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For the 'unwanted' unborn

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HYDERABAD: The strict enforcement of the PNDT Act notwithstanding, parents still find ways and means to eliminate the girl child. One of the city's best known gynaecologists, Dr Evita Fernandez says that the distressing trend of women giving in to the family's demand and aborting a female foetus continues in Hyderabad unabated. However, with rules becoming difficult to break, more urban "literate" rich are going for sex-determination tests as they can fly to other countries to identify the sex of the child.

"Women gave in (to the family's demand) during the past and continue to do so even now," she says talking about female foeticide and the 'unwanted' girl child. Though the government is desperately trying to fight this extreme form of violence against women but unfortunately, the dipping female sex ratio reflects the society's skewed mindset. "This despite the fact that women are proving themselves in all spheres today," asserts Dr Fernandez, who is the managing director and chief consultant obstetrician of Fernandez Hospital. She says during the course of her practice, she routinely comes across cases when husbands dodge a visit to the hospital just because of the baby's gender. "A mother will never kill her child based on the gender," she maintains.

And it's not just the disturbing trend of female foeticide that has remained unchanged. Early marriages too remain a norm. Dr Fernandez, who has been practicing for 33 years, says it irks her when she sees 18-year-olds checking into the hospital for their deliveries. "I do not know what their financial condition is but there is a need to give these girls a chance to do something with their lives. It is an irony in the present age," says Dr Fernandez. Specially referring to Old City, she questions the need to marry off young girls when they are clueless to make important decisions such as giving birth. "Girls are suppressed and can't make decisions," she notes.

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Dr Fernandez continues to be the city's most preferred obstetrician despite the large number of private hospitals that now dot the city. She says there is enough need for more hospitals for maternal and child health more so in Old City. "Today, I wouldn't refer a would-be mother to a government hospital because I know that they are overloaded. It would be unfair. Government Maternity Hospital (GMH) at Nayapul does 70-80 deliveries in 24 hours. How would the doctors be able to devote time to complicated deliveries? They are providing the best that they can provide," she says.

Saying that 60% of the total deliveries are now being handled by private hospitals, she insists that there is a need to take away the overload from tertiary care hospitals like the GMH that are meant to take care of complicated deliveries. She suggests a way out - to create a competent cadre of midwives who will be taken over or given jobs by private practitioners to handle low-risk deliveries. She says if doctors treat and accept them as colleagues and encourage them to work and provide a competent service, the system would work. Nurses are treated poorly and this attitude among doctors needs to change.



Her hospital, which started a new branch in Hyderguda that is dedicated to complicated deliveries, is now working towards lowering the cost of care. “Child birth has become too medically driven as against a naturally enjoyable process,” she says. However, in a trend she observes that now most Muslim families are trying to restrict their family size, going for not more than three children. The credibility Dr Fernandez enjoys among her patients is possibly rooted in the fact that she is among the few doctors in the city who still endorses normal deliveries. Her ‘dawkhana’ tucked away in a by-lane of Abids is as much the preferred choice of the techie couples living in the Hitech City as for the hundreds of Hyderabadi families residing far away in the Middle East for three generations now. Fernandez is also one of those very few institutions in the city that does not turn

away HIV positive pregnant women. The 120-bedded hospital was started as the Stork Home Clinic with a modest two-room and two-bed by Dr Evita's parents in 1948.

Giving a word of advice to the burgeoning infertility centres she says it's time that all of us make our best attempt to follow guidelines. "Let us not cut corners," she signs off.