



Effect of sociocultural factors on gender preference among pregnant women in urban slum

KEYWORDS

sociocultural factors, gender preference, ANC

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ABSTRACT *Objective: Effect of socio-cultural factors on gender preference and assessment of awareness regarding decreasing sex ratio among pregnant women.*

Material and Methodology: A cross sectional study conducted among all pregnant women attending the antenatal clinic for the first time at UHC Shivaji Nagar, Govandi, Mumbai from September to October 2012 and interviewed using semi structured questionnaire and data was analysed by SPSS 16.

Result: Out of 120 pregnant women 71.76% preferred male child. Education, occupation, socioeconomic class, sex of the previous child, type of family and not the religion had significant association with son preference. Major reasons for son preference were keeping the family line (39.53%), old age security (26.74%) and in laws pressure (19.76%). Awareness regarding decreasing sex ratio and female feticide as a crime was 40% and 24.33% respectively.

Introduction:

Sex ratio has been persistently declining in India as well as in Maharashtra in spite of PC-PNDT ACT (Preconceptional prenatal diagnostic test) since September 1994. According to census 2011 sex ratio of Maharashtra is 883/1000, which is less than 2001 census 922/1000. Skewed sex ratio is an issue of major concern and has long-term social and demographic consequences. At the heart of the problem is the low status of women in society, a patriarchal social framework and value system based on 'son mania'. The problem is getting worse as scientific methods of detecting the sex of the foetus and for termination of pregnancy are improving. This seems to be fulfilling the long felt need of the people through female feticide. In this light, the study of factors influencing sex ratio becomes very relevant for better understanding of the problem.

Objectives :

1. Effect of socio-cultural factors on the preference for the sex of children among pregnant women in urban slum.
2. Assessment of awareness regarding decreasing sex ratio among pregnant women in urban slum.

Material and Methodology:

A cross-sectional study was undertaken with 120 pregnant women who attended first time antenatal clinic (ANC) for present pregnancy of urban health centre Shivaji Nagar, Govandi, Mumbai, field practice area of Topiwala National Medical College and Nair Hospital, Mumbai. Antenatal Clinic is conducted twice in a week, where one day new ANC cases are registered and the other day follow up of the registered ANC cases is done. The study was carried out from September 2012 to October 2012. A semi structured questionnaire was used to collect information on their knowledge and attitudes towards gender preference and female feticide. The collected data was analysed using SPSS 16 and Chi-square was used as test of significance.

Inclusion criteria: Study subjects should be the resident of study area and must be residing there since one year. Those who were willing to participate were included and

consent was taken as well as complete confidentiality was maintained.

Exclusion criteria: Resident of less than one year. Those not willing to participate in the study.

Result:

A total of 120 pregnant women in the reproductive age group of 15-49 years were included. Maximum number of women were in the age group of 20-34 years (69.36%). The mean age of the women was 26.75 years. 26.6% were Hindu and 73.33% were Muslims. Socio-economic status according to modified B. G. Prasad classification showed that majority of the women were from classes III to V. Majority (60%) of the women were from nuclear families. 24.16% were illiterate, 64.9% of them educated up to primary and secondary school and only 5% were graduated. Most of them were housewives (65.9%) and only 34.16% were employed. Out of the 120 respondents, 86 (71.67%) had preference for a male child. The factor of son-preference was correlated with various socio-economic characteristics. Preference for son was observed in 89.65 percent and 33.34 per cent of the illiterate and graduated women respectively. The association between education and preference for son was found to be statistically significant ($X^2 = 31.96$, $p < 0.05$). 87.22 per cent of the women from the lower classes (III, IV and V) preferred a male child as compared to 12.78 percent of the women from the higher classes (I and II). There was significant association found between socioeconomic class and male child preference ($X^2 = 17.37$, $p < 0.05$). Son preference was seen higher among housewives (78%) as compared to those employed (25%) and the association was statistically significant ($X^2 = 10.12$, $p < 0.05$). Male child preference was observed more in joint type of families (56.97%) than nuclear families (43.03%). Male child was also preferred in 81.25% of the Hindu families and in 68.18% in Muslim family. The association between religion with preference for son was not found to be statistically significant. Multigravida showed choice for male child higher (58.82%) as compared to Primigravida (32.69%). Preference to male

child was higher in women who had no male child previously (67.85%) than those who already had a male child (40%). This difference was also statistically significant.

Major reason for son preference in the study subjects was keeping the family line (39.53%) followed by old age security(26.74%), pressure by in laws (19.76%), to perform last rite(8.13%), income purpose(4.65%) and social status (1.16%). While main reason for not preferring daughter is not staying with parents (61.62%) followed by marriage related problems (15.11%), difficult to rear up (12.79%) and dowry problem(10.46%).

40% of ANC Mothers were aware of the fact that sex ratio of India is decreasing and 60.83% were having knowledge that female feticide is a crime out of which only 36.99% knew regarding the punishment for female feticide. ie. Preconceptional Prenatal diagnostic Act(PC-PNDT ACT).

Discussion:

Preference for sons is influenced by economic, religious, cultural, social and emotional desires and norms that favour males and make females less desirable and parents expect sons but not daughters. To understand why preference for male child is so strong in a society, it important to recognize the social and cultural factors in that particular society. In this study, table:1 shows higher son preference (71.67%) was observed among pregnant women. Chavada et al(2009) and Vadera BN et al (2006)in their study reported that 87.53 per cent and 58.3 per cent of the women had preference for a male-child respectively.^{2,3}

The present study identified a significant association between education of the women and son preference as there was substantial decreased son preference with increased education level among women ie. higher secondary and graduated women had 28.57% and 33.34% son preference respectively as compared to illiterate women with 89.65% son preference, $p < 0.05$. Similarly significant association was also observed between socioeconomic class of the family and son-preference. ANC women belonging to lower classes (V,IV,III) had higher preference for male child ie.84% as compared to those belonging to higher class ie.37.5%, $p < 0.01$. In the study it was found that choice for male child was higher in joint family(77%) as compared to nuclear family(68%) as well as statistically significant $p < 0.03$. Higher son preference was due to the demand by the in-laws or pressure from the other family members. In a similar study by Chavada M et al in 2009 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat it was found that son preference was more in illiterate (93%) and less in graduate women (68.75%), higher among those belonging to lower socioeconomic class(89.63%), joint family (90.7%) and among

housewives (86.31%) and statistically significant.^{2,1} The study also highlighted that son preference was more among housewives (77.8%) than employed(25%). First time pregnant ANC women had less thought about gender preference (32.69%) than multigravida (58.82%). Preference to male child was higher in women who had no male child previously (67%) than those who already had a male child (40%). This difference was also statistically significant $p=0.02$. Another study by Vadera B N et al in 2006 in Jamnagar, Gujarat had also showed the similar finding.³

In the study major reason for son preference in the study subjects was keeping the family line (39.53%) followed by old age security (26.74%), pressure by in laws(19.76%), to perform last rite(8.13%), income purpose(4.65%) and social status (1.16%). While main reason for not preferring daughter is not staying with parents (61.62%) followed by marriage related problems (15.11%), difficult to rear up (12.79%) and dowry problem(10.46%). Similar reasons for male child preference and avoiding female child was observed in the study by Chavada M et al in 2009 in Ahmedabad and Vadera BN et al in 2006 Jamnagar, Gujarat.^{2,3} 40% of ANC Mothers were aware of the fact that sex ratio of India is decreasing (Fig:1) 61% were having knowledge that female feticide is a crime (Fig:2) and out of which only 37% knew regarding the punishment for female feticide ie. Preconceptional Prenatal diagnostic Act (PC-PNDT ACT) (Fig :3) Study by Puri et al showed that 65.5% agreed to the fact that sex determination is a crime. 16.3% & 11.4% knew about punishment for sex determination & implications of killing of female child, respectively.⁴

Recommendation and Conclusion:

In conclusion, the present study has shown that there is a preference for male child in the community. To improve the declining child-sex ratio, it is essential to promote a positive image of the girl child and to value and celebrate the girl child's life in our family and community. The study highlights the need to improve the educational level amongst women. Strong and decisive policies are needed to be implemented by the government to improve the status of women and to change the attitude of the society towards the female-child. Sex-selective abortion is to be strictly banned before the implementation of two-child norm as it tends the parents to abort the child if the foetus is a girl. Only laws are not efficient to stop this so increase community awareness with use IEC package. Govt. of India is doing substantial work throwing considerable light on subjects of girl child through implementation of various programmes to restore the rights and dignities of girl child, giving her a world where she can live, live and dream and enrich our lives.

Table no.1
ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS AND SON PREFERENCE

Characteristics	Preference for Male Child		Total	Chi square X ²	P value
	YES	NO			
	86 (71.67%)	34 (28.33%)	120		
Education				31.96	<0.05
Illiterate	26 (89.65%)	3 (10.34%)	29 (100%)		
Primary	41(89.13%)	5 (10.86%)	46 (100%)		
Secondary	15 (46.87%)	17 (53.12%)	32 (100%)		
Higher Secondary	2 (28.57%)	5 (71.42%)	7 (100%)		
Graduate	2 (33.34%)	4 (66.67%)	6 (100%)		

Religion					
Hindu	26 (81.25%)	6 (18.75%)	32 (100%)	0.16	1.9
Muslim	60(68.18%)	28(31.8%)	88(100%)		
Socio economic class					
Class I	3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)	8 (100%)	17.37	<0.01
Class II	8 (42.10%)	11 (57.89%)	19 (100%)		
Class III	21 (84%)	4 (16%)	25 (100%)		
Class IV	38 (82.6%)	8 (17.39%)	46 (100%)		
Class V	16 (57.14%)	6 (21.42%)	28 (100%)		
Type of Family					
Joint	37 (77.08%)	11 (22.91%)	48 (100%)	0.60	<0.03
Nuclear	49 (68.05%)	23 (31.94%)	72 (100%)		
Occupation of ANC					
Housewife	63 (77.77%)	18 (22.2%)	81 (100%)	10.12	0.05
Labourer	20 (74%)	7 (26%)	27 (100%)		
Service	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	12 (100%)		
ANC Status					
Primigravida	17 (32.69%)	35 (67.31%)	52 (100%)	-	-
Multigravida	40 (58.82%)	28 (41.18%)	68 (100%)		
Sex of previous child in Multipara					
Male	16 (40%)	24 (60%)	40 (100%)	5.11	0.02
Female	19 (67.85%)	9 (32.14%)	28 (100%)		

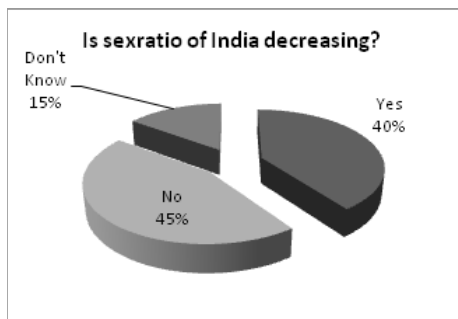


Figure:1

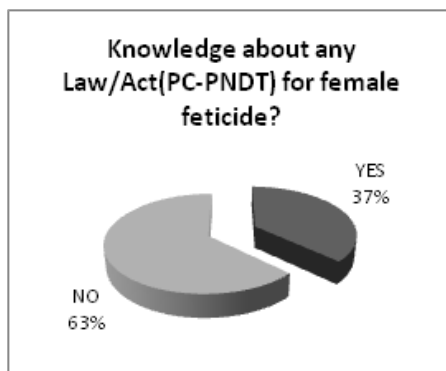


Figure:3

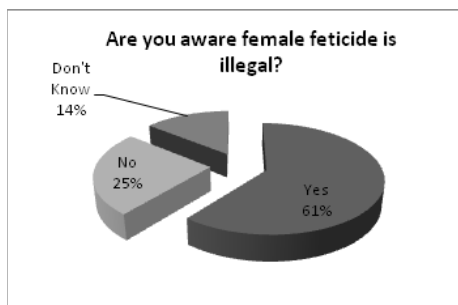


Figure:2

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