



STUDY TO ASSESS GENDER PREFERENCE OF CHILDREN, AMONG PREGNANT WOMEN ATTENDING ANC OPD AT A PRIMARY HEALTH CENTER

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Sex ratio, an important social indicator measuring extent of prevailing equity between males and females in society. India is one of a handful of countries that has significantly more males than females.

Aims and Objectives: To study gender preference of children among antenatal women and to assess their perception with reference to gender of child and family composition.

Methodology: Cross sectional study conducted among 90 pregnant women.

Results: Study finding indicates that 32.2% of women had preference for male child. The main reason for son preference was economical support. Significant association was found between education, socioeconomic status and gender preference. Majority of them preferred 2 children as a family composition with 1 male child and 1 female child.

KEYWORDS : Gender preference, Sex ratio, Family composition

BACKGROUND:

Sex ratio, an important social indicator measuring extent of prevailing equity between males and females in society. Sex ratio is defined as the number of females per one thousand males. Changes in sex ratio reflects underlying socioeconomic and cultural pattern of society. There is a strong preference for sons in many societies.⁽³⁾ India is one of a handful of countries that has significantly more males than females. The problem is particularly severe at younger ages; the child sex ratio (i.e., the number of girls per 1,000 boys in the 0-6 years age group) has declined steadily from 964 in 1971 to 962 in 1981, 953 in 1991, 927 in 2001, and 914 in 2011.⁽⁴⁾ The past studies have documented the reasons behind the preference for sons over daughters in the context of Indian subcontinent. They have found that sons are preferred over daughters for a number of economic, social and religious reasons (perceived greater economic, social, and religious utility of sons than of daughters), including financial support, old age security, property inheritance, dowry, family lineage, prestige and power, birth and death rituals, and beliefs about religious duties.⁽²⁾

Governments of many countries in the world are taking initiative to achieve gender equality.

Goal 5 of United Nations sustainable development goals is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. As it is said that discrimination begins in the womb, it is very important to create awareness among antenatal women regarding sex ratios and its effects on the society, and to change their perception of son preference.

A shortage of girls would lead to a shortage of eligible brides thus making the girl a scarce commodity. This trend which definitely a manmade is very dangerous and needs to be reversed otherwise there will be serious negative social consequences. Gender bias, even when not disastrous, may still generate greater debility among surviving girls. The preference for sons can result in gender based inequality within household which manifests itself in the form of discrimination against daughters in providing food, health care and education which in turn increases the vulnerability of the surviving girl child.⁽¹⁾

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

Aim:

To study gender preference of children, among pregnant women attending ANC OPD.

OBJECTIVES:

To study socio-demographic profile of pregnant women attending

ANC OPD at primary health center To assess their perception with reference to gender of child and family composition To give recommendations according to results of the study

METHODOLOGY:

A cross sectional study was conducted among 90 pregnant women at primary health center Khadavli, Mumbai for a period of 2 months between February to April 2017. At this Primary Health Center, there is an ANC OPD on every Thursday of the week. Approximately 20-25 women come for this OPD every week. By seeing the previous records of the OPD it was observed that approximately 80-100 pregnant women attended the OPD every month, hence the sample size was taken as 90. All pregnant women coming to ANC OPD at primary health center were included in the study.

A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared in accordance to the study objectives and tested by conducting a Pilot study in approximately 15 pregnant women. These women interviewed in the Pilot study were not included in the final study. After preliminary self-introduction, purpose of the visit was explained to the study subjects. After obtaining informed consent, the pre-validated semi-structured questionnaire was administered to the study subjects. Interviews were conducted in a separate room available at the PHC so that privacy and confidentiality was maintained. Each and every participant of the study was also counseled regarding the regulations against sex detection, female feticide and the consequences of the same irrespective of their preference.

RESULTS:

Socio-demographic Information-

Table 1: Age wise distribution of study subjects³

Age	Frequency
19-23	13 (14.4%)
24-29	60 (66.7%)
30-34	14 (15.6%)
35-40	3 (3.3%)

Majority of the women were in the age group of 24-29 years

Table 2: Socio-demographic profile and son preference among the participants

Factors	Total	Yes	No	P value	
Education of women	Illiterate	18	16	2	< 0.05
	1-10th	60	13	47	
	11th-12th	12	2	10	

Socio Economic Class	Lower	15	8	7	< 0.05
	Lower Middle	61	19	42	
	Middle	12	2	3	
	Upper Middle	2	2	7	
Working/nonworking	Working	51	15	36	>0.05
	Housewife	39	16	23	

Table 3: Gender preference in current pregnancy

Gender preference	Frequency
No	51 (67.7%)
Yes	39 (32.3%)
Preference for Son	31 (34.4%)
Preference for daughter	8 (8.8%)

Total 39 women had preference for their current pregnancy, 31 women had preference for male child and only 8 women had preference for female child.

Table 4: Reasons for son preference

	Pressu re from in laws	Already have boy/girl child	Dowry	Support in old age	To perform last rites	Economi cal support
Reasons for Son preference	7	8	6	7	5	16
Reasons for Daughter preference	0	8	0	3	0	1

Multiple answers were given by the study subjects that's why total has come more than 100%

Table 5: Preferred family and gender composition

No. of children	Frequency
1 child	20
2 children	63
>2 children	7
Preferred gender composition	
No preference	21
1 male 1 female	53
Only males	11
Only females	05

Table 6: Knowledge about sex ratio among study subjects

Knowledge about sex ratio	Frequency
Yes	21 (23.4%)
No	69 (76.6%)
Total	90 (100%)

Table 7: Knowledge regarding adverse effects of less no of female as compared to male (This question is asked to all study subjects irrespective of their knowledge regarding sex ratio)

Consequences of Declining sex ratio	Number of women gave answer
Decrease in no. of brides	16 (17.7%)
Increase in inter caste and inter religion marriages	8 (8.8%)
Increase in violence against women	7 (7.7%)
Don't Know	51 (56.7%)

DISCUSSION:

A cross sectional study was conducted among 90 pregnant women coming to the ANC OPD at primary health centre. In this study it was found that majority of the women 67.7% did not have any preference, 43.3% women had gender preference in current pregnancy, 34.4% (n=31) women had preference for male child and

8.8% (n=8) women had preference for female child (Table no.3). Similar result was found in **Khandelval v et al.** study in which 40% of women had son preference. In **Donald S. et al.**⁽⁶⁾ study also 31.5% women preferred male child and only 14.5% women preferred female child. In Table no. 4 it is given that the main reason for son preference was economical support in old age and pressure from in laws while the main reason for female child preference was that the family already had a male child. In **Mallika C. et al**⁽⁷⁾ study similar reasons were found for son preference. According to the information in Table no. 2 significant association was found between educations of pregnant women, socio economic status and male child preference. In **Vinod V. et al**⁽⁸⁾ study also significant association was found between education, socioeconomic status and gender preference. The preferred family composition was 1 male child and 1 female child (Table no.5). In a similar study of **Khandelwal V et al**⁽⁵⁾ 64.5% females preferred equal number of son and daughter. Table no.6 indicates only 23.3% women had knowledge regarding sex ratio and 31 women knew one or more than one adverse effects of less no. of female as compared to males.

Conclusion: Preference for male child is still found among the people, due to some social and economic causes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Awareness should be increased among people regarding sex ratio, trend of sex ratio and adverse effects of declining sex ratio, especially in rural areas of India. Literacy has a direct effect on the perception of women regarding gender preference. More efforts should be made for education of girls, gender equality and women empowerment, especially in rural areas of India. In general, awareness should be created regarding the laws and acts regarding sex determination and female feticide.

LIMITATIONS:

This study was done at one PHC only, so the results of this study cannot be generalized to all the rural areas.

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