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The Role of Media in Spreading Awareness of Surrogacy/Surrogate Mother

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Abstract:

The principal objective of this study is to find out the awareness of surrogacy among common people. The media being the benchmark, the study concentrates on the role of media in spreading awareness to the general public. The surrogacy process has a taboo attached to it especially in Indian context. The word surrogacy is either unpopular or have had a negative meaning among the people. Those women who become surrogate mothers are not given appropriate respect or rather considered unusual from the society. What exactly is a surrogacy, what is the process involved and what is the role of surrogate mother, these are few common questions based on which survey will be conducted in order to figure out the medium through which people are acknowledged. Surrogacy is considered as consent to those couple who have no chance of getting a baby of their own. At this stage they can approach surrogate mother who is ready to bear the baby for such couple.

Keywords: Media, Surrogacy, Surrogate Mother, Awareness

1. Introduction

Surrogacy being the gift to those couples who have no chance of bearing a baby, even then it is not so popular among common people. The reason behind it is the taboo attached to it. People don't wish to speak about it in public, or share it with others. There is a negative meaning attached to the word called "surrogate mother". Layman has got no basic knowledge about the same.

Media being powerful communication tool, it has to step ahead in spreading awareness related to such issues which benefit the general public. Perhaps there is a minimal contribution towards this issue in a positive manner. There is a minimum coverage on such issues which makes people unaware or half aware of it. Any issues for that matter when the knowledge is incomplete, it produces negative meaning and effect on the society.

Surrogacy is an arrangement whereby a woman agrees to give birth to a baby for someone else.

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary surrogacy means "the practice by which a woman (called a surrogate mother) becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby in order to give it to someone who cannot have children".

According to Parlex dictionary surrogate means "A person or animal that functions as a substitute for another, as in a social or family role. Surrogate mother is one who substitutes for that woman who cannot bear a baby of her own.

It's the wonderful joy for such misfortune couple who have a hope in their life. It's the blessing to human life. I really have a high regard for the advanced science for its venture in reproduction specialty. Often we observe media coverage of surrogacy arrangements has tended to focus on the negative aspects of surrogacy, such as the 'Baby M' case in the United States where the surrogate mother refused to surrender the child (New Jersey Supreme Court, 1987), Surrogate scandals, negative showcase of commercial surrogacy and so on.

The miracle invention by science in the field of reproduction health should be celebrated. A swift glance at the history of surrogacy explains everything, mostly positive aspects of the same. Having another woman bear a child for those couple to look after, usually with the male as the genetic father, is referred to in the distant past. Babylonian law and custom permitted this practice, and childless woman could use the practice to shun a divorce, which would otherwise be predictable. ("Wikipedia")

Talking about the legal aspect of surrogacy, it is legal in Indian context. The commercial surrogacy has been legal since 2002. Surrogacy in India is of low cost and the law allows for the process. In 2008, the Supreme Court of India in the Manji's case (Japanese Baby) has held that commercial surrogacy is permitted in India. This increased the confidence to go for surrogacy in India. But during 2014, surrogacy was banned on homosexual couples and single parents. ("Wikipedia")

I respect those women who become a surrogate mother. It may be for any reason ranging from self fulfillment, zeal to help others, desire to get pregnant and also for the economical reasons. Study by Vasanti Jadva *et. al* shows that women have several motivations to become a surrogate mother. The most common motivation is that 91% of women do this to help a childless couple. Only 3% of women do it for commercial reasons. A 2011 study from the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge found that surrogacy does not have a negative impact on the surrogate's own children.

2. Literature Review

Vasanti Jadva *et. al.*, (2003) in their paper, *Surrogacy: the experiences of surrogate mothers* show that women have several motivations to become a surrogate mother. The most common motivation is that, 91% of women do this to help a childless couple, 15% do this because of enjoyment of pregnancy' as a reason for opting for surrogacy, and 6% feels it as self-fulfillment and only 3% of women do it for commercial reasons. In this study the experience of surrogate mothers has been studied and evaluated. The psychological as well as physical experiences were been captured through this study which concludes the motivation behind those women who opt to be a surrogate mother.

Jenn Z, (2013) in his article, *Surrogacy and the Media* writes about the negative role of media in making money or increasing their circulation by reporting news about surrogacy and surrogate mother. He has also pointed out the way reporters, print or broadcast, and editors approach such stories just to boost their viewership and circulation. "Drama and negativity boosts their ratings, which, in turn, line their pocket books", Mr Jenn says.

Charles J. Dougherty, (1992) in the issue, *What's wrong with Surrogacy?*, concentrates on the detailed information about the surrogacy, its different types, effects on self respect of individual. The article revolves around the effects of surrogacy on the child as well as the surrogate mother. The financial part of the surrogacy and surrogate mother have been discussed and analyzed in this article.

Scott S. Elizabeth, (2009) in the study *Surrogacy and the politics of commodification* has attempted to overview the politics behind the commodification behind surrogacy motherhood. By concentrating on the core issue, law and contemporary problems, she has tried to suggest few suggestions and realities to the lawmakers. The shift from surrogate mothers to gestational carriers has been covered under the gestational contracts.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to find out the amount of knowledge on surrogacy and role of media in spreading such knowledge. The negativity/taboo attached to surrogacy can be observed in a greater aspect. Scholars and researchers found that the media being the reason behind it. This is proved in the article of Jenn Z, (2013) in his article *surrogacy and the media*. He points out the reason of those reporters and editors to cover the news of the surrogacy/surrogate mother. He assures that profit making is the sole reason since media waits for sensitive/ negative issues. This study attempts to figure out the role of media in spreading awareness of surrogacy/surrogate mother.

The research study constitutes a Case Study and In-depth interview with a sample group of students, journalist and academicians. In order to collect the opinions and information about the role of media initiatives and practices following categories of the sample group were contacted and interviewed: I) students, II) Journalists, III) Academicians, IV) Business people, V) Housewives.

4. Objectives

The objectives of this paper are as follows:

- To find out the role of media in spreading awareness about the surrogacy/surrogate mothers.
- To analyze and interpret the role of media in spreading awareness about the surrogacy/surrogate mothers.
- To understand the effectiveness of the information spread by the media.

5. Analysis & Interpretation

Interview was conducted among the sample participants and out of 30 interviewee 10 did not know about the concept of surrogacy/surrogate mother and remaining 20 were aware of the concept. Among the interviewees the single most medium of source of information was 'media', but different streams of media. Out of 20 participants, 20% (4) were known from online media, 15% (3) from print media (newspapers & magazines), 50% (10) from film media and 15% (3) from books and studies. This clarifies the role of film in educating the people about surrogacy/surrogate mother, followed by online media. A print medium which includes newspaper and magazines, share the equal role as the awareness through books and studies.

From the detailed analysis and interpretation on the interviews by the participants, we figure out that media is playing a major role in spreading awareness about the surrogacy/surrogate mother. The source of information of that interviewee who was aware about the concept was 'media'. They agree on the point that film media has a greater impact on such issues. Interviewees were able to figure out few of the movies related to the surrogacy/surrogate mother. Chori Chori Chupke chupke, Vicky Donor were few among them.

The knowledge about surrogacy should be shared equally between people of all age. It should not be hidden. The more you hide it, the more taboo gets attached to it. It automatically turns into a socially forbidden concept.

Concentrating on the positive or negative effects of media in spreading knowledge, one of the interviewees (journalist) is in an opinion that "The media does play a significant role in creating awareness about surrogacy. It exposes the reality if scenarios as complicated at this and invariably creates a certain degree of sensitively". Interviewees feel that Media has a greater contribution towards coverage on surrogacy/ health related issues in very recent times. In cities like Mangalore, Bangalore, Chennai, people usually find hoardings and testimonials who claim that they have received a baby through these advance related fertilization. Mostly advertisements related surrogacy or IVF are seen in Magazines, Newspaper and TV commercial ads. Through which audiences are better able to be aware about the concept and be literate about surrogacy, though not completely.

But the fact is that media cover the concept of surrogacy/surrogate mother in a much sensationalized way, which is hyping the situation. It's the simple and wonderful contribution towards a human fruition from those surrogate mothers. There is no need of sensitizing the matter. But the media coverage pretends it to be the negative/ unmentionable matter in the public. Let's take the example of a Hindi film, Chori chori chupke chupke, and main casts by Salman Khan, Rani Mukerjee and Preethi Zintha. In the movie Salman Khan and Rani Mukerjee being the unfortunate couple who has had a miscarriage. This is why they approach Preetha Zintha for the baby. In this movie Salman Khan becomes the genetic father by the surrogate mother. But Preetha Zintha is a sex worker and she is willing to be a surrogate mother only for the money. And after the baby is born, she refuses to hand over it to the couple. Ultimately, she realizes her circumstances and hands over the baby and leaves.

What we learn from the movie at the first stage is that, women who is ready to be a surrogate mother cannot be from the respected family, either she has to be a 'bad' woman or a sex worker or poor women. Secondly, money is the ultimate goal for the women to be a surrogate mother and thirdly the refusal to hand over the baby. The surrogate mother refuses to hand over the baby, which creates a negative impact on the viewers about the surrogate mother. At all these stages surrogacy is considered as a taboo because couples do not disclose about the fact to their family members. They hide the matter and give the impression that Wife herself having a baby. Which again showcases wrong impression among the viewers that even if the couple is going for the surrogacy process, they should not mention it because society do not accept those couples or that baby as their own.

The effectiveness of media in spreading awareness about the surrogacy can be identified by the way interviewee's responded. When the word surrogacy/surrogate mother was mentioned those interviewee who were unaware about the concept, could find out only when mentioning of some films. They took the help of films to understand the concept of surrogacy/surrogate mothers. This means that media has an effective role in spreading out the information about surrogacy whether negative/positive.

The term 'commoditization' in context to surrogacy is the sole reason behind all the negative impression about surrogacy/surrogate mother. News coverage related to the surrogacy/surrogate mother are mostly related to commoditization of surrogate mother and children. Even though money does matter to some extent in surrogacy process, but most of the time it is wrong to say that is the ultimate goal. There is absolutely nothing wrong in commercializing the surrogacy. But the challenges behind commercializing are the ability to control the crimes attached to this. The commodification of the human body has been haggard into focus over the last several years as issues such as human trafficking for organs and sexual needs have gained the central attention. Unfortunately, another form of trafficking has eluded the same level of attention: surrogacy motherhood.

Commercial surrogacy has been the benchmark for baby-selling and women exploitation. According to European Centre for Law and Justice Report 2012, "in some places, the commercial surrogacy rings seem to be involved in prostitution and surrogacy. This scenario is found commonly in Asia, the same methods are used to recruit young women in the countryside for prostitution and for surrogacy: entice them with the promise of a respectable job, rape them and take their passports away".

6. Conclusion

The analysis and interpretation on the information collected through interview has helped the researcher to come to the conclusion that, media being the single most source of information about surrogacy/surrogate mother is covering the issue more effectively. It could be print, online, cinema or broadcast media. But in the entire scenario media does its best to spread awareness about not only surrogacy, but also all other concepts related to surrogacy and health. Even though the society has developed over a period of time, the unmentionable concepts are still alive. Surrogacy, being one among those taboos, it is considered unmentionable and unaccepted. Those who have received a baby through surrogacy do not wish to confront the truth. Society especially in India considers such process as unusual and forbidden. Talking about those women who wish to be a surrogate mother, they would not reveal the truth. Even though those mothers are eligible for appreciation and praises, no much women discloses it because of the fear and shame they are going to face by the society. This situation has to be changed. Society has to realize that it's a great favor surrogate mothers are performing. It's filling hands of bare hands. Spreading happiness in lives of such couple whose life is hopeless.

There is a need of positive coverage by media, issues related to the surrogacy/surrogate mother. The media have to extend their coverage or telecast on the legal issues and the reality of such crimes related to surrogacy motherhood. By acknowledging the people from all the perspective, they would be able to understand the concept much deeper and accept it soon. This would help women to get conscious by the crimes related to surrogacy motherhood as well as to lead a better and respectful life with dignity and basic human right to live.

7. References

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