

## A cry to save the girl child

Ultrasound prenatal testing, which helps doctors determine the sex of the unborn child, has spawned into a multi-crore industry in India and is a major contributory factor to the rising cases of female foeticide, says a doctor.

The test, basically meant to monitor the growth of the foetus, is not so necessary as is made out to be, said Puneet Bedi, an obstetrician and gynaecologist, at a talk on 'Save the girl child' here Monday evening.

Bedi said a matter as grave as female foeticide is being trivialized by being termed a 'social evil'.

'To begin with, let's not trivialize the matter by calling it a social evil because once we say that it becomes easy to shrug off the responsibility from one's shoulder since then it becomes a combined responsibility. It's a crime, a genocide,' he said.

Bedi said the ultrasound test, which a woman undergoes during routine checkups in her pregnancy, 'is actually not so important'.

'In America, for instance, women are given a choice if they actually want to undergo the test. But here this is the perfect tool to commit the crime because the sex of a baby can be determined from this test,' Bedi said.

Calling it a multi-crore industry, Bedi said that some doctors have used technology to their benefit and actually lure people to come to them to get the test done to determine the sex of the baby and abort it, if need be.

'In India, one million foetuses are killed every year. In order to be doubly sure about the baby's sex two million ultrasounds are done and one million illegal abortions carried out. Considering one doctor handles 100 cases in a year, 30,000 doctors are involved in this illegal act,' Bedi said.

In Delhi alone, 23,000 abortions were carried out in 2005.

Another speaker, V.K. Goel, a doctor with Punjab's department of family and health welfare, mentioned how the government had tried, and succeeded to a certain extent, in pulling up the state's abysmal sex ratio.

He said Krishan Kumar, the district commissioner of Gurudaspur, helped form the Upkar Foundation in 2005 after the sex ratio plummeted to 774 females for every 1,000 males.

The foundation developed a software to keep track of all pregnant women in the district, monitored their health and the birth of children, prepared a medical audit every five months and also organised street plays and puppet shows to spread awareness of the issue. The 4,000-member foundation, with a huge participation of the local people, did everything to tackle the problem.

The state's sex ratio has now risen to 817 females to every 1,000 males but a lot still needs to be done.

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