

ANALYSIS OF FEMALE FOETICIDE RELATED NEWS COVERAGE IN INDIAN DAILY NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract: Killing of female foetus is practised in many Asian countries including India. Female foeticide is one of the extreme manifestations of violence against women. There sex ratio figures are declining, as evident from the Census of India latest reports. This paper deliberates on the issue of female foeticide and it's reporting by analysing the different articles (feature, informative, editorial, opinion, by guest writers, etc.) related to the issue published in the leading daily newspapers in India and using content analysis method. The study reflects on the association of the newspapers with the Census announcements and of female foeticide related indices in the context of coverage of the phenomenon of female foeticide and explores of role of newspapers towards their social responsibility.

Keywords: Female Foeticide, Content Analysis, Indian Newspapers.

Introduction:

Theoretical Framework: Female foeticide is one extreme manifestation of violence against women. Female foeticide is a practice that involves the detection of the sex of the unborn baby in the womb of the mother and the decision to abort it if the sex of the child is detected as a girl. There has been a tremendous decline in sex ratio figures in India. It is a demographic concept that measures the proportion of males to females in a given population. In India it is measured as the number of females per thousand males in a population. Child Sex Ratio is the number of females per thousand males in the age group 0-6 years in a population.

The Indian Census is the most credible source of information for many socio-cultural and demographic data since 1872. Provisional data for Census 2011 was released on March 31, 2011. Do today's newspapers reflect country's political and social culture? There has been a number of studies that have assessed the contents and design of newspapers, online newspapers and news websites. This paper gives an informative preview of the issue specific contents in the selected newspapers in India and will be useful for exploring their potential for creating awareness against the horrendous practice of female foeticide. It aims to fulfil a scholarly gap in research of the contents of daily English newspapers in India through study of their efforts to tackle the issue of female foeticide. Through content analysis, a research method of analysing written, verbal or visual communication messages, theoretical issues can be tested to enhance understanding of the data and also distil words into fewer content related categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Based on the review of the issue of female foeticide in India, the following research questions were raised:

RQ1: Do the newspapers display a similar status regarding coverage on female foeticide?

RQ2: Does the validity of content analysis useful for making inferences with the purpose of providing new insights?

Understanding the Context:

Status of Indian Women: The status of women is the yardstick for assessing the standard of culture of any age of any nation. It also encompasses in itself the notions, rights and obligations of superiority and inferiority in terms of power, authority and grading. The status implies her position in particular subsystem in society. Her rights, privileges and their determination, her access to power and authority, the state of her position when compared to that of man, manifests her status in that particular society. The Census of India, 2011 findings provide an overview of the status of Indian women and that they have

a status lower than men in all aspects. The Indian women on all social and development related indicators.

Skewed Sex Ratio: The overall sex ratio of 940 females per 1000 males (Census 2011) shows a marked gap between boys and girls. This has nationwide implications and is the result of decisions made at the most local level - the family.

Methodology and Data Collection: Sex ratio measured as the number of females per thousand males in a population was considered as the operational definition for the study. The study employed the inductive approach and the method of content analysis to evaluate the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the published articles on female foeticide in four Indian daily English newspapers namely, The Times of India; The Hindustan Times; The Economic Times and The Tribune between February 1, 2011 and January 31, 2012.

Preparation Phase: This phase was initiated with the identification of newspapers to be included for the study. The newspapers were selected purposively after deciding on what to analyse and in what detail along with the sampling considerations. The prime consideration in the selection of the newspapers was prominence, as reflected in their circulation and regional representation. The Times of India and The Hindustan Times were chosen because they are the two major organs in the Indian newspapers market. The Economic Times is a leading financial and business daily and the Tribune is a regional daily newspaper. Once the newspapers were identified, the articles dealing with the issues of female foeticide and sex ratio were selected. The method of content analysis was used for making inferences from the given data to their context, with the purpose of providing new insights behind the phenomenon of female foeticide leading to a greater understanding and possible solution for necessary action.

Organizing Phase: The data was gathered by selecting the articles from printed and their electronic versions from the selected newspapers by reporters and news agencies. February 2011 was considered as the starting point for the data collection because we wanted to find out how and to what extent the selected newspapers would deal with the issues of female foeticide and of declining sex ratio and compare it with the provisional findings of the Census of India 2011. The newspapers, when reporting female foeticide related news, presented a variety of facts about the sex ratio and child sex ratio indices for the nation; the causative factors and the technological reasons; PC & PNDT - its implementation, shortcomings, convictions; and method of reporting.

We selected our unit of analysis as all the articles dealing with the issue of skewed sex ratio and female foeticide in all the selected Indian daily English newspapers for a period of one year starting from February 1, 2011 to January 31, 2012. After making sense of the data, it was organized and coding of all the articles was done in which the written material was read through again and again and the necessary headings were written down after which the categories were generated freely. Hence, two broad categories were penned down namely; Quantum and frequency of the articles and the issues covered.

Findings:

Quantum and Frequency of the Articles: As soon as the Census of India, 2011 data was released, all the selected newspapers started reporting on various aspects of female foeticide. Of the total 367 articles published in the given duration of one year, there were 192 in The Times of India, 29 in The Hindustan Times, 34 in The Economic Times and 112 in The Tribune. The frequency was low before the announcement of the Census 2011, though the frequency reached its peak in April, and then reduced drastically in May. There was again slight increase in the frequency of articles in June and July followed by a fall again in August and September and followed the pattern of increase and decrease in the frequency of articles till the study period was observed (Figure 1). These findings raised serious questions about the sustainability of reflections in the newspapers on current and topical issues.

Number of Articles Categorised by Sources: A total of 143 articles were found to be released by the various news agencies operating in India. 63 articles have been released by TNN; 37 articles by the Tribune News Service; 23 articles by PTI; 7 articles by IANS; 10 articles by The Hindustan Times and 3 articles by ET Bureau.

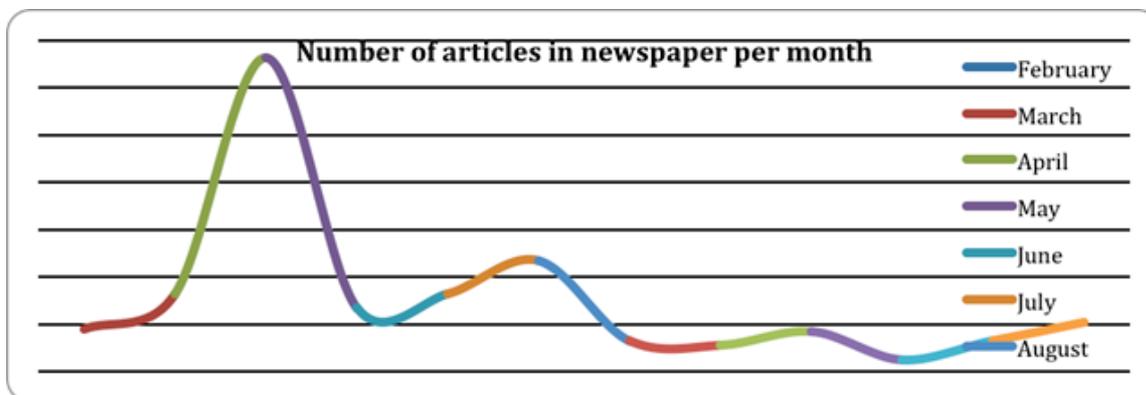


Figure 1: Frequency of Articles Appearing in Sample Newspapers Every Month from February 1, 2011 to January 31, 2012

Articles by Journalists: A total of 170 articles were contributed by the journalists in the selected newspapers out of which Times of India published 122 articles, The Tribune published 74 articles, the Hindustan Times published 20 articles and the Economic Times published 6.

Issues Covered: The articles revealed that the technology was blamed for skewed sex ratio in the country and reported that the drugs like Mifepristone and Misoprostol were widely used as medical termination of pregnancy pills. The record of ultrasounds conducted was easily deleted or not saved. If the enforcement happened to be strict in one district, such families could avail the facility in neighbouring state. There were various articles explaining the consequences.

Many articles expressed that skewed sex ratio would lead to more sex-related crimes (Siwach, 2011). Marriage would be difficult for many men and it will ultimately lead to frustration and sexual harassment and women trafficking on a large scale.

Rich and educated Indian parents are increasingly aborting a second girl child in desire of getting a boy. Men from Punjab and Haryana have been bringing girls from Kerala, Bihar, West Bengal and north east for marrying but those wanting to tie the knot in the next 12 years will find it difficult to get brides even from outside these states as the number of girls in this segment has started falling in other places, too (Sharma, 2011). There were articles which highlighted the efforts by the government and other institutions. Amritsar's district administration introduced the *Panghura* (cradle) scheme in 2008 and later following the success of this initiative in Amritsar, Bathinda and Ludhiana administrations also followed suit (Rana, 2011). Some eminent personalities in fields of cinema, sports and politics were associated with the campaign against female foeticide with the hope that their association with the cause will discourage female foeticide and called it a national shame.

Almost all the selected newspapers related to the Census announcement regarding the issue of female foeticide though in varying degrees and their association has been studied in terms of quantum and frequency of articles. The findings revealed that the newspapers did not display a similar status regarding the coverage on female foeticide.

The reporting of the shocking overall sex ratio figures garnered the maximum coverage, followed by reporting of the initiatives by the central and state governments. The consequences of female foeticide and improper implementation of the PC & PNDT Act were frequently discussed.

Conclusion: The associations of the newspapers with important news releases such as Census announcements display coverage of the issue of female foeticide. They exhibited their social responsibility, although a wide variation was seen in the coverage on the issue. The coverage by the newspapers of the articles on female foeticide differed widely in the quantum, frequency as well as in feature articles providing analysis to the issue. The newspapers can play a significant role in arousing the awareness amongst the people since they are effective medium of mass communication, economically viable and readily available to the large section of people. It can reach a large audience and has a tremendous potential for campaigning and advocacy. Unless the laws were implemented effectively, sex ratio would not improve.

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