

ABORTION PRACTICES IN THE RURAL AREAS AROUND NAJAFGARH

A Study by

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Foeticide, commonly called 'induced-abortion', according to educated guesses is fairly common in rural areas. In spite of the services available under the provisions of M.T.P. women who desire abortion usually utilize services of "experts" who are scattered all over the country. It has also been observed that rural folks also believe in the abortifacient action of some herbs, rituals and practices and make use of them.

This paper presents the findings of a study conducted in the rural areas around Najafgarh, Delhi to collect information about different indigenous preparations, practices and rituals, which according to the rural population of the area have abortion-inducing-effects. It may be pointed out that the study confines itself in presenting such data in a narrative form as was reported by the 'resource persons' of the area and thus it is not intended to give 'value-judgement' on the desirability of such practices. It also does not include in its scope a discussion on the efficiency of

such herbal medicines as are reported in the study.

The resource persons interviewed include: indigenous dais, private medical practitioners, old women of the villages, teachers and barbers. Maternity and Child health workers who had long experience (10-15 years) of working in the area and as such had gained intimate knowledge of the community were also contacted.

In all nine such practices were reported from the area. These are described below:

1. This technique is reported to be used for securing abortion where the duration of pregnancy is upto two month.

- i) First the abdomen of the woman especially the lower portion is massaged vigorously.
- ii) then heated oil is applied on the palms of woman and subsequently.
- iii) attempts are made to manipulate the uterus with the help of nails after inserting fingers as far as it can in the uterus.

It may be observed that this technique involves the use of a combination of practices.

2. This technique is recommended for use where the duration of pregnancy ranges between two to three months. It consists of inserting a piece of

'C-tangle-tent' (Laninaria) in the cervix. After sometime, this piece absorbs the moisture and starts swelling which forces the cervix to open and expell its contents.

3. Although this technique is considered to be 'risky' by some of the villagers it was reported to be used where the duration of pregnancy varies between two to four months. Under this a spoke or 'peacock's feather' dipped in about one gram of water is inserted in the uterus of the woman. It is claimed, that this procedure disrupts the process of the development of embryo and causes abortion. No definite reasons could be given by the villagers as to the reasons why this technique is considered risky for the woman, although the obvious risk of perforation of uterus is evident.

4. Under this technique tablets are prepared consisting of potassium (5 gram) with wheat dough and are administered to the woman who intends to have abortion. Soon after it, the woman is made to drink hot milk or water. It may be indicated, that the woman has to swallow the tablets and not to chew them as chewing may cause blisters on the tongue.

5. This technique was reported in use for inducing abortion in a woman who has four months pregnancy. This technique involves preparation of a

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decoction consisting of the following:

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| a. Carrot seeds | 250 gms |
| b. Jaggery | 200 gms |
| *c. Ghaggar bael | 25 gms |
| *d. Hav bael | 25 gms |
| e. Nutmeg | 1 piece |

(*Type of bushes commonly found in the area)

The process through which the decoction is prepared is as below:

Carrot seeds are boiled in about one kilo of water and it remains on fire till the water is reduced to about half the quantity. Then all the remaining constituents (b, c, d, and e) are put in it and the mixture is heated on fire lighted of cowdung cakes. As a result of heating when the contents are again reduced in about 200-250 c.cs., then the decoction is considered ready and is given to the woman at night. If woman starts bleeding per vagina after taking this decoction she is given about 2 oz. of 'pure ghee' to protect her from the 'garmi' effect of the decoction. This technique is reported to be effective and most commonly used as abortion-inducing-agent in the area.

6. It simply involves administering a high dosage of quinine orally (approximately 600 milligram) to the woman and it is thought that it causes abortion. This again is a fairly well recorded method for causing illegal abortions.

7. A decoction is prepared which consists of carrot seeds and water at the ratio of 1:2 i.e., about 125 gram of carrot seeds and $\frac{1}{2}$ kg. of water and

this mixture is heated till the contents are reduced to half. The decoction thus prepared is administered to the woman which according to popular belief causes bleeding and consequently abortion to the woman.

8. Cotton dipped in potassium permanganate is inserted in the uterus with the help of cotton swab. It is believed to have abortion inducing effects.

9. The woman is persuaded to jump from a height of about ten feet and the jerk is expected to cause abortion even to a six months old pregnancy.

Discussion

Some of the techniques mentioned above have been recorded and have some scientific basis causing abortion. For example, the administration of quinine is known to cause abortion, jumping from a height does cause a fair jolt and physical factor can cause detachment of placenta and thereby induce abortion.

But no scientific evidence is available to substantiate the efficacy of some of the other methods. However, the 'resource persons' who gave the information are absolutely confident about their favourite methods and it is known that they practice it often successfully. The further proof of the efficacy of their methods will remain unknown, at least to the writers, since the information was given in confidence and in good faith that the names of the concerned persons will not obviously be divulged. Further the anxiety to protect their 'trade secrets' prevented obtaining any further details about the method used.

SNA NEWS

Matron, J.J. Group of Hospitals, Bombay writes:

The Student Nurses of the J.J. Group of Hospitals, Bombay celebrated annual function from 20th March 1980 to 9th of April, 1980.

The Certificates were awarded in the function by Dr. R. Anjaneyullu, Director of Medical Education and Research, Govt. of Maharashtra, to the staff nurses who completed short term courses in Operation Theatre management and Nursing Management in I.C. C.U. which were conducted by Training College of Nursing for the J.J. Hospital, Staff Nurses.

On 27-3-80 and 28-3-80 Sports were organised for student nurses and trained nurses.

On 7th April, 1980 W.H.O. day was celebrated. Mrs. Bakul Patel a well known social worker was the chief guest who spoken on the theme "SMOKING OR HEALTH—CHOICE IS YOURS" and the nurses role on same theme was played. This was followed by a beautiful three hours variety entertainment programme by student nurses.

On 9th April, 1980 prize distribution ceremony was organised under the chairmanship of Dr. R. Anjaneyullu, Director of Medical Education and Research, Govt. of Maharashtra. Mrs. Thrity Talyarkhan, Chairman, Indian Womens Council was the chief guest who distributed the prizes, Mrs. K. Thommy, S.N.S. Distributed the prizes to the sports winners.

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