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Gender preference and its impact on families: a cross sectional study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Despite tremendous economic progress made through liberalization and globalization, gender preference for children remains a major issue in any society throughout the globe. The aim of the study was to determine the gender preference for children and its impact on family among study population.

Methods: A cross sectional study was carried out between October-2013 to December-2013 in the urban (Ratanpar) and rural (Khodu village) field practice area of C U Shah Medical College Surendranagar, Gujarat. Total 377 study participants were selected by using systematic random sampling. Data was collected using pre designed and pre tested questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS.

Results: Out of total study population, about 78.8% were completed their family and 21.2% had desire for child in near future. Those who had completed their family, nearly two third of them were blessed with both male and female child (62%). Among those who had desire for child (n=80), about two fifth (41.2%) wished to have male child. At parity one, 52% had desire for only male child as next child and also strong preference for male child was observed at parity two and above among those having only female children.

Conclusions: Study revealed that most of the couples wish to have at least one son in the family hence perception of parents towards desired gender of child to be born must be gravitated in favor of daughters.

Keywords: Gender preference, Cross-sectional study, Daughters, Son syndrome

INTRODUCTION

Despite tremendous economic progress made through liberalization and globalization, gender preference for children remains a major issue in any society throughout the globe. Gender preference for children of particular sex can have an impact not only on fertility but also on mortality and sex ratio. Natural sex ratio (males for every 100 females) at birth is 105 which is slightly biased towards the male child to balance the sex ratio of total population as males are at higher risk of death due to natural and external causes (accidents, injuries etc.). Preference for male children have been documented in many studies from several countries of the world. The study from European countries showed no gender preference in France and Poland, mixed gender

preference in Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland, and female child preference in the Czech Republic.⁸ Preference for balance family with one male child and one female was reported in US.⁹

In patriarchal society like India, socioeconomic, cultural and emotional factors are strongly in favour of male child. On Momen whose last child was boy had completed their family earlier than those whose last child was girl. Strong preference for male child leads to skewed sex ratios, female feticides, higher child mortality for girls and discrimination at each stage of life even after birth. According to UNFPA report, in India nearly 0.46 million girls were missing at birth annually during 2001-2012. Sex selective abortions were high among

those who had first female child even though they were educated and economically well set in the society.¹ According to report released by the national institute of transforming India, GOI, sex ratio(females per 1000 males) at birth in India drop by 6 point from 906 during 2012-14 to 900 during 2013-15. Gujarat has reported worst sex ratio which dropped by 53 points from 907 females per 1000 males during 2012-14 to 854 females per 1000 males at birth during 2013-15.19 Despite of all these facts, not all the females are equally vulnerable for discrimination in male dominated societies. The family who already have a male child, are more likely in favour of females. 10 Hence this study was conducted to find out the gender preference for children and its effect in families among 18-49 years of married population in field practice area of C.U. Shah Medical College, Surendranagar.

METHODS

A cross sectional study was carried out between October-2013 to December-2013 in the urban (Ratanpar) and rural (Khodu village) field practice area of C U Shah Medical college Surendranagar, Gujarat. Sampling frame was constructed by enlisting all the houses under field practice area. There were total 668 and 1314 houses in the urban and rural field practice areas respectively. It was decided to include 10% of the total houses which turned out to be 70 houses in urban and 130 houses in the rural. One male and female aged 18-49 years who were married and present in the selected house at the time of visit were selected. Total sample size came to 400, out of them 140 were from urban area and 260 were from rural area. Nearly 15% urban and less than 1% rural study population were excluded from the study as they didn't give consent. Final sample size was 377 which included 119 urban and 258 rural study populations. Informed verbal consent was taken from all study participants. Data was collected using pre designed and pre tested questionnaire to collect information about sociodemographic details of study participants, their preference for child's gender, ideal family size, ideal family composition and socio-cultural factors related to child birth in families. Data was analyzed using SPSS. The study was approved by institutional ethics committee.

RESULTS

From total 377 study population, all age groups represent almost similar percentage between 15% - 19% except 20-24 years (11.1%) with mean age was 35.1±8.2 years, 31.6% were belonged to urban area while 68.4% were from rural area, 58.8% were females and majority was educated up to primary standard or above it (83.3%) (Table 1).

Out of total study population, about 78.8% had completed their family and 21.2% had desire for a child in near future. Those who had completed their family, nearly two third of them were blessed with both male and female child (62%), one third were with a male child (34%) and very few with female child (4%) irrespective of the number of children. Among those who had desire for a child (N=80), more than two fifth (46.2%) had no gender preference, about two fifth (41.2%) wished to have male child, and one fifth (12.6%) wished for a female child. Those who had no gender preference (n=37), nearly 90% did not have any children and remaining 10% were blessed with one male child. Among those who had preference for male child (n=33), about 85% already had female child, 12% had male child and remaining 3% had no children. Those who had preference for female child (n=10) all of them already had male child. At parity one, Nearly half (48%) of those who had female child didn't want a second child and remaining (52%) had desire for only a male child as the next child while those who had male child among them 67.2% didn't want another child, 7.3% desired for a male child, 7.3% didn't have gender preference and 18.2% desired for a female child as their next child. At parity two and above desired for the next child depended on presence of male child in the family. There was no couple who desired for another child who already had two or more than two male children in their family. Strong preference for male child was observed at parity two and above among those having only female children (Table 2).

Table 1: Sociodemographic profile of study population (n=377).

Variables			
Variables Age (year)	Rural (%)	Urban (%)	Total (%)
< 20	01 (0.4)	01 (0.8)	02 (0.5)
20-24	30 (11.6)	10 (8.4)	40 (10.6)
25-29	51 (19.8)	15 (12.6)	66 (17.5)
30-34	45 (17.4)	25 (21.0)	70 (18.6)
35-39	44 (17.1)	28 (23.5)	72 (19.1)
40-44	39 (15.1)	21 (17.6)	60 (15.9)
45-49	48 (18.6)	19 (16.0)	67 (17.8)
Total	258 (100)	119 (100)	377 (100)
Gender			
Male	108 (41.9)	47 (39.5)	155 (41.1)
Female	150 (58.1)	72 (60.5)	222 (58.9)
Total	258 (100)	119 (100)	377 (100)
Education			
Illiterate	36 (14.0)	17 (14.3)	53 (14.1)
Just literate	09 (3.5)	01 (0.8)	10 (2.7)
Primary	107 (41.5)	31 (26.1)	138 (36.6)
Secondary	93 (36.0)	37 (31.1)	130 (34.5)
Graduate and above	13 (5.0)	33 (27.7)	46 (12.2)
Total	258 (100)	119 (100)	377 (100)

Nearly 40% of urban and 48.4% of rural study population had no gender preference. Preference for male child and female child remained equal (30%) among urban population while rural study population showed strong preference for male child (45%). Among urban study population males showed higher preference for female

child (15%), while females showed higher preference for male child (20%), however preference for female child remained equal(15%) among both. Among rural study

population, both males and females showed strong preference for male child compared to female child (Figure 1 and 2).

Table 2: Living children and gender preference for next child among study population.

	Desire for a child					
No and gender of living children	Yes (%)				No (%)	Total (%)
	Male child	Female child	No gender preference	Total		10tai (70)
No child	01 (03.0)	00	33 (97.0)	34 (100)	-	34 (100)
At parity one						
Male	04 (07.3)	10 (18.2)	04 (7.3)	18 (32.8)	37 (67.2)	55 (100)
Female	13 (52.0)	-	-	13 (52.0)	12 (48.0)	25 (100)
At parity two		-	•			
Only male	-	-	-		59 (100)	59 (100)
Only female	11 (84.6)	-	-	11 (84.6)	02 (15.4)	13 (100)
Both male & female	-	-	-		76 (100)	76 (100)
At parity three		-	•			
Only male	-	-	-		04 (100)	04 (100)
Both male & female	-	-	-		68 (100)	68 (100)
At parity four						
Only females	04 (100)	-	-	04 (100)	00	04 (100)
Both male & female	-	-	-		28 (100)	28 (100)
At parity five and above						
Only female	-	-	-		01 (100)	01 (100)
Both male & female	-	-	=		10 (100)	10 (100)
Total	33 (08.7)	10 (02.7)	37 (09.8)	80 (21.2)	297 (78.8)	377 (100)

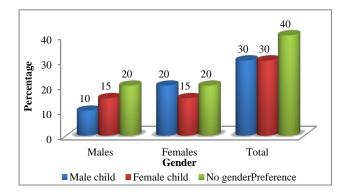


Figure 1: Gender preference for child among urban study population (n=20).

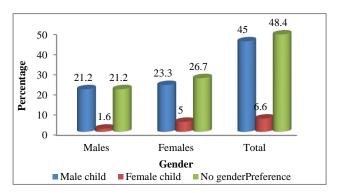


Figure 2: Gender preference for child among rural study population (n=60)

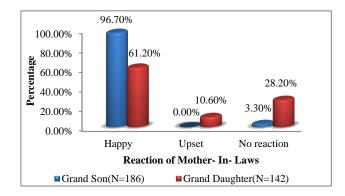


Figure 3: Reaction of mother in law on birth of grand child.

Family size reflects the number of children in a family and family composition means child's gender. Nearly 58% of study population replied that both husband and wife have equal right to decide about family size and composition while 40% replied that it was decided by husband. Nearly 70% of total study population believed that two children was the ideal family size followed by three children (11.7%). Nearly 9.6% of total study populations were not sure about the family size. About 57.3% of total study population replied that one male child and one female child were Ideal family composition followed by at least one male child (21.2%), at least two male children (10.3%), only one male child (4.3%), two male children and one female child (3.4%), no gender

preference (2.7%) and number of male child should be more than female child (0.8%) (Table 3).

Table 3: Perception regarding family size and composition among study population.

	N (%)			
Who had right to decide regarding family size and composition?				
Husband	150 (39.8)			
Wife	01 (0.3)			
Husband and wife	217 (57.6)			
Mother in Law	09 (2.3)			
Ideal Family size				
One child (%)	18 (4.8)			
Two children	265 (70.3)			
Three children	44 (11.7)			
Four children	14 (3.7)			
Not sure	36 (9.6)			
Ideal family composition				
One male child	16 (4.3)			
One male child & one female child	216 (57.3)			
At least one male child	80 (21.2)			
At least two male children	39 (10.3)			
Two male children & one Female child	13 (3.4)			
No gender preference	10 (2.7)			
No of male child > female child	3 (0.8)			

Table 4: Socio-cultural factors related to child birth (n=377).

	N (%)			
Ritual performed to beget a child				
Male child	128 (34)			
Female child	03 (0.8)			
Either male or female child	11 (2.9)			
No ritual performed	235 (62.3)			
Celebration on birth of baby				
Male child	177 (46.9)			
Female child	29 (7.7)			
Male and female child	43 (11.4)			
Not for any one	93 (24.7)			
No issue	34 (9.0)			

Out of total study population 62.3% did not perform any type of ritual to beget a child, 34% performed various types of ritual to beget a male child and very few performed ritual for female child (0.8%). From total study population, nearly half (46.9%) had celebrated birth of male child but very few (7.7%) had celebrated female child's birth (Table 4).

Among female study population who had male child, all replied that their mother in law were happy on birth of grandson while among those who had female child 10.6%

replied that their mother in law were upset on birth of granddaughter and 28.2% said that they had no reaction at all (Figure 3).

DISCUSSION

In this study perception regarding gender preference was observed and analyzed for both males and females, while majority of the studies included only female's perception regarding gender preference.

The present study showed that nearly 80% of total respondents have completed their family which was quite higher than the study conducted by Dey and Ramendra (52.5%) and this might be due to broad age group of the respondents in this study.²⁰

Son syndrome was noted to be present among 41.2% of the respondents in this study which was lower as compared to Sahu in Ranchi, Vadera et al in Jamnagar, Roy and Romy in Darjeeling and Dey and Ramendra in Hoogly. 13,20-22 Female child preference was 12.6% in this study which was almost similar to studies conducted by Roy and Romy, Dey and Ramendra. 20,22 In this study, at parity zero almost all respondents welcomed both male as well as female child equally without showing any gender preference for first issue which was different than the studies conducted by Sahu, Dhande et al and Rai et al who showed male child preference 36.36%, 95%, and 64.3% and female child preference was 27.27%, 5% and 32% respectively. 13,23,24 At parity one among those who had male child preference for female child as next issue remained higher which was almost similar to the study conducted by Dey and Ramendra.²⁰ In this study, it was observed that at parity two and above desire for another child depended on the older sibling's gender; those who had two male children no one wished for another child while those who had female children all of them wished for a male child and this finding was almost similar to study conducted by Dey and Ramendra.²⁰

Among urban respondents, male as well as female child preference remained equal in this study. The present study also showed high preference for male child among rural respondents (45%) and the same findings were noted by Sahu in Ranchi (76.9%) and Vadera et al in Jamnagar (70.68%). ^{13,21}

Nearly 60% of respondents revealed that family size and composition was determined by consensus of both husband and wife which was lower than the study conducted by Pramila et al in Nepal.²⁴ Two children was the ideal family size as perceived by majority (70%) of the respondents and preference for balance family with one male child and one female was reported by majority of respondents (57%). The similar findings were noted by Dhande et al and Dey and Ramendra in their studies.^{20,23}

In this study out of the total female respondents 96.7% and 61.2% had replied that their mother in laws were happy on birth of grandson and granddaughter respectively and almost the same findings were noted in a study conducted in Delhi and Haryana. 11

CONCLUSION

Our study revealed that balance family with one son and one daughter is preferred, nevertheless they wish to have at least one son in the family. To eliminate this son syndrome which is deeply rooted in our patriarchal society, perception of parents towards desired gender of issues to be born must be gravitated in favour of daughters. Stop thinking about gender preference and give equal rights to all the daughters to be born and live wishfully to achieve gender equal society.

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Institutional Ethics Committee

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