

Letter to Editor

Missing Daughters: Has the PC-PNDT Act Been Successfully Implemented?

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Haryana is one of the most prosperous states in India and is growing fast economically. However, the status of women is poor as far as the sex ratio is concerned. Both sexes should be a natural mix of the population. Do men have the right to disturb this nature's law?

Family should value girls as an asset, and gender equity should start from home itself. The community should have a pivotal role in changing the mindset of people and families to build a positive attitude towards the girl child.

The Census Report of 2011 showed a gruesome situation and skewed girls' sex ratio, which reflects the value of girls in society.¹ The declining sex ratio is an unfavourable trend, and the steady decline in the number of girls is really a matter of concern. The most disturbing and alarming aspect of the sex ratio in India, especially in the 0–6 years category, and states like Haryana, which boast of industrial growth, increased education levels, more political consciousness and higher per capita income compared to other states, are simmering with falling girls' sex ratio.² If the same trends continue, then the day is not far away when social crimes will surpass and counter the progress achieved on various fronts.

As rightly pronounced, the coming events cast their shadows before as the imbalanced girls' sex ratio at birth, female foeticide, and a higher rate of deaths among girls may perhaps explain the grave situation. Various social scientists and population experts have worked on sociocultural factors affecting girls' sex ratio, but the point of debate still remains unanswered. What are we doing about this problem? When will we learn to modify the attitude of each and every person?

Strenuous efforts have been made by governments and social reformers to change the mindset of people, but still, we are groping in darkness. If we review the sex ratio in the world, we would find that more than 1000 females against 1000 males are there in developed countries like the USA and Australia, whereas in India, we have interstate disparity, like in Kerala, more than 1000 females are there against 1000 males, but in Haryana, it is much below that.

As a result of sex selection and consequent termination of pregnancy with the female foetus, a major fall in the number of females was observed in states like Haryana and Punjab.

Various suggestions have been put forward to improve the adverse female sex ratio, such as involving the community, better interdepartmental coordination, improving women's status through empowerment, soliciting support from celebrities, religious preaching, social and political commitment, convergence of voluntary agencies, shoulders responsibility of Panchayati Raj Institutions, holistic approach of health personnel, making and enforcing stringent laws, compulsory registration of marriage, pregnancy, births, and deaths.

The government of India realised the menace of the heinous crime of sex determination and subsequently termination of pregnancy and was seriously concerned about the missing girls.

Although the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act was enacted in 1994 and was modified as the Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act 2002 and later amended in 2010, the results aren't commensurate with the desired level.³

Haryana has shown real concern among policymakers, and the government has resorted to a multi-pronged strategy to increase awareness in general and tackle it specifically through stringent implementation of the PC-PNDT Act by implementing it in letter and spirit and advocating against female foeticide.

The health department also has serious concerns about this and understands its responsibility, but still, people are not coming forward to make a real fight against those unscrupulous elements who are indulged in this sordid affair. Hon'ble PM and CM of Haryana have shown their commitment politically and now it is the turn of us doctors as the saviour of human beings. At the district level in Haryana, teams have been constituted for effective implementation of the PNDT act under the chairmanship of the CMO and people are empowered to take action against the violators. The strategy seems to be effective, as the sex ratio has started improving in the state of Haryana.

This is an appeal to all doctors and citizens of Haryana to come forward with a brave heart and a strong desire to fight this social evil. The law is there, but cunning persons may perhaps try to escape. However, if we remain vigilant, then no one even would think of going scot-free. Let us make a great promise: we will save each daughter in the womb, and after birth, we will give them the due respect.

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