

End of Sterilization camps?

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Few years back, in Chattisgarh, around 53 sterilizations were done in 12 hours. Around 13 tribal women had lost their lives due to the botched tubectomies under unhygienic and cruel conditions. The Supreme Court recently gave its judgement on the Devika Biswas v/s Union of India case, in which the Court has asked the Centre to frame a National health Policy by the end of December. Further, the Supreme Court has also told the centre to frame the policy keeping gender equity in mind.

Ethical sterilization

The matter of concern here is the ethical sterilization of both males and females and the implementation of the Ministry of Health and Welfare's guidelines on Female Sterilization, 1999. Since health is a state subject, the centre is unwilling to share the burden of sterilization methods and procedures. But, the truth is that population control is a national concern and both the centre and the states should participate with equal interest in it.

The National Population Policy

The National Population Policy of 2000, framed the objectives of meeting the contraception needs of the entire population, that of health personnel, healthcare infrastructure and the basic reproduction and child healthcare. The most important objective to note here is the universal access to information and counseling regarding the wide choices of contraception methods. Along with the information, it is also the right of the individual to choose the method of contraception he or she desires. Unfortunately, the cases of forced sterilization are not new. The health workers and ASHA workers often misguide women regarding the sterilization operations, calling them 'simple' and 'painless'. The motive behind this action is certain luring offers that are provided to them in case they can achieve their targets of female sterilizations.

Rights of women

Forced sterilizations violate the right to information, the right to have informed choices of safe and effective methods of surgery. When several deaths had occurred due to forced sterilizations, the basic right to life was violated. It is the duty of the health workers to provide proper counseling to the patients before carrying on such operations.

In India, the percentage of vasectomies still remains abysmally low despite the fact that vasectomy is an easier and a reversible procedure. Many false social beliefs are still prevalent like the sense of losing fertility, masculinity, etc. With proper counseling, and raising awareness, vasectomies can be made more frequent as compared to tubectomies.

But, under no circumstance should sterilization be forced upon any individual. Extreme measures for population control can go against the democratic nature of our country. Rather, the government should focus more on promotion of education of women and granting the right to a woman on taking her own pregnancy decisions. This can automatically help achieve the population targets.

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