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Profiles, Practices and Perceptions towards Gender Preferences among Pregnant Women of Ahmedabad City, Gujarat, India

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Abstract

Sex selective practices are of serious concern to the rapidly changing societies. The view of the pregnant women residing in urban areas should be considered. The present cross sectional study aims to study the obstetrics profiles, practices and perceptions of suburban pregnant women of communities in the service areas of a medical college. Antenatal women of the community of Saijpur ward attending antenatal clinics of the area formed the study subjects. Two hundred pregnant women were interviewed using pre-tested Performa taking their consent. Institutional ethical consent was obtained beforehand and the data were analyzed. It was seen that out of the total 200 respondents, most of them (n=184, 92%) were literate. Forty two (21%) already had two daughters at the time of interview. The study showed that 31.5% (n=63) showed preference for male child and only few (n=29, 14.5%) showed preference for a girl child. It was evident that literacy has positive impacts on obstetrics practices of the women. Son preference is also observed among urban subclasses. Pregnant women tend to prefer a male child by and large, especially if the previous child is a daughter. Their views for such choice should be incorporated to bring about desired social change against gender imbalance.

Key words: Gender preferences, Suburban pregnant women, Sex selection, Ahmedabad city, Female feticide.

Introduction

Male gender preference is an age-old problem which has been seen as a rural phenomenon more or less. But the recent reports all over the country suggest that it is also seen among urban localities as well and also seen more commonly in well to do states like Punjab and Haryana.^[1] This trend has led to an important concern because the small family norm in urban and well to do families have unfortunately prompted them to prefer a male child. It has also been found that improvements in health facility have benefitted males more than females^[2], thereby lengthening male survival ahead and further creating gender imbalance in the country. Recent studies also suggest the males in countries like India, China and South Korea are marginalised and withdrawn^[3]. “Son preference” could be due to many reasons, like the wishes of the in-laws/parents, having had a daughter already and the social status of the woman. It is worth to note woman her self’s overall beliefs for favouring or not favouring a particular gender, as future programs could be directed to these root causes, rather than just going for banning of Sonography machines or the Gynaecologists. Where in some parts, like northern India, girl constituted about 60% of the unwanted births,^[4] the “hidden views” of the pregnant woman herself must be considered. It would also be worth to study the attitudes of suburban pregnant women for gender selection as they represent as “mixed” culture between pure urban and pure rural backgrounds.

Objective:

To study the obstetrics profiles, practices and perceptions of suburban pregnant women of communities in the service areas of a medical college.

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional study was carried out among in the service area of a tertiary care hospital of a reputed medical institute of Ahmedabad city of Gujarat. The study was carried out during January to June 2013. Pregnant ladies were included attending the Anganwadi/Antenatalclinics (ANC) of the Saijpur ward of Ahmedabad city. Institutional ethical consent was obtained. A pregnant woman was defined as a woman having history of amenorrhea couples with positive urinary pregnancy test and/or ultrasonography confirmed pregnancy or history of amenorrhea couple with clinically confirmed pregnancy. The population of Saijpur field practice area is about 5000. Considering a pregnancy rate of 4.5%, calculated from the field register, the total number of pregnant women would come around 225. So a total of 200 currently pregnant women were interviewed to cover most of the pregnant women in the area. The only exclusion criteria were a moribund lady not able to take part in the questionnaire and a lady already interviewed in the previous visit. Faculties including a teaching staff along with a female medical social worker did the data collection on a pre-designed and pre-tested questionnaire. Informed consent was taken from the respondents and the data were analysed anonymously. The data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) software and appropriate statistical tests (Chi-square and proportions) were applied.

Results

The mean age of the respondents was 25.83 (± 7.0) years. The study shows that the majority (183, 91.5%) of the respondents came from urban background while the rest (n=17, 8.5%) were from rural. Most of the respondents (n=191, 95.5%) were Hindu by religion, the rest of them were Muslim. The study shows that exactly half (50%) of the respondents had a minimum of Secondary level (up to 12th) education. It can be seen that a very few proportion (n=16, 8%) of the respondents was illiterate. Education has significant relation with the gravida status of the women. [Table 1]. Most (n=156, 78%) of the pregnant women were housewives.

Regarding the obstetric history of the respondents [Table 1], it was seen that majority of them were primigravida and third gravid (n=65 and n=64 respectively) followed by second gravid (n=43, 21.5%) and fourth gravid (n=28, 14%). Regarding parity, majority of them were either had single parity (n=84, 42%) followed by nullipara (n=74, 37%). About 34% (n=68) of the respondents have had a history of previous abortion. Religion and occupation of the women have got significant associations with the abortion history. [Table 1]. Seventy five (37.5%) of the total respondents had single living child and 37 (18.5%) of the respondents had two living children, at the time of interview. The study shows that 20.5% (n=41) of the respondents already had a son, while 19.5% (n=39) had a daughter. Similar proportions (n=42, 21%) already had two daughters at the time of interview. The study showed that, majority of the pregnant women (54%, n=108) did not show any preference for either sex for their current pregnancy outcome. While 31.5% (n=63) showed preference for male child, only few (n=29, 14.5%) showed preference for a girl child. It was interesting to note that almost all (n=185, 92.5%) of the respondents thought that male gender is preferred over the female counterpart in the country.

Discussion

The mean age of 25.83 years (± 7.0) was quite comparable to the range found in a study by Kansal R. et al, which was 23.98 ± 7.0 years.^[5] The study shows that almost all (92%, n=184) of the respondents had some literacy. This is an important finding, as a recent study related to sex ratio at birth and education showed that there has been an inverted U-shaped relationship between sex ratio and education.^[6] A study from Vadera showed that the proportions of illiterate, primary level and secondary level to be about 20%, 45% and 34% respectively^[7]; which in the present study was 8%, 25%

and 50% respectively. The higher level of overall educational level may be due to the fact that the study was done among urban subpopulations, which was not the case for the study by Vadera. Education of the husband is also an important thing to be considered because not only to spread awareness of the “girl child” but also due to the fact that certain studies have shown that there is a close association between unwanted births (one third of all) and the improper use of condoms as well as unwillingness by the husband.^[8] Here in the present study it was fortunate to have all the husbands of the respondents to be literate.

The abortion rate in the present study was 34%, which is comparable to the abortion rate of the study by Tragler A where the rate was 27.81% (84 out of 302) among the urban slums of Mumbai city.^[9] The question of whether the abortion was spontaneous or induced was left because of the possible non-response to the question. In the present study, 31.5 % of the respondents preferred a male child for the current pregnancy, while only 14.5% of the respondents preferred to have a female child. The study conducted by Dey et al showed that about 32.7% of the mothers desired more sons than daughters and only 3.8% desired more daughters than son.^[1] Thus the findings of the present study are comparable to the previous studies. It reflects that not only the family members but also the mother itself has got something to do with the male sex preference in the society. In a study by Kansal R (study subjects dominated by rural background) et al, son and daughter preference were found to be 22.2% and 11.8% respectively.^[5] While in a study by Vadera B, the son preference was found to be 58.5%.^[7] The contrasting figures of those studies may be due to factors like urban/rural ratio among the respondents as well as the number of living children at the time of interview. As the present study was conducted in suburban populations, it also counteracts the beliefs that son preference is only prevalent among higher social class people, as mentioned in the study conducted by Gaudin S.^[10] A study conducted by Tragler A. also revealed son preference was also observed among the suburban slums of Mumbai city as well.^[9] In the present study, about half of the respondents (n=90, 45%) replied that they were prompted by their in-laws to have a male child during any point of time of their pregnancies, as observed by Dhillon S. et al, who showed family pressure to be an important factor for antenatal depression.^[11]

Conclusion

Many favourable obstetric circumstances don't depend on neither urban nor rural background. The religion plays some role in such circumstances. Literacy has a positive impact on favourable gravid status (primi) and low abortion rates among the respondents. Son preference is seen among suburban women as well.

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TABLE

Table 1: Distribution of some favourable obstetric characteristics among the respondents (N=200)

Variable	Category	N	Prevalence of some of the (Favourable) obstetric histories among the respondents							
			Primi gravida		Nullipara		No History of Abortion before		Having 1 or more female children alive	
			n	P value	N	P value	n	P value	n	P value
Background	Urban	183	58	0.25	66	0.37	122	0.51	73	0.565
	Rural	17	7		8		10		8	
Religion	Hindu	191	56	0.00*	65	0.00*	123	0.028*	81	0.011*
	Muslim	9	9		9		9		0	
Education	Illiterate	16	0	0.001*	5	0.103	6	0.00*	5	0.789
	Primary	51	14		18		29		23	
	Secondary	101	33		33		65		40	
	Graduate	32	18		18		32		13	
Occupation	Housewife	156	47	0.00*	56	0.00*	88	0.00*	55	0.00*
	Private job/labour	25	18		18		25		19	
	Business	19	0		0		19		7	
	Total	200								