

**Perspective Piece**

## **Non-medical preimplantation gender selection A clear gendercide and sexism in Pakistan.**

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### **Abstract**

Assisted reproductive technology (ART) advances since the birth of Louis brown in 1978 since then this field introduces innovative techniques such as preimplantation genetic diagnosis. This technique offer the opportunity to fertile and infertile couples to select sex of their offspring prior to implantation via in-vitro fertilization (IVF). These techniques in Pakistan are practicing since three decades without any legislative authorities that actually favors to choose a son instead of a daughter. This accounts as an unethical tradition in international market which also indicates a substantial social harm to our state in coming future. Non-medical sex selection is believe to be exhibits sexism and gendercide, which can threatens the psychological welfare and future liberties of the child. Also it promotes a common social stereotype of sex upon children from the moment of their birth and create uneven gender distribution which can lead to a social devastation like; incidence of child marriage and sex trafficking, kidnapping and selling of women, fraternal polyandry etc. This section, mainly in Pakistan, making a call for legal and regulatory possibilities, enforcing a ban on non-medical sex selection for its contribution to gender inequality and gendercide.

### **Keywords**

Assisted reproductive technology, in-vitro fertilization, Non-medical sex selection, sexism, gendercide, gender inequality, legislative authorities.

### **Introduction**

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) has been widely used around the world after the birth of Louis brown in 1978 to assist infertile couple to get children, generally through in vitro fertilization (IVF)—the transfer of fertilized human embryos into a woman's uterus (Ceelen, van Weissenbruch, Vermeiden, van Leeuwen, & Delemarre-van de Waal, 2008). The moral issues surrounding in vitro fertilization have received considerable treatment in existing scholarship. The bioethical debate around ART advances as does the technique. Novelties such as Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) and sperm sorting now offer the opportunity to would be parents to select prenatally the sex of their offspring. For medical reason sex selection can be performed when the mother is a carrier of a sex-linked disease like hemophilia. Other reasons for sex selection are non-medical and usually reflect specific social reasons (Toebe, 2008). However, this article will discuss the major critical argument related to gender selection that believe to be account as sexism mainly in Pakistani population.

### **Non-medical sex selection in Pakistan – A threat to state**

In Pakistan the awareness of treating infertility with the aid of assisted reproduction technology has increased since 1989 when Gynaecologist Prof Rashid Latif Khan introduced this major breakthrough in this country. Despite of none of any regulatory body related to human embryology this field has boomed up so widely that it has bring multimillion business to its experts. Beside to this reality that we are practicing this field without any legislative authorities some of the practices are wholly unethical which cause substantial social harm, like 'Gender Selection'.

As, Pakistan is a country which known to be as male dominant state (Zakar & Kraemer, 2013), where men can be privilege more when compared to women. Because this supremacy of male child is knitted into the cultural and religious structure (Zakar & Abbas, 2016). A son is consider as a permanent person of the family in contrast to a daughter who will go to the home of her husband and will eventually leave, and follow customs and name of her in-laws (Winkvist & Akhtar,

2000). Sons are viewed as a beneficial source for family financial maintenance and social security of parents and parents thus exhibit richer sentiments and material investment in sons than in daughters (Winkvist & Akhtar, 2000). To continue patriarchal lineage is a crucial part of Pakistani culture: the birth of a son, uplifts the family's social standing (Purewal & Hashmi, 2015). Mostly, Male children are favored because

- i. they have a greater earning capacity,
- ii. they continue the family line; and
- iii. they are generally the heirs of a family's heritage (Purewal & Eklund, 2017).

On the other hand, girls are often believed to be an economic burden because of the dowry system, and after marriage they typically become members of the husband's family, ceasing to support their parents in illness and old age (Masood Kadir, Fikree, Khan, & Sajan, 2003). So when it comes to the chance to have a baby by such an expensive treatment of IVF, majority of patients prefer to have child with male gender. In general non – medical sex selection believe to be demonstrates sexism in its purest most blatant form, firstly because, it risk the advertising of gender equality and abolishment of sexism (Bracken & Nidadavolu, 2005). By promoting infertile couples to found their making liable decision upon traditional concepts of sex and gender, non – medical (Strange, 2010). It threatens the psychological welfare and future liberties of the child, which is the second core argument for rejecting this practice. Gender selection of choice, forces a common social stereotype of sex upon children from the moment of their birth. However, it is found that this practice has significant potential to that threatens harm to both state and child welfare (Strange, 2010).

### **Family balancing – defending accusations**

To support the practice of non – medical gender selection and to defend against the accusation of sexism, supporters invoked the concept of 'family balancing' (Malpani, Malpani, & Modi, 2002). Family balancing is, generally a process of minimizing or avoiding gender differentials within particular families (Dickens, 2002; Malpani & Malpani, 2002). Though this approach

does not rely upon a notion of superiority of one sex, and promotes gender balance as a primary value to sex- selecting couples, advocates claim it is not sexist (Dickens, 2002). For this, Stephen Wilkinson precisely define 'family balancing' to overcome the moral criticisms towards gender selection in common (Wilkinson, 2015).

This term has a prevalent complexity due to an unquestioned conclusions like: if balanced families hold a particular value then it describes the families somehow defective which do not contain equal number of children or do not have at least one child of each sex (Browne, 2011). Søren Holm, on the other hand, made this similar point when he defines; how idea of family balancing uniquely problematizing gender – unbalanced families (Holm, 2004). Critics claims that individuals who are created to fulfil a specific role: to bring a stereotypically male and female element to family are particularly Ovulnerable. The burden of parental expectation to imitate gendered roles is likely to heightened levels of psychological harm (Strange, 2010). Wilkinson points out that practitioner who are selecting gender's to offer family balancing are as much as guilty of sex stereotyping, like all social sex selectors (Wilkinson, 2015). Therefore, family balancing is no less sexist or socially harmful; than unrestricted sex selection.

### **Gender imbalance – impact on society**

An uneven gender distribution is socially problematic and possibly devastating. A low ratio of adult females surges the incidence of child marriage and sex trafficking underworld (Paul, 2015). Also, this kind of traditional norm preference of sons makes a ridicule of international standards on gender equality (Paul, 2015). Current Pakistani sexism behavior can be explain by an example; "If a baby boy gets sick, its parents will sell everything they own to save their son's life. If it's a girl, very often the parents . . . just stop the treatment and take the baby home." Whether by gender selection via assisted reproductive technology, abortion, or female infanticide, this is a clear gendercide which carries massive implications for global stability (Remaley, 2000).

(Hudson & Boer, 2002). China with this similar issue has already begun to witness incidents of kidnapping and selling of women to offer brides for those who are willing to buy in high prices (Werner, 2009). Another complexity is “fraternal polyandry,” where “a woman is forced to marry two brothers, and is expected to produce sons for each of them” (Golomski, 2016).

Paradoxically, as women's value does not increase with their diminish numbers. One of the major problem is that the woman herself does not hold her value; it is actually the males around her that hold her value—her father, her husband, and then her in-laws (Mohammed, 2002). In Pakistan, the increasing shortage of potential brides has not initiated a “groom price;” instead, dowry prices have increased (Rudd, 2001). The association between female value and gendercide is plain: “unless the daughters in vivo has value, she's not going to be born . . . and this is going to define the ratio of young adults two decades from now.”

### Conclusion

There is an ongoing debate over the ethics of non-medical sex selection. It is a dynamic topic of discussion, in which evidences related to global war against girl has put in serious consideration by regulating sex selection and limiting this technique to medical necessity. ART technologies involved are expected to become more economically feasible, and more regularly used: future generations of parents are becoming progressively aware of the possibility of non – medical sex selection. It is critical, therefore, that all of couples with interests at stake are conscious of the complexities of the moral debate.<sup>24</sup>This section, mainly in Pakistan, making a call for legal and regulatory possibilities, enforcing a ban on non-medical sex selection for its contribution to gendercide.

As we know without our cultural change, legal measures will remain to be undermined and ineffectual. But the relation between the technology and gendered abortions is so vibrant that nation must discover the will and means decisively to device such laws. At the same time, it is vital that nation must rationalize the resources to reverse the tradition of degrading women which sex-selection technology has

aggravated. To assume world full of sons is a global nightmare with countless consequences. Neither nations nor cultures can afford to rest in the face of gendercide.

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