

RESEARCH ARTICLE



OPEN ACCESS

Received: 12.05.2023

Accepted: 28.09.2023

Published: 12.10.2023

Citation: Chandrasekarayya T, Cendrayudu N. (2023). The Female Child Deficit: Its Causes and Impending Consequences in Indian Perspective. *Geographical Analysis*. 12(2): 7-11. <https://doi.org/10.53989/bu.ga.v12i2.23.1>

Funding: None

Competing Interests: None

Copyright:

© 2023 Chandrasekarayya & Cendrayudu. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Published By Bangalore University, Bengaluru, Karnataka

ISSN

Print: 2319-5371

Electronic: XXXX-XXXX

The Female Child Deficit: Its Causes and Impending Consequences in Indian Perspective

T Chandrasekarayya¹, N Cendrayudu²

¹ Associate Professor, Dept. of Population Studies & Social Work, S.V. University, Tirupati, A.P, 517502

² Associate Professor, Dept. of Geography, S.V. University, Tirupati, 517502, A.P

Abstract

The female children are equally important apart from male children of any country. It donated as Sex composition of Child population (0-6 Years), which is basic demographic characteristics. The deficit in girl children will have many implications, the most fundamental being to define the limits of the society's reproductive potentials. Further, the existing sex composition of children is also the basic demographic determinants of births, deaths and marriages in future. Moreover, future migration rates, work force and all other population characteristics can be influenced by the ratio between the sexes of children at present. The present aims to examine deficit of girl children and its causes along with upcoming consequences in India based on secondary data collected from census apart from others and suggestions are given for advocacy as well as policy matters.

Keywords: Gils Child; Discrimination; Son Preference; Neglect of Girls; Sex Selective Abortion

Introduction

In a "normal world," the female population equals or slightly surpasses the number of males. Except in India, that is, where the situation is just the opposite, where the gender ratio- or the number of females to males- is known to be among the most imbalanced in the world. Child Sex Ratio is defined as "number of females per 1000 males in the ages of 0-6 years" in given period in an area. Although China has the most severe shortage of girls compared to boys of any country in the world today, in India, the 2011 census revealed disturbing news: the proportion of girls aged 0-6 years dropped from 927:1000 to 914:1000 since

the previous census done 10 years earlier. The census also revealed that the phenomenon has reached high proportions in states which had no prior history or practice of female infanticide, or where forms of discrimination against girls were not strongly evident earlier. The reasons behind this mistreatment of girls crosses the spectrum of Indian regions, economic classes, and castes and are due to a complex mix of economic, social, and cultural factors. In India, the changes in education, employment, nutrition, work patterns, religion, and culture, as well as family concerns such as marriage, property, inheritance, and continuity are the causes for imbalance sex ratio.

Though the population growth rate in respect of males was lower at 17.1 per cent, when compared with 18.3 per cent for females-implies some correction in the overall sex ratio- the child sex ratio (for the age group from zero to six years) deteriorated over the decade, from 927 to 919 females for every 1000 males. This should set off alarm bells in the government, civil society groups and the law. This ratio is mainly man-made through selective sex determination with the aim of getting rid of the girl child, early death due to neglect and infanticide. As per census of India, 2011 the declining sex ratio in India is due to "neglect of the girl child resulting in their higher mortality at younger age, high maternal mortality, sex selective female abortions, female infanticide, change in sex ratio at birth"⁽¹⁾. The deficit of Girl Children is an unique feature of India over the decades as compared to developed nations, which has been highlighted in respective census reports and also studies by many authors viz, ⁽²⁻⁴⁾, but many have examined the trends and causes for deficit of girl children population by examining the child sex ratios, while some ^(5,6) and IDRC and Action Aid India, 2011 with some efforts made on its impending consequences.

Objective

The objectives of the present paper are to examine deficit of girl children in India, its causes and future repercussions extensively along with suggestions to overcome the issues.

Methodology

The present paper is based on secondary data collected from census of India and other published documents. Here the Girl Children are considered as number of female children per 1000 male children in the age group of 0-6 years in a given area in a period of time.

Results and Discussion

The sex ratio worked out for population of all ages is not indicative of any clear picture to know whether it is favourable to females or otherwise. The child sex ratio is generally affected by two factors namely mortality differentials and extent of medical interferences, which influence overall sex ratio also. Hence, child sex ratio is always considered as the best indicator to understand the sex ratio at birth when the data on births by sex are not easily available. Differentials in child sex ratio explain changes in girl child population over period of time in India.

Table 1 depicts that Over all Sex Ratio (Number of females per 1000 males) was 945 in 1951, came down to 934 in 1981 and recorded as 943 in 2011, implying some improvement in the overall sex ratio in recent decade; while, the child sex ratio (0-6 years of age) deteriorated over the decade, from 983 in 1951 to 927 in 2001, thus declined sharply with 56 points in

five decades and it further declined to 914 in 2011, such least had never recorded after independence.

Table 2 shows that in 1961 census, the child sex ratio at the National level was 976; whereas the rural child sex ratio stands at 957 and urban child sex ratio was 951. The corresponding figures in 2011 census are 914, 919 and 902 respectively. Further, the gap in rural-urban child sex ratio was 6 in 1961, rose to 17 in 2011. Thus, the child sex ratio had been drastically declined and gap had been widened. The main causes for low child sex ratio and further decline, gap in rural-urban in the country are: Neglect of girl child resulting in their higher mortality rates at younger ages, high maternal mortality, sex selective abortions and female infanticide.

Causes

The causes for deficit of girl children in India context are many fold viz socio-economic, cultural, religious and political, which are complex in nature, most of which are discussed here.

The son-preference trend in India

Apart from higher morbidity levels, which cause mortality of girl children, preference for son has been main causes for decline of girl children. Son-preference has been equally strong among different income groups and irrespective of caste and sex ratios where earlier period showed that sex ratios were better among lower castes and among the poor. The norms that have been part of India's socio-economic fabric for centuries are that Sons are considered pivotal to family welfare, as they are the ones who earn money, continue family lineage, and provide a form of old age security for parents. A daughter, meanwhile, is considered to be a "double loss" as she not only leaves her family when she marries, becoming an "asset" to her new family, but she is also a source of marriage expenses, including the payment of dowry to the groom's family.

Family planning for sons

Some new trends, such as the two-child family norm encouraged by the Indian government, and an emphasis on education also influence decisions. However, it has been that although small families are accepted in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana, family planning effectively means, "Planning for sons." Generally, people want educated daughters-in-law, because it "...is oriented towards the future family of the couple-children will get proper guidance and instructions from an educated mother...marriage prospects rather than employment appear to drive education." However, parents expressed the hope that more education for girls would result in them obtaining white-collar, regular, and secure work pre-marriage and a better choice of prospective husbands. In rural areas of India, there may be a compromise in the duration of schooling. It is observed that "... girls are encouraged to complete as much education as they can- but-

Table 1. Trends in Child sex ratio in India, 1951-2011.

Sex Ratios	Census Years						
	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Over all Sex Ratio	945	941	930	934	927	933	943
Child Sex Ratio	983	976	964	962	945	927	914

Source: Census of India, 2011.

Table 2. Child sex ratio of India

Child Sex ratio by Residence	Census Year					
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total	976	964	962	945	927	914
Rural	957	968	963	948	934	919
Urban	951	948	959	935	906	902
Rural-Urban Gap	6	20	4	13	28	17

Source: Census of India, 2011.

if a 'good match' is found; the girl is married off before she completes her studies."

Sex-selection practices

In India, members of the older generation referred to children as natures or a divine gift, and of the sin of getting rid of a child. Women of reproductive age may agree with this view, and may protest, but decisions of family member's plays crucial role regarding gender of children. Since the 1980s, technology widely available in India, such as amniocentesis and ultrasound, has permitted parents to predetermine the size and gender composition of children for their families through abortion. Although sex-selective abortion is illegal and banned in India, it has been widely practicing even rural areas of India. Some people are did not stop at one abortion, but had more than two times-because a girl had been conceived each time. "Abortion," is the method of family planning par excellence-to limit family size, to enable spacing between children, and also to regulate the sex composition of the family. Sex Selective Abortion is referred as "High-Tech Sexism" by AmartyaSen⁽⁷⁾ a renowned economist, who studied missing females in India.

Neglect of girls

Neglect of girls, whether planned or inadvertent, also contributes to the lower child sex ratio. The degree of discrimination varied by location, there nonetheless was widespread evidence of lower levels of nutrition, health care, schooling, and emotional care, and high levels of under immunization in general. "With nutrition and health, who may or may not take the decision is uncertain, but the discrimination is evident". A firstborn daughter was not typically subjected to inferior treatment; she was treated like her brothers. But with each additional girl, the pressure to have a son increased and starts

discrimination against girl children.

Dissatisfaction of Daughters

When a daughter grows up and marries, she essentially becomes chattel in her husband's parents' home and has very limited contact with her natal family. Even if she earns a good living, it will be of no help to her own parents in their old age. So for parents, investing in a daughter is truly, in the Hindi expression, planting a seed in the neighbor's garden. Sons, by contrast, provide a kind of social security. Changes in work, education, marriage age, and marriage costs also seem to add up to disaffection for daughters, to a greater extent than before. The factors causing this include: increased investment that has to be made in daughters in terms of education and marriage; the loss of their material and labour support; fears for their sexual safety and security; and worries about their future happiness in an appropriate marriage.

Impending consequences: In India, the deficit of Girl Children leads to many severe upcoming consequences by way of socio-economic, cultural, religious, demographic, and political aspects, but many may be less gravity and some could be very serious, which are briefly discussed hereunder.

No relevance of institution of marriage: Continuous declining in Child Sex Ratio has many potentially serious consequences, although there are no historical model by which to learn about the implications of a lack of women relative to men, one fairly obvious social consequences is that there are not enough women for men to marry and the institution of marriage would lost its relevance.

Raise in Child marriages: The scarcity of brides might lead to the child betrothal and early marriage (child marriage) to cope with the problem. Increasing numbers of child brides will further contribute to the poor status of women, as will be less likely to finish the school or develop skills before

marriage.

Chances of Disease Burden: Young brides and their children are also more likely to suffer from the increased morbidity and mortality associated with early child birth. Thus there are serious socio-economic and health implications of declining child sex ratio.

Increase in dowry Amount : Another consequence of scarcity of female is the increase in dowry i.e. payment of exorbitant dowry, daughters are often sold to higher castes and even poor men often paid a bride price to obtain a wife. Among the Jats in particular and various other in general, the scarcity of women led to wide spread system of polyandry.

Non available of suitable spouse by age and sect: Present trend of gender imbalance continues, one of the serious repercussions would be a rude shock to the institution of marriage in the decades to come. It has severe consequences especially in North Indian states of Punjab and Haryana which are characterized by inability of men in marriageable age to find suitable partner by age as well as caste.

Increase in age gap: Scarcity of females may cause to increase in age gap between bride and bridegrooms. The brides will have much lower ages than bridegrooms, it causes to many problems like adjustment, family life, companionship etc.

Buying brides from other regions : The Hindustan Times, July 12, 2003 read as "in Haryana (Haryana), because of shortage of women men buying brides from other states like Assam, West Bengal and from far away villages of Bihar. The price put on such a girl is much less than what people pay for cattle, after marriage they are condemned to a life of slavery.

Cultural Problems: Men from the shortage of female by caste, group, area and region causes to get married of other castes, sects, areas and regions, it may cause to cultural problems, because brides have to adjust with bridegrooms family cultural, deviation may cause troubles in coping up of family life.

Abduction and trafficking of girls: Shortage of brides would lead to abduction and trafficking of girls that resulted in expansion of the sex industry with the magnitude of spreading Sexually Transmitted Diseases and deadly disease like HIV/AIDS would increase manifold. The Hindustan Times recently reported that young girls from Assam and West Bengal are kidnapped and sold into marriage in neighbouring Haryana⁽⁸⁾.

Raise of anti-social behaviour: In this distorted social scenario marked by growing anti-social behaviour, crimes against women like rape, molestation, eve teasing, child marriages; forced polyandry etc. is also expected to rise.

Pressure on Women: Parents who have a fervent preference for male offspring will impose pressure on women. Thus, women who had given birth to only daughters were desperate for sons and would keep having children until they had one or two male children. In a study done by the Centre for Social

Research in Haryana, fear of violence is a cause for female foeticide. Also the women who produce daughters face much more domestic violence which makes them complicit in getting rid of the girl child⁽⁹⁾.

Risk of ostracism: A family with only daughters will also likely lose its land when the father dies: although women can legally inherit property, in some areas of India, they risk ostracism or even murder if they claim what is theirs.

Some men may remain unmarried : Some states now experience a shortage of brides because of the adverse sex ratios. It was noted that 20% or more men in some states, including Haryana and Punjab, may remain unmarried. There are already examples of brides being "imported" from poorer eastern states. Further, unmarried men may face psychosocial problems like lack of sexual pleasure, family life, loneliness etc.

Delay in Marriages: Trends to higher age at marriage, more so in urban settings, were also observed, possibly as a function of the emphasis on education. In urban areas, it was observed that the average age at marriage is now 20 for boys and 17 to 18 for girls, where earlier both were married at 14 years of age. Perhaps the rise in marriage age may be due to greater difficulty in finding an eligible spouse, with factors such as education, earning capacity, and dowries raising the stakes for the ideal match.

Choice of mate selection by girls may decline: Ensuring a girl's chastity is considered a great parental responsibility and is one of the arguments for promoting early marriage. For better or worse, some of the usual social, cultural, and economic norms in Indian society's choice of mates may be swayed. In some regions inter-caste marriage, marriage with girls of tribal communities, and polyandry are now becoming more common.

Social tensions arise: There are also reports of bride buying and forced remarriage of widows. In the near future social tension could rise because of the challenge of finding female partners, and may lead to crimes against women. Others wonder if a shortage of women will lead to less violence against them, or a decrease in dowries. Thus, the increasing imbalance in sex ratios is a sign of continued inequality between the sexes. The scarcity of females, they add, is symptomatic of their low value.

Disappearance of mothering roles: In India, females are playing a crucial role in household chores, childbearing as well as child rearing activities with more patience. Further, females role as mother cannot be ignored that strengthens family system; welfare of family members; however, in future, these can be slowly disappear if girl children decline rapidly.

Decline in Female labour: Apart from household works, females are engaging in outdoor employments, especially in the agrarian sector of rural economy, the contribution of females by supporting men has been quite significant. However, their contribution is often unrecorded and unacknowledged. In

this context, decline in child sex ratio leads squeezed female labour force. Further, the economic consequences are grave for deficit of females that a huge proportion of the productive population is missing and also the lack of women impairs the ability of men to work.

Decline Population Growth: In the entire world, for smooth growth of population of any country, both men and women are equally important. If females continuously declining, it causes to deficit of women population thereby it affects the growth of population by lack of females for men reproductive activity. Thus, scarcity of females brings down societies reproductive potential by lowering net reproductive rate. Moreover, events such as new household formation will decline.

Conclusion

Now a days, in a patriarchal society like India, a daughter is generally unwelcome due to "Guarding her chastity", as well as expenditures by way of Dowry are a heavy burden on parents apart from worry on uncertainty of her life after marriage. A son on the other hand continues the family line, provide the parents with emotional and financial security and perform the last rite i.e. male child is important for moksha. These are major cause apart from other reasons for rapid decline in child sex ratio in recent decades. Though, in India the acts are passed (such as The Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Acts, 1994, The dowry prohibition Act), however these Acts are not properly implemented. It may be therefore, concluded that effective enforcement of laws along with softening a son-centered culture and bringing changes in cultures that are deeply rooted by way of socio-economic, and religious concerns which are causes for discrimination of girl children. Moreover, balanced child sex ratios are essential to avoid upcoming evil consequences of deficit of girl children in India.

Solutions and Advocacy

The long-term and short-term measures can stem to supersede from the deficit of girl children in India. In the long term, it is suggested that ensuring equal entitlements such as property rights, equal access to nutrition, health, education, affection, guarantee on safety and addressing the problem of dowry and life after marriage. While, in the short term, incentives to educate girls, financial support for girls, educating healthcare professionals and enhancing incentives for more number of female children born are recommended. "Another option is depositing some amount of cash to families where there are one or two female children in a household and no

male children for future expenses such as education, marriage and life security. Such innovations are being started now in small settings in different places of India."

The development and focus aid on women are the two aspects that can tackle the declining girl population in India. The development can surely the wealthier the home, the more educated the parents, the more plugged in to the modern economy, the more a family will invest in its girls. But these efforts should be joined by an awareness of the unintended consequences of development and by efforts, aimed at parents; to weaken the cultural preference for sons. The other is focusing aid on women. The idea is that a mother who has more money, knowledge and authority in the family will direct her resources toward all her children's health and education. She will fight for her girls. While increasing women's decision-making power would reduce discrimination against girls, "When women's power is increased, prejudices and cultural practices opposite to girl children can decline".

In Indian context, it will not be enough to counter son-preference. But, dislike to daughters has to be evenly provoked through policy measures that increase the economic worth and support of daughters through improved employment opportunities, recognizing women's health and emphasizes on education levels than the mothering roles.

Finally, understand the formal and informal social, cultural, economic, and political processes that motivate the bias against having female children are needed to frame social policies to overcome a long-standing cultural preference for male children and to reverse a potentially disastrous future imbalance in the male/female child ratio of India's population.

References

- 1) Census of India, 2011: Sex Composition of Population, R.G.C.C of India, New Delhi. New Delhi. 2011.
- 2) Premi M. The Growing Imbalance in India's Male-Female Ratio. *The Economic Times*.
- 3) Dale S. India's missing daughters. 2010. Available from: <https://www.idrc.ca/en/article>.
- 4) Roberts LR, Montgomery SB. India's Distorted Sex Ratio: Dire Consequences for Girls. *J Christ Nurs*. 2016;33(1):7-15.
- 5) Prabhu A. What are the consequences of declining sex ratio, and what can be done to stop Female Foeticide?. 2014. Available from: <https://www.quora.com/>.
- 6) Singh C. Implications of skewed sex ratio in India. 2013. Available from: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com>.
- 7) Amartyasen. Many faces of Gender inequalities, Frontline. 2001.
- 8) Rashid N, Dr, Sadafnasir. Female Foeticide in India: Causes and Consequences. *Research J Humanities and Social Sciences*. 2013;4(3):344-346.
- 9) The declining sex ratio will affect us socially. *Hindustan Times*. 2017.