

Gender preference for child among reproductive age group women - A cross-sectional study in Jamnagar district

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ABSTRACT

Background: Today, female feticide and gender preference are a big problem in India. Although there is so much emphasis against it, the problem has become aggravated. In this context, various studies showed that the male child preference leads to skewed sex ratio. The present paper is an attempt to determine the view of the people for giving their preference to the male child. **Objectives:** The objectives were to study the preference of women for gender of child, as well as reasons for preference for it, and association between socioeconomic factors and demographic factors with gender preference. **Materials and Methods:** It is a community-based cross-sectional study, in which 500 married women of 15–49 years of reproductive age group, 150 randomly selected women from one urban municipal ward, and 350 randomly selected women from seven villages of rural area were constituted the study population. Widow and separated women were excluded from the study. A pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire was administered to each individual to collect information. Microsoft Excel 2007 software and the Chi-square test were used. **Results:** Almost half of the women (51.4%) have preference for male child. Women from lower age group (65.25%), currently married (66.42%), Muslim religion (72.22%), lower education (59.01%), and low socioeconomic status (66.67%) and those who are laborer (71.83%) have male child preference. **Conclusions:** This study concludes that more number of females have preference for male child in women of younger age group. Muslim religion and its customs, thoughts, and rearing practices make difference. Lower socioeconomic status and poor education are also major contributory factor. Male child will support in old age and will take social responsibilities are the main basic reasons found to be associated with male child preference.

KEY WORDS: Reproductive Age Group Women; View of People; Female Feticide; Gender Preference; Skewed Sex ratio


INTRODUCTION

Killing of women exists in various forms in all societies over the world. It is severe in China, India, Korea, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The preference for sons or more number of sons than daughters has been documented in several countries

in the world.^[1] The heart of the problem is the low status of women in society, a patriarchal social framework, and value system based on "son mania."

One of the significant features of the 20th century has been the dramatic decline in fertility and preference for smaller families in most parts of East and South Asia; this, in spite of reducing, has exaggerated preference for son, leading to an increased discrimination against daughters.^[2] Gravity of the problem has been indicated by the declining sex ratio. Sex ratio has been declined from 941 in 2001 to 939 in 2011.^[3]

There are varied socioeconomic and demographic factors which determine the gender bias as well as strong prejudices

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against the female child (Bora, 2007).^[4] South Asian countries have declining sex ratios. In the beginning of the 20th century, sex ratio in colonial India was 972 females/1000 males; it declined by -8, -11, -5, and -5 points in 1911, 1921, 1931, and 1941, respectively, according to first census conducted by Royal Administration during colonial period emphasis on male dominated population.^[3]

Prof. Amartya Kumar Sen, in his world famous article "Missing women," statistically proved that, during the last century, 100 million women have been missing in South Asia due to discrimination leading to death.^[5]

Vital factors like, pre-natal sex determination and liberal law on abortion has been responsible to develop cultural prejudices against the girl child. Ratio favorable to boys and adverse to girls coincides with the introduction of modern pre-natal sex determination methods.^[6] Gender biasness resulting into low status of women and neglect of girl child is leading to a higher risk of mortality.^[7] Cultural preference for the son, sex sequence, and number of sons (Gupta, 2005 and George and Dahia, 1998), abuse of sex determination technique (Garg and Nath, 2008), and small family culture have created an imbalance in the sex combination.^[8,9] Historically, the practices of it in India were limited among the upper caste group, due to custom of hypergamy, and now, it is being practiced by the people of middle and low-middle income groups.

Objectives

The objectives of this study as follows:

- To study the preference of women for gender of child.
- To study the reasons for preference for male and non-preference for female child.
- To study the association between socioeconomic factors and demographic factors with gender preference.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

With sample calculation formula "sample size = $4pq/L^2$ and taking probability of choice of having male child as $P = 50\%$ and allowable error $L = 10\%$ of p , sample size would be 400. Taking 20% non-response rate, sample would be 480, and rounding up, it will be 500. Thereby, this cross-sectional study is based on a sample of 500 respondents, 350 from rural and 150 respondents from urban, because according to census 2011, 70% of population of district is living in rural area. Of 16 wards in the urban area, one ward was selected for the study, while of 103 villages, 7 villages were randomly selected for the study purpose. The survey was conducted in January-December 2016. A preformed questionnaire was used for data collection.

Inclusion Criteria

I made correction in age group which is 15 and 49 years.

Exclusion Criteria

Widows and separated women were excluded from the study.

Testing of Hypothesis

To test the hypothesis, a Chi-square test technique has been employed for drawing the desired inferences. Here, Chi-square test at 95% confidence interval and degree of freedom at $(r-1)$ $(c-1)$ is tested for urban and rural areas.

Ethical Permission

The ethical clearance from the institutional ethical committee was obtained before conducting the study.

RESULTS

Table 1 depicts that, of 150 urban area women, 72 (48%) preferred son, only 3 (2%) preferred female child, while 75 (50%) had no preference for the gender of child. In rural area, of 350 women, 185 (52.86%) preferred son, only 12 (3.43%) preferred female child, while 153 (43.71%) had no preference for the gender of child, and this difference was statistically not significant.

Table 2 depicts that, in the age group of 15–24 years, 77 (65.25%) preferred son, while 41 (34.75%) had no preference for the sex of child. In the age group of 25–34 years, 155 (54.01%) and 132 (45.99%) and, in 35–44 years, 25 (26.32%) and 70 (73.68%) had preference for son and no preference, respectively. Moreover, this is statistically significant. In those women who were currently pregnant, 91 (66.42%) preferred son, while 46 (33.58%) had no preference for the sex of child. In those who were not pregnant, 166 (45.73%) and 197 (54.27%) had preference for son and no preference, respectively, and this is statistically significant. In Hindu women, 203 (48.33%) preferred son, while 217 (51.67%) had no preference for the sex of child. In Muslim, 52 (72.22%) and 20 (27.78%) and, in other religion, 2 (25%) and 6 (75%) had preference for son and no preference, respectively, and this is statistically significant.

Table 1: Distribution of women according to preference for male/female child

Preference	Distribution of women		
	Urban <i>n</i> (%)	Rural <i>n</i> (%)	Combined <i>n</i> (%)
Male	72 (48)	185 (52.86)	257 (51.4)
Female	3 (2)	12 (3.43)	15 (3)
No preference	75 (50)	153 (43.71)	228 (45.6)
Total	150 (100)	350 (100)	500 (100)

($\chi^2=2.106$, $P=0.348$, $df=2$)

Table 2: Distribution of women according to preference for son

Variables	Son preference		Total <i>n</i> (%)	<i>P</i> value
	Yes	No		
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)		
Age group in years				
15–24	77 (65.25)	41 (34.75)	118 (100)	<0.00001
25–34	155 (54.01)	132 (45.99)	287 (100)	
35–44	25 (26.32)	70 (73.68)	95 (100)	
Total	257 (51.4)	243 (48.6)	500 (100)	
If currently pregnant				
Yes	91 (66.42)	46 (33.58)	137 (100)	0.00003
No	166 (45.73)	197 (54.27)	363 (100)	
Total	257 (51.4)	243 (48.6)	500 (100)	
Religion				
Hindu	203 (48.33)	217 (51.67)	420 (100)	0.0002
Muslim	52 (72.22)	20 (27.78)	72 (100)	
Other	2 (25)	6 (75)	8 (100)	
Total	257 (51.4)	243 (48.6)	500 (100)	
Literacy status				
Illiterate	57 (54.81)	47 (45.19)	104 (100)	0.003
Primary	87 (63.04)	51 (36.96)	138 (100)	
Secondary	47 (49.47)	48 (50.53)	95 (100)	
Higher Secondary	51 (40.8)	74 (59.2)	125 (100)	
Graduate and above	15 (39.47)	23 (60.53)	38 (100)	
Total	257 (51.4)	243 (48.6)	500 (100)	
Occupation of women				
Housewife	171 (49.14)	177 (50.86)	348 (100)	0.001
Labor	51 (71.83)	20 (28.17)	71 (100)	
Service	31 (46.27)	36 (53.73)	67 (100)	
Other	4 (28.57)	10 (71.43)	14 (100)	
Total	257 (51.4)	243 (48.6)	500 (100)	
Type of family				
Nuclear	106 (48.62)	112 (51.38)	218 (100)	0.274
Joint	151 (53.55)	131 (46.45)	282 (100)	
Total	257 (51.4)	243 (48.6)	500 (100)	
Social class				
I	63 (44.37)	79 (55.63)	142 (100)	0.21
II	61 (56.48)	47 (43.52)	108 (100)	
III	85 (50.6)	83 (49.4)	168 (100)	
IV	44 (57.89)	32 (42.11)	76 (100)	
V	4 (66.67)	2 (33.33)	6 (100)	
Total	257 (51.4)	248 (48.6)	500 (100)	

In this study, in those women who were illiterate, 57 (54.81%) preferred son, while 47 (45.19%) had no preference for the sex of child. In those who studied up to primary, 87 (63.04%) and 51 (36.96%); up to secondary, 47 (49.47%) and 48 (50.53%); up to higher secondary, 51 (40.8%) and 74 (59.2%); and up to graduate and above, 15 (39.47%) and 23 (60.53%) had preference for son and no preference, respectively, and this is

statistically significant. In those women who were housewife, 171 (49.14%) preferred son, while 177 (50.86%) had no preference for the sex of child. In those who were laborer, 51 (71.83%) and 20 (28.17%); doing service, 31 (46.27%) and 36 (53.73%); and doing other work, 4 (28.57%) and 10 (71.43%) had preference for son and no preference, respectively, and this is statistically significant [Table 2].

This study shows that, in those women who were living in nuclear family, 106 (48.62%) preferred son, while 112 (51.38%) had no preference for the sex of child. In those living in joint family, 151 (53.55%) and 131 (46.45%) had preference for son and no preference, respectively, and this is statistically not significant. In those women who belong to socio-economic class (SEC) 1, 63 (44.37%) preferred son, while 79 (55.63%) had no preference for the sex of child. In those from SEC 2, 61 (56.48%) and 47 (43.52%); from SEC 3, 85(50.6%) and 83 (49.4%); from SEC 4, 44 (57.89%) and 32(42.11%); and from SEC 5, 4 (66.67%) and 2 (33.33%) had preference for son and no preference, respectively, and this is statistically not significant [Table 2].

Table 3 depicts that those female who showed preference for male child gave reasons with multiple answers. It shows that 184 (71.59%) women told he supports in old age, 182 (70.82%) women told that male may take social responsibilities, 122 (47.47%) women told that he carry forward family name, 106 (41.25%) women told pressure of family, 58 (22.57%) women told that boys are more intelligent, 41 (15.93%) women told that he performs last rite, and 10 (3.89%) women told that they are opting for a single child. Those female who showed non-preference for female child gave reasons with multiple answers, 128 (49.81%) women told that she is economic liability, 119 (46.30%) women told that she is not going to stay with them permanently, 98 (38.13%) women told for post-marital problems, 96 (37.15%) women told that she is burden on family, 95 (36.96%) women told that she needs more careful rearing, and 56(21.79%) women told that females have dowry problems.

Table 3: Distribution of women according to the reason for preference/non-preference for son/daughter

Reason	Distribution of women
	n (%)
Male preference (n=257)*	
Support in old age	184 (71.59)
Male may take social responsibilities	182 (70.82)
Carry forward family name	122 (47.47)
Pressure from family	106 (41.25)
Boys are more intelligent	58 (22.57)
Perform last rite	41 (15.93)
Opting for a single child	10 (3.89)
Female non-preference (n=257)*	
Economic liability	128 (49.81)
Not going to stay with them permanently	119 (46.30)
Post-marital problems	98 (38.13)
Burden on family	96 (37.35)
Need more careful rearing	95 (36.96)
Females have dowry problems	56 (21.79)

*Multiple responses

DISCUSSION

As the problem of female feticide has been increased hiddenly, we can have idea about the problem by knowing preference for male child. What are reasons for male child preference, and how we can deal with it. In present study we can find out reasons that lead to male child preference. Almost half (51.4%) of women had preference for male child and it was statistically significant. More than half women (65.25%) in younger age group of 15–24 years, 66.42% of women during pregnancy, and 59.01% of poorly educated women had preferred for male child. Mean younger age and poor knowledge and awareness are responsible for that. About two-third women in Muslim religion (72.22%), 66.67% of women of SEC 5, and 71.83% of laborer women preferred for male child and which was statistically significant. This shows influence of religion and customs. This is a major concern to think about. We can have equality just by changing tradition of religion. Major reasons for male child preference were found: 70.82% of women told that male may take social responsibilities while 71.59% told that he supports in old age.

The findings were seen in a study done by Chavada *et al.*^[10] in Ahmedabad, observing that 87.53% had preference for a male child. Furthermore, a hospital based study was done by Kansal *et al.*^[11] in Meerut, India, on pregnant mothers, in which male preference (22.2%) was found. Son preference was more among women who were laborers (91.92%) and 89.63% of the women from the lower classes V in a study done by Chavada *et al.*^[10] In this study, male child preference is less than in a study done by Chavada *et al.*, and it can be due to improved literacy status of women over years or can be due to wrong answer during interview.

On the basis of this study, we can have opinion of people for the changes in policy to save girl child, which are loopholes in the legislative system, what are actual practice going in the community and cultural influences, which is strength of my study. Limitations of this study are that people can give wrong answer or their opinion may change over the period of time or with motivation, education, and influence.

Recommendations

Free and compulsory education should be provided to female children so that they can support themselves. Furthermore, it would remove the attitude of parents that “investing in girls is unnecessary.” Legislative measures like Prohibition of Dowry Act and the PNDT act should be stringently implemented. Central/state governments should popularize schemes in operation in the states through which economic benefits accrue to those families who have daughters. Banks need to be encouraged to give loans for a female child’s higher education at low rates of interest. The effort toward the awareness and sensitization campaigns for the girl child

should be intensified and continued. Efforts and provisions should be made to provide social security to parents, who are above 65 years and have only daughters and scheme of an old age pension if they do not have a son. There is a need to sensitize members of society toward gender issues, especially the lawmakers, and law enforcement agencies, educators, and administrators.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that more number of females have preference for a male child in women of younger age group. Muslim religion and its customs, thoughts, and rearing practices make difference. Lower socioeconomic status and poor education are also major contributory factor. Male child will support in old age and will carry forward their family which are the main basic reason found to be associated with male child preference.

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