foeticide*. Bhopal: VHAI, P. 52
- Srivastava A, Das Gupta P, Rai S 2005. *Attitude towards Girl Child and Declining Sex Ratio in Bhopal*. Bhopal: Centre for Women Studies, P. 42
- Varma Sudesh 2011. Child Sex Ratio Plunges in 431 Districts. *Times of India*, June 8th, P. 8.