

Son preference and Sex Composition of the Living Children: the Effect on Future Fertility Intention of Women in India

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Introduction

Globally, countries in East Asia, South Asia, Middle East, and North Africa have exhibited a preference for sons over daughters (Williamson 1976; Cleland et al. 1983; United Nations 1985; Arnold 1987; Rai et al. 2014). Being a part of South Asia, India is recognized as a country with a notable preference for sons (Arnold 2001; Das Gupta et al. 2003). In India, the past two decades witnessed a remarkable shift from high fertility (TFR=3.6 in 1991) to low and near replacement level fertility (TFR= 2.2 in 2017) (Office of RGI, 1991, 2017). The declining fertility led to the rapid manifestation of son preference in many parts of India (Kishor 1994; Das and Bhat 1997; Mutharayappa 1997). Son preference is the single most important determining factor that brings huge imbalance in the sex ratio at birth and child sex ratio, and consequent family composition (Arnold, Kishor, and Roy 2004; Mitra 2014; Bongaarts 2013). Thus, fertility decline in the presence of son preference has diversified the sex composition of the children in families in India.

In India, fertility declines from 3.6 in 1991 to 2.4 in 2011 in the last two decades (Office of RGI, 1991 and 2001). This fertility decline leads to limiting of family size but do not minimize the desire for son among couples (Das and Bhat, 1997). And the desire for son in a fertility controlled environment started sidelining girls before and after birth. In the phase of declining fertility it has been emerged that people are adopting small family norm without compromising the number of the desired son and in this line unborn daughters are first who are being sacrificed (Shekher *et al.*, 2010).

Post-1990s, the availability and easy access to pre-natal diagnostics techniques have played a major role in getting the desired number of the sons in India (Shekher et al. 2010). Initially, this discriminatory practice was limited to the couples located in urban areas and affluent states (Kulkarni 2007; Kumar and Sathyanarayana 2012). However, in the wake of urbanization, this tendency is seen to be percolated to nearly rural and tribal areas (Kumar and Sathyanarayana 2012). Thus, with the ongoing decline in both urban and rural fertility,

the girls have higher chances of being eliminated at birth. The earlier impression of son preference by wealthier families and family belonging to higher social status is seen to be diffusing in the immediate predecessors in the recent time (Kulkarni 1986; Kaur et al. 2017). It is an indicator of an emerging pattern of fertility behavior among potential couples who have inherited preference for a son. Besides this, studies recognized that the existing sibling composition also determines the future fertility intention and fertility level in a family in India. The presence of one male child in a family profoundly influences the future fertility intention or demand for additional children (Ali 1989).

Objectives

In this study, the first objective is to see the future fertility preference of women according to sex composition of their existing children. The objective is to analyse the effect of sibling composition on the further fertility intention of women and the third objective is to know the level of fertility in presence of son preference by states because the patriarchal rigidities are known to be more prevalent in some parts of India than the other part.

Data and Methods

National Family Health Survey (1992-93, 1998-99, 2005-06 and 2015-16) data has been used for meeting the objective of this paper. The methodology in this paper involves analyzing the trend of future fertility intention by the given sex composition of the existing children of women. This trend has been assayed by using all four rounds of NFHS. The effect of socio-economic background and the sibling composition of children on future fertility intention are examined by using multinomial logistic regression. The effect is represented in the form of predicted probabilities which is simply known as the probability of an event. In this study, the dependent variable in regression analysis is future fertility intentions and outcome variables are Sex Preference, Place of Residents, Social Groups, Religious Groups, Regions, Wealth Quintile and Educational Attainment.

Findings

The analysis of trend in future fertility intentions of women based on the sex of her existing children shows that in 1992-93, 76% of women want to have another child if they have only one existing female child. Its also revealed that if the women have two male children then only 26% wants to have another child but if they have two female children then 57% of women want to have another child. From 1992-93 to 2015-16, the percent of women with the

aspiration to have another child in presence of one male child has been declined from 73.23% to 50.19%. The aspiration for having another child after two or three girl children has been declined in the last 20 years but still continue to be high throughout all the periods. Still, after two decades in 2015-16, where there are two female children there are four times more women (26%) who want to have another child in comparison to women with two male children (6%).

The fertility intentions of a couple are framed by the choices of the several bio-demographical variables and one such important is sibling composition. The analysis for second objective attempts to conceptualize the dynamics of sex composition of children and corresponding future intentions of fertility in a family. Sons are preferred sex in ideal sex composition in a family. The chances of having additional birth are higher (61.7 percent, $p<0.00$) in a family given the sex of the previous child is female. This chance of progression to additional child observes a sharp decline (6.54 percent, $p<0.00$) when women have two male children and similar magnitude (7.45 percent, $p<0.00$) of the desire of the additional child is seen among the couple with at least one son. The percentage probability of not having another child is lower (22.34 percent, $p<0.00$) when there is one female child but it is higher in presence of two male (31.76 percent, $P<0.00$) or one male and one female child (38.22 percent, $p<0.00$). Among social groups, ST has high chances of having another child but the same declined in others (18.46 percent, $p<0.00$) groups. In reference to SC women, the probability of sterilization is higher among OBC women (41.24 percent, $p<0.00$) and less in ST women (36.92 percent, $p<0.00$). Among religious groups, Muslims have high (32.28 percent, $p<0.00$) and Sikh have less (15.49 percent, $p<0.00$) probability of having another child in reference to Hindu. All religious groups like Muslims (20.63 percent, $p<0.00$) Christian (39.05 percent, $p<0.00$) and Sikh (39.29 percent, $p<0.00$) have less chances of getting sterilized in reference to Hindu. Among Indian Regions, South and West India have less probability (15.47 percent, $p<0.00$) of having another child but Central (25.53 percent, $p<0.00$), East (26.51 percent, $p<0.00$) and North East (26.55 percent, $p<0.00$) have high chances of having another child in reference to North India. In reference to poorest, women in other income group have a high probability of getting sterilized and it is highest among middle (43.52 percent, $p<0.00$) income group and richer (42.81 percent, $p<0.00$) income group. In reference to uneducated women, highly educated (22.03 percent, $p<0.00$) and women with secondary level (36.32 percent, $p<0.00$) of education have low chances of getting sterilized.

Findings for second objective presents the fertility trend in presence of son preference and no preference in Indian states and UTs from 1992-93 to 2015-16. In every state of India, there is high fertility in presence of son preference in comparison to no preference in all the periods. The total fertility was very high during the 1992-93 in comparison to 2015-16. But in India, the overall fertility declined. So, there is a decline in fertility in presence of son preference also but it is still high in comparison to no preference of son. The north Indian states like Himachal Pradesh (3.5), Jammu and Kashmir (3.7) Punjab (3.6) and Rajasthan (3.9) have more TFR in presence of son preference in comparison to no preference. In these two decades (1992-93 to 2015-16), in the states with highest TFR, the TFR in presence of son preference is declined from 4.5 to 4 in Bihar and 5.4 to 3.4 in Uttar Pradesh. In 2015-16, the top states in terms of TFR in presence of son preference are Bihar (4.0), Meghalaya (3.6), Rajasthan (3.3), Jharkhand (3.2), Madhya Pradesh (3.0) and Chhattisgarh (3.0).

The findings for third objective shows that in 1992-93, among all north and north-western states, the highest gap between TFR in presence of son preference and no preference found in Gujarat (+1.3) and other states with higher gap in TFR in presence and absence of sex ratio are Karnataka (+0.9), Assam (+0.8) Uttar Pradesh (+0.7) and West Bengal (+0.7) . In 2015-16, the highest gap in TFR in presence of son preference and in the absence of son preference found in Rajasthan (+1) Chattisgarh (+0.8), Jharkhand (+0.8), Uttarakhand (+0.8), Uttar Pradesh (+0.8), Madhya Pradesh (+0.7), Bihar (+0.7), Goa (+0.7), Jammu & Kashmir (+0.7).

Conclusion

The study attempts to assess the trends and patterns of fertility preferences and its association with the sibling composition in the household and fertility behavior. The finding shows that the delineation of family size is majorly based on the number of the son in the family. The results of this study shows that in the presence of one or more sons the desire for having another child among women is less and sterilization is high. Along with the sex composition of the children, the demographic and socio-economic backgrounds also have a significant effect on future fertility intentions of women. Substantially, the fertility intention is guided by the cultural preference for the son which is a common phenomenon of a patriarchal society (Dreze and Murthi 2001; Arokiaswamy 2002; Patel 2006; Chaudhuri 2012). Here, the findings of this study also reinforce the role of son preference in fertility intentions as TFR is considerably distorted in the presence of son preference in every state of India with few exceptions.