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## Full Length Research Paper

# PERSPECTIVE ON NEWBORN ABANDONMENT IN RELATION TO GENDER: A SINGLE CENTRE REPORT

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### Abstract

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Son preference and its implication for skewed sex ratio is well documented phenomenon in India. The ways embraced to have son preference would be sex selection abortion, female infanticide and abandoning the female new born.

**Aims:** To see effect of PCPNDT act over abandoned babies and various factor associated with abandoned babies.

**Study design:** Retrospective cross-sectional descriptive study.

**Methodology:** Study was conducted in Government Medical College and Hospital, Akola, and Lady Harding District Hospital for women, Akola (Maharashtra, India). The information regarding abandoned babies was collected from the records of Neonatal intensive care units of both hospitals. All abandoned babies who were admitted in NICU of both hospitals from 1 January, 2003 to 31 December, 2014, were included in study (total duration 12 years).

**Result:** From year 2003 to 2014 in total 69 babies were abandoned (rescued), out of 69 abandoned babies 32 were males and 37 were females. Difference between gender of abandoned Childs and implementation of PCPNDT was found statistically significant. Of all babies 2 had injuries and 2 had congenital anomaly. During hospital stay none of babies were claimed by parent or relatives.

**Conclusion:** It becomes obvious that when the choice sex selection before birth ends, then societies is forced to get rid of females by abandoning them as one of the options, though gender selection of any form should be discouraged. The findings of abandoning more females should be investigated further to uncover possible reasons for the bias.

**Keywords:** PCPNDT act, Abandoned Child, Foeticide

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## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of abandoned babies is one that is gripping in society and has widespread social ramifications. Abandonment is not a new phenomenon and is often subject to social change and circumstances. There are many historical or mythical case reports or incidents of abandonment – such as Karna in Mahabharata. The folk literature often associates abandonment with romance and grandeur. The emotions of the abandoned baby are rarely considered and invariably the tales have 'happy endings', with princely discoveries, grand marriages or emotional reuniting. The reality seems to be far from this, with lower social status, poverty and social censure as prompts for abandonment (Green, 1999). The study of abandoned babies can be informed by two sources. First, the literature on infanticide may be a useful starting point. It may well represent one potential outcome where the mode of infanticide is abandonment (Saunders, 1989; Friedman et al.,

2005 and Rouge-Maillart et al., 2005) and the subsequent survival of the infant is dependent on their circumstances and fortune. Another area of literature relating to the experiences of adoption and fostering may inform the understanding of abandoned babies (Freundlich, 2002 and Wilson, 2004). There are cultural variation and social conditions that directly affect rates of abandonment, such as one child policies in China (Gu and Roy, 1995), poverty and HIV in South Africa (Coovadia and Broughton, 1990), political conditions in Romania (Ionescu, 2005), drug use and HIV in Russia (Guilmoto, 2012). In India, reasons are different – an unwed mother fearing social stigma abandons her baby; couples not wanting girl child abandon their child, costly paediatric treatment etc but reliable data on this does not exist. Local fertility restrictions also tend to compel parents who want both small family size and a son to resort to sex selection (Guilmoto, 2012). Son preference and its implication for skewed sex ratio is well documented phenomenon in India.

The ways embraced to have son preference would be sex selection abortion, female infanticide and abandoning the female new born. The first two are well studied phenomenon but the phenomenon of abandoned female babies is rarely studied. Selective abortions of girls in India has grown in past two decades and accounts for most of large growing imbalance between the number of girls to boys aged 0-6 years. Sex ratio for birth after first born girl fell sharply from 1990 to 2005. By contrast, sex ratio for birth after a first born boy did not change (Jha *et al.*, 2011). 30% women assumed to abort all female foetuses for third births in India (Guilmoto, 2012). Amniocentesis was introduced in 1974 "to ascertain birth defects in a sample population," but "was quickly appropriated by medical entrepreneurs. A spate of sex-selective abortions followed" (Karlekar, 1995) The skewed sex ratio has been linked son preference and spread of ultrasonography technology through the private health care system (Guilmoto, 2012).

The Indian government implemented a Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act in 1994 to prevent the misuse of technique for purpose of prenatal sex determination to selective abortions of girls<sup>[14]</sup>. It is unlikely that this act has been effective because few health providers has been charged or convicted<sup>[15]</sup>. With its strict implication sex ratio improved in favours females in 2007 from 906 to 909 in 2013 but number of survived girls in the 0-4 years age group declined from 914 to 909 in India (SRS). Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (PNDT), was amended in 2003 to the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act) to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection but visible action taken under this law at local level such as Akola districts visible from 2011-12 as seen per records of Civil surgeon's office in form of USG machines being sealed (PCPNDT, 2015). Therefore the present study was aimed to see effect of PCPNDT act over abandoned babies and various factor associated with abandoned babies.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This record based retrospective cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted in Government Medical College and Hospital, Akola, and Lady Harding District Hospital for women, Akola (Maharashtra, India). The information regarding abandoned babies was collected from the records of Neonatal intensive care units of both hospitals. All abandoned babies who were admitted in NICU of both hospitals from 1 January, 2003 to 31 December, 2014, were included in study (total duration 12 years). These hospitals are first referral centres for health check-up and treatment of the abandoned babies, who are brought here from district area and peripheral area in Akola district. After the discharge from hospitals these abandoned babies were shifted to foster homes. All available data regarding age at abandoned, gender, area, and date of admission, weight on admission, congenital anomalies, and injuries, outcome in form of discharge or death were recorded from hospital records. For the study purpose abandoned babies or unknown babies were defined as those babies whose parents were not known. Also strict and effective implementation of PCPNDT act was happen after 2011 so we have compared study subjects in two groups before and after implementation

of PCPNDT act. Before the start of study, permission from the ethical committee was taken from both hospitals. Data was analyzed by using Epi-info 7 software and appropriate test of significant was applied wherever required.

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Demographic data related to recovered/rescued abandoned child**

Gender	Before	After	Total
Male	24	08	32
Female	19	18	37
Total	43	26	69

$X^2=4.087$  d.f.=1 P= .043 statistically significant (as  $P < 0.05$ )

From year 2003 to 2014 in total 69 babies were abandoned (rescued), out of 69 abandoned babies 32 were males and 37 were Females. Before to active implementation of PCPNDT 24 male and 08 were females observed and after implementation 19 were male and 18 were female were observed. Difference between gender of abandoned Childs and implementation of PCPNDT was found statistically significant.

**Table 2. Age and area wise distribution of abandoned babies**

Area from where baby were rescued (recovered)		
Urban	34	49.27%
Rural	35	50.73%
Total	69	100%
Approximate age of abandoned child at the time of hospital admission		
<1 week	56	81.16%
>1 week	13	18.84%
Total	69	100%

From the table 2, it was observed 35 were brought from urban areas and 34 from rural areas. 56 babies' were having age less one week admission and 13 babies' were having age more one week at the time of admission.

**Table 3. Various factors associated with abandoned baby's health**

Gender	Survived	Expired	total
Male	23	09	32
Female	30	07	37
Total	53	16	69
$X^2=0.816$ , d.f.= 1, $p>0.05$ (Difference not significant)			
Approximate age			
<1 week	00	16	16
>1 week	53	00	53
Total	53	16	69

Fisher's exact test, The two-tailed P value is  $< 0.0001$  Extremely statistically significant.

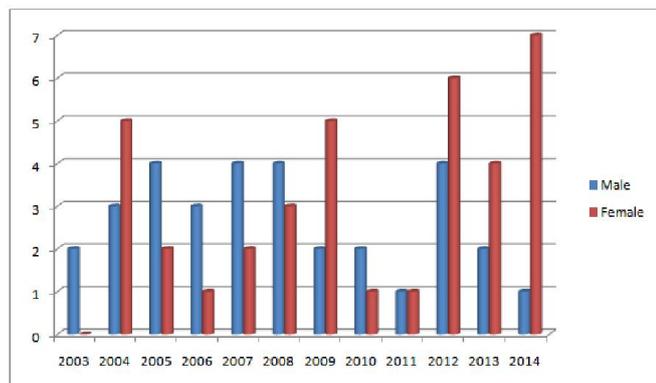
From the table 3 it was observed that Out of 32 male babies total 23 survived and 09 babies expired and out of 37 female babies 30 survived and 07 babies expired. Difference between survival and gender of abandoned child is found to be statistically not significant. Abandoned child having age less than 1 week no one survived and having age more than 1 week all abandoned child survived. Difference between survival and age of abandoned child is found to be statistically highly significant.

**Table 4. Distribution of abandon babies according to gender, congenital anomaly, and action under PCPNDT act**

Year	No.	Gender		Babies with Anomaly/ Injuries*	Action under PCPNDT act
		M	F		
2003	02	02	00	01*	00
2004	08	03	05	00	00
2005	06	04	02	01	00
2006	04	03	01	00	00
2007	06	04	02	01	00
2008	07	04	03	00	00
2009	07	02	05	01*	00
2010	03	02	01	00	00
Total	43	24	19	04	00
2011	02	01	01	00	03
2012	10	04	06	00	08
2013	06	02	04	00	02
2014	08	01	07	00	00
Total	26	08	18	04	
Grand Total	69	32	37	04	13

\*Injury

Of all babies 2 had injuries and 2 had congenital anomaly. During hospital stay none of babies were claimed by parent or relatives. Offences registered under PCPNDT act were 3 in year 2011, 8 in year 2012, 2 in 2013 and none in year 2014.

**Image 1. Graphical presentation of abandoned child according to year and gender of rescued**

## DISCUSSION

In last 12 years i.e. from 2003 to 2014 in total 69 babies were abandoned so in average 5 to 6 babies are abandoned in calendar year. Before the Active implementation of PCPNDT act there was more male than female. These findings are similar to findings in UK (Sherr *et al.*, 2009). But after active implementation there were more female child was observed. Probably due to previous to PCPNDT, sex determination was easy for female child and after it female foeticide or abortion happens. After active PCPNDT implementation due strict law enforcement about sex determination, there was no sex determination happens and these unwanted girl child were born. There girl child become abandoned child however apart from this cause other causes can be like child born out of wedding wedlock, illegitimate child, poverty etc other suggested common cause of abandonment. However there is improving trend of sex ratio in Maharashtra as well as India. But abandoned female child can be a disadvantage by-product of the PCPNDT act. In present study this difference was found statistically significant.

To drawn a conclusion from this finding this demand a large scale study. Out 69 abandoned child, two babies were having injuries, the male baby who had multiple injuries expired and the other one, female baby with fracture femur survived. The first babies with multiple injuries may due to attempt to do infanticide and injury to second baby may due to birth injury as most of this deliveries are conducted in secret by untrained attendant. Apart from this the two babies had congenital anomalies one male and other female both survived. Out of 69 abandoned Childs, only 2.9% (2) infants were having congenital anomaly so congenital deformity seems not to be a main cause of abandonment in India. When abandoned babies were tested for their HIV status none of found to be HIV positive, so HIV positivity not seemed a cause for abandonment as seen in few other studies (Freundlich, 2002).

The area from which babies are found is concern almost equal numbers babies are found in urban and rural area i.e. 34 from urban and 35 in rural areas. This negligible difference in sex ratio in rural urban areas is as per global trends (Guilmoto, 2012). Survival rate of infants were better in those, who have age more than 1 week. Difference between survival and age of abandoned child is found to be statistically highly significant. It was observed that Out of 32 male babies total 23 survived and 09 babies expired and out of 37 female babies 30 survived and 07 babies expired. Difference between survival and gender of abandoned child is found to be statistically not significant. Out of 69 babies 35 (46.3%) are male and 37 (53.6%) are females. Though over the total period of 12 years the difference in abandoning male and female babies in not obvious. There is definitely universal cultural reason in the India for sex selection, as there is elsewhere in the world (Chan *et al.*, 2002), to abandon one gender more than the other. There may be a biological predisposition, mood (Murray *et al.*, 1996 and Sinclair and Murray, 1998) or cultural bias to favour girls (Grace *et al.*, 2003). However, explanations are complex. Any explanation that includes intention may be at matched with the spontaneity of the action.

## Conclusion

During years 2010-2014, we assume that there was no gender selection was carried out unlawfully thus no female foeticide happened. It becomes obvious that when the choice of sex selection before birth is not available, then societies is forced to get rid of females by abandoning them as one of the options. Though gender selection in any form is to be discouraged. The findings of abandoning more females should be investigated further to uncover possible reasons for the bias. It may be that the gender of the new-born might favour abandonment, or simply reflect a chance finding.

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