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Awareness about Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act among The Married Women: An Observational Cross Sectional Study

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Abstract

Foetal sex determination and sex-selective abortions by medical professionals has grown today into a thousand crore industry. In the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation and Misuse) Act, 1994 amendment was done and titled as Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technique (Prohibition of sex selection) Act (PC-PNDT ACT) 2003 for improvement in technology-related sex determination regulation.

Aims and Objectives: 1. To find out awareness about PCPNDT Act among the married women in the community and to determine their sociodemographic factors influencing this awareness. 2. To assess the reasons for gender Based family composition and violation of laws.

Materials and Methods: A hospital-based observational study was carried out among the married women in the reproductive age group attending Dr. Vithalrao Vikhe Patil Memorial Hospital in Ahmednagar District. The 100 study participants were administered a preformed questionnaire of about ten questions on the PCPNDT Act. The data obtained was analyzed and expressed in percentage, and statistical analysis was done.

Results: The majority of the participants (81%) were aware of the act amended by the Government for the prevention of female feticide. A large number of participants (60%) would prefer to know the sex of their unborn child, and also 9% of them would terminate the pregnancy if the sex was revealed to be a female. A large number of participants (85%) were aware that there is punishment for both doctors who facilitate and patients who seek pre-natal sex determination.

Conclusion: The study found that most of the participants were aware of the possibility and techniques of pre-natal sex determination. More than half of the participants were aware of the law enacted by the Government. Still, they should be educated about the importance of maintaining the falling sex ratio and prevention of female feticide.

Keywords: Pre-Conception; Pre-Natal; Female feticide.

Introduction

In recent years, the child sex ratio has fallen significantly. Census 2011 shown that the child sex ratio in India is about 933 females against 1000 males.[1] The falling sex ratio is signaling precipitation of demographic catastrophe in India. This ratio is not natural; it's man-made,done bydiscriminatory sex determination to get rid of the female child, early female child death due to purposeful negligence and infanticide. With the advances in technology, sex determination has become easier very early during pregnancy with fatal consequences for the girl child. Female feticide does not have any societal and financial boundaries. Even the educated, urban, and wealthy people too

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often nurture a desire for a male child and abort female fetuses.[2] To curb the sex-selective abortions and for controlling the falling sex ratio, the Government has implemented the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PC-PNDT) Act, 2003. The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act of 1994 and 2003 has been in place to regulate an age-old and persistent social problem of female feticide in India.[3,4]

Considering the above background, the study was conducted among the married women in the community to assess their awareness regarding the PC-PNDT Act.

Materials and Methods

An observational cross-sectional study was carried out in a tertiary care hospital. A study with a sample size of 100 with the Proportional Quota Purposive Non-Random Sampling Method was carried out with a Questionnaire. The Questionnaire was specially designed for the study and validated by the Subject Expert.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Married women in the age group of 18 to 45 years.

2. Willing to participate inthe study and given informed consent.

Exclusion criteria:

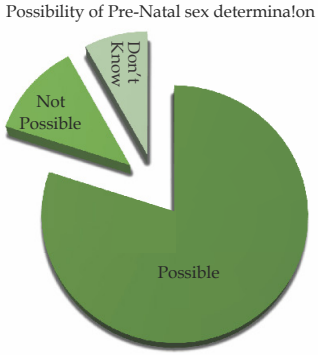
1. Women who are unmarried.

2. Married women below the age of 18 years and above 45 years.

The study was conducted in Dr. Vikhe Patil Memorial Hospital in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra. The study was started after the approval of the Institutional Ethical Committee (IEC). The data was collected by a preformed Questionnaire using Google Forms.The data obtained after the survey was analyzed statistically under expert guidance. The confidentiality of research data and the identity of an individual is maintained according to the ICMR Guidelines.

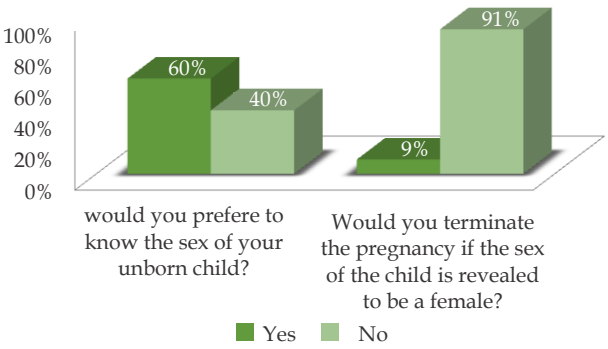
Result

A total of about 100 married women were assessed for their awareness and attitude about Pre-Natal sex determination and the PC-PNDT Act. The participating women were of the age group 15 to 45 years. Most of the participants taking part in the survey were from the rural areas (85%), out of which 58% of participants were educated and had completed SSC. Our study shows that the majority of the participants(80%)were aware of thepossibility of prenatal sex determination, and out of theremaining 20% participants, 12%of participants believed that pre-natal sex determination is not possible. (Graph 1)



Graph 1: Possibility of Pre-Natal sex determination

Media was the primary source of information (63%), followed by friends or relatives (20%) and Healthcare Professionals (17%). About 54% of participants were aware of Ultrasonography (USG) as a method of prenatal sex determination. Out of the total participants, a considerable number of them (60%) prefer to know the sex of their unborn child, out of which 9% of them would terminate the pregnancy if the sex of the unborn child is revealed to be a female. (Graph 2)



Graph 2: Opinion about the sex determination of unborn child & termination of pregnancy if female child.

About 55% of participants believed that pre-natal sex determination could be done in Private Hospitals. In comparison, the rest (45%) believed that it could be done in both Government as well as Private Hospitals.

Awareness regarding the Pre-Natal Sex Determination Act

1. Are you aware about the Act for prevention of Female Feticide enacted by the Government?
   - Yes 81%
   - No 19%

2. Is Pre-Natal sex determination punishable?
   - Yes 89%
   - No 11%
3. Who will be punished?
   - Doctors who facilitate pre-natal sex determination 8%
   - Parents who seek pre-natal sex determination 7%
   - Both 85%
4. Punishment for Doctors?
   - Imprisonment 64%
   - Fine 28%
   - Both 8%

Discussion

In India highest female infanticide incidents occur.At least 117 million girls around the world demographically go "missing" due to sex-selective abortions. Various theories have been proposed as possible reasons for sex-selective abortions. Culture is favored by some researchers,[5] while some favordisparate gender-biased access to resources.[6] Natural reasons may also explain some of the abnormal sex ratios.[7,8] With the increasing availability of sex screening technologies in India, the PC-PNDT Act, 1994 (amended in 2003) prohibits sex-selection or disclosure of the sex of the fetus. It also prohibits the sale of "any ultrasound machine or any other equipment capable of detecting sex of the fetus" to persons, laboratories, and clinics not registered under the Act. However, the enforcement of the law is not that strong, and also the easy access to USG fails to curb this practice. Male child preference is deeply embedded in the culture of various countries like India. Son preference has led to post-natal discrimination as well against girls, which ranges from infanticide to neglect of healthcare and nutrition, often ending in the premature death of the females. But why should there be gender preferences in modern societies? When children are no longer a source of economic security, they no longer provide economic net utility, but rather lead to significant time and monetary costs?

Conclusion

Although the awareness about the PC-PNDT Act looks satisfactory in the current study, the fact that various regulations regarding the act and its amendments might not have been percolated into the community cannot be ruled out.The research shows that even though a majority of them were aware of the Act enacted by the Government and pre-natal sex determination is a punishable offense, more than half of them would like to know the sex of their unborn child and 9% of them would terminate the pregnancy if the sex is revealed to be a female. Female literacy, coupled with women empowerment, will pave a long way in changing the mindset of the people, thereby reversing the downward trend of sex ratio. Thus, the active involvement of media, along with the participation of the community, will eliminate this social pathology of female feticide and gender discrimination.

Author's Contribution-We declares that this research project was done by the Authors named in the present article, and the authors will bear all liabilities pertaining to claims relating to the content of this article. The Author no 1 mentioned is involved in guiding, constructing the questionnaire, refining the article, and Author no 2 is involved in conducting the study.

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Conflict of interest: No conflict of interest is associated with this research project.

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