

Gender Preferences for Off Springs and its Association with Socio-Demographic Factors Among Married Women in a Slum Area of Jaipur City: A Cross Sectional Study

Vivek Bharti¹, Suresh Kewalramani², Amita Kashyap³, Priyanka Kapoor⁴

¹Community Medicine, Block CMHO, Kishangarh Bas, Alwar, Rajasthan, India

²Associate Professor, Department of Community Medicine, S. M. S. Medical College, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

³Senior Professor, Department of Community Medicine, S. M. S. Medical College, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

⁴Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine, S. K. Govt Medical College, Sikar, Rajasthan, India

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Abstract

Introduction: The preference for a male child is still very common in India. Strong desire for a son and discrimination against the female child are resulting for skewed sex ratio in India. The present study was planned with objective to assess the gender preference its association with socio-demographic factors among married women of reproductive age group in an urban slum of Jaipur city. **Materials and Methods:** A community based cross sectional study was carried out in an urban slum (Kathputlinagar) of Jaipur, Rajasthan from June 2016 to August 2017. Total 1230 married women of age group 15 to 49 years were interviewed using a predesigned semi structured questionnaire to collect information regarding gender preference and its associated factors. **Results:** 53.3% women had preference for male child. Religion and socioeconomic status had significant association with male gender preference while age, and occupation were not significantly associated with gender preference. Total number of living children and gender composition of living children was significantly associated with gender preference. **Conclusion:** Preference to male child over female child had been observed and associated factors were Religion, socioeconomic status, total number of living children and gender composition of living children.

Keywords: Gender Preference, Sex Ratio, Sex Selection, Male Preference.

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Introduction

'Gender' is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviors assigned to 'males' and 'females' whereas, the term 'sex' is a biological and physiological phenomenon which defines man and woman. Therefore, 'gender' may be understood as a man-made concept, while 'sex' is natural or biological characteristics of human beings[1]. The preference for sons or more number of sons than daughters has been documented in several countries in the world[2]. In India, the desire for a son is strong and pervasive and it has been frequently mentioned as one of the major hurdles in reducing the national fertility level[3]. Despite modernity, industrialization, literacy and equality, parents still pray for male child[4]. The preference for a male child and discrimination against the female child are causing adverse effect on natural sex ratio in India. Right from the first census of 1871, India had consistently shown an abnormal sex ratio (940 females for every 1000 males) but the most alarming and disturbing aspect was observed in census 2011 where child sex ratio was 914 females /1000 males and it is the lowest since 1947[5]. In Rajasthan, the sex ratio was 921 females /1000 males in the census 2001 which improved a bit to 928 females /1000 males in census 2011. India has a patriarchal social framework where the preference for son over daughter is rooted in socioeconomic and cultural factors. Females are not only devalued as human beings from the day they born but also they are denied the right to be born. Female feticide is

one of the most serious forms of violence against women where female fetuses are selectively being aborted after prenatal sex determination. Hence, present study was conducted with the objectives to determine the gender preferences among the married women of reproductive age group and to find out any association of socio-demographic factors with gender preferences.

Materials and Methods

A community based, cross sectional descriptive study was carried out to find out gender preferences for off springs and associated socio-demographic factors among married women in urban slum area of Jaipur city from June 2016 to August 2017. After taking the prior approval from institutional ethics committee, all the married women of age group 15 - 49 years, residing in the area for atleast last 6 months and who gave written informed consent were included in the study. Widowed or divorced women and those not available even after two house visits were excluded from this study. A pre designed and semi structured questionnaire was used to gather the information. A consecutive house to house survey was conducted for data collection.

Statistical Analysis

Data thus collected were entered in Microsoft excel software and analysed using SPSS (version 20.0). Categorical data was expressed as number and percentage. Chi square test was used to determine association of gender preferences with socio-demographic factors. P-value <0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

Results

Total 1230 study subjects were interviewed. Maximum study subjects were in age group 25-34 year (37.5%). Majority of the study participants were Hindu (88.9%) and almost three fourth (72%) of the study population was belonging to SC/ST casts. Nearly half of the study subjects were illiterate (47.4%) and none was

*Correspondence

Dr. Priyanka Kapoor

Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine, S. K. Govt Medical College, Sikar, Rajasthan, India

E-mail: priyankakapoor19@gmail.com

professionally educated. Maximum about 34.4% participants were belonged to SES Class-V according to Kuppusswamy's Scale of socio-economic status and almost all participants were indulged in skilled or labourer type of work as their occupation (52.6% and 46.2% respectively). More than half (58.8%) of the study population were residing in joint type families. Maximum participants were having single child and son was as a last living child. (Table-1) Male preference was seen in slightly more number of subjects (656, 53.3%) as compared to subjects with female preference (574, 46.7%) (Graph-1). Religion and socio-economic status showed significant association with gender preference (P< 0.05). Male preference was seen more in Hindus (53.93%) as compared to Muslims (46.07%). Highest son preference was seen in SES Class-III (60.48%) followed by SES Class-II (59.14%), SES Class-IV (51.56%), SES Class-I (50.00%) and lowest in SES Class-V (48.94%). Age and occupation of married women had no significant association with gender

preference. Higher male child preference was seen in 35-44 year age group. Highest gender preference for male child was observed among skilled workers (56.11%) while lowest was seen among labourers (50.70%) (Table-2).

Women without child had higher son preference (59.72%) as compared to those who had one or more children. Significant association (P-value <0.05) was seen with total number of living children. It was observed in present study that gender composition of living children was significantly associated with gender preference. 100% male preference was seen when there were 3 females and lowest male preference was seen when there were 3 males (13.33%). It was also observed in the present study that when gender of last living child female then the preference for male child was more (61.10%) as compared to the situation when last living child was male (43.59%) (Table-3).

Table 1: Socio demographic characteristics of study participants

Variable	Sub-group	N	Percentage
Age group (years)	15 – 24	366	29.8
	25 – 34	461	37.5
	35 – 44	393	32
	> 45	10	0.8
Religion	Hindu	1094	88.9
	Muslim	136	11.1
Caste	General	148	12
	OBC	196	15.9
	SC/ST	886	72
Education	Illiterate	583	47.4
	Primary	201	16.3
	Middle	279	22.7
	Secondary	126	10.2
	Higher secondary or Intermediate	31	2.5
	Graduate / Postgraduate	10	0.8
Occupation	Professional	0	0
	Housewife	15	1.2
	Labourer	568	46.2
	Skilled worker	647	52.6
Socio-economic status (kuppusswamy's classification)	Class I	6	0.5
	Class II	93	7.6
	Class III	291	23.7
	Class IV	417	33.9
	Class V	423	34.4
Type of family	Nuclear	249	20.2
	Joint	720	58.5
	3 generation	261	21.2
Family size (No. of Children)	0	288	23.4
	1	461	37.5
	2	203	16.5
	3	203	16.5
	4 and above	75	6.1
Gender of last Child	Male	523	42.5
	Female	419	34.1

Table 2: Gender preferences of in relation to socio-demographic characteristics

Variable	Subgroup	Son preference n (%)	Daughter preference n (%)	Total n (%)	P value
Age groups (in years)	15-24	190 (51.91)	176 (48.09)	366 (100)	0.054
	25-34	249 (54.01)	212 (45.99)	461 (100)	
	35-44	242 (61.58)	151 (38.42)	393 (100)	
	>44	6 (60.00)	4 (40.00)	10 (100)	
Religion	Hindu	590 (53.93)	504 (46.07)	1094(100)	0.001(S)
	Muslim	66 (48.53)	70 (51.47)	136 (100)	
Occupation	Housewife	8 (53.33)	7 (46.67)	15 (100)	0.189
	Labourer	288 (50.70)	280 (49.30)	568 (100)	

Socio-economic status (Kuppuswamy's classification)	Skilled worker	363 (56.11)	647 (43.89)	647 (100)	0.026 (S)
	Class I	3 (50.00)	3 (50.00)	6 (100)	
	Class II	55 (59.14)	38 (40.86)	93 (100)	
	Class III	176 (60.48)	115 (39.52)	291 (100)	
	Class IV	215 (51.56)	202 (48.44)	417 (100)	
Class V	207 (48.94)	216 (51.06)	423 (100)		

Table 3: Gender preferences according to gender composition of living children and gender of last living child

Variable	Subgroup	Son preference	Daughter preference	Total	P value
Number of living children	0	172 (59.72)	116 (40.28)	288 (100)	0.040 (S)
	1	251 (54.45)	210 (45.55)	461 (100)	
	2	96 (47.29)	107 (52.71)	203 (100)	
	3	102 (50.24)	101 (49.76)	203 (100)	
	≥ 4	35 (46.67)	40 (53.33)	75 (100)	
Gender composition of children	1 Male + 1 Female	40 (50.63)	39 (49.36)	79 (100)	0.001(S)
	2 Male	15 (25.86)	43 (74.14)	58 (100)	
	2 Female	57 (86.36)	9 (13.64)	66 (100)	
	3 Male	2 (13.33)	13 (86.67)	15 (100)	
	3 Female	12 (100)	0 (00)	12 (100)	
	2 Male + 1 Female	37 (41.11)	53 (58.89)	90 (100)	
	1 Male + 2 Female	51 (59.30)	35 (40.70)	86 (100)	
Gender of last living Child	4 or more children	35 (46.67)	40 (53.33)	75 (100)	0.001 (S)
	Male	228 (43.59)	295 (56.41)	523 (100)	
	Female	256 (61.10)	163 (38.90)	419 (100)	

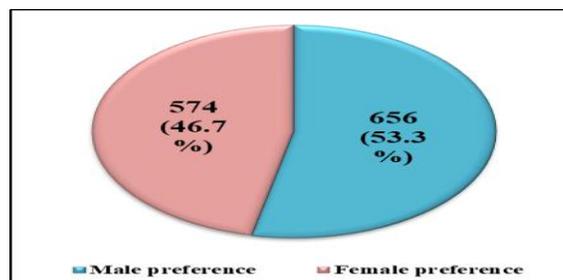


Fig 1: Gender preference among study subjects

Discussion

This study was carried out among married females of reproductive age group (15-49 years) in an urban slum of Jaipur city which is a field practice area of U.H.T.C., attached to SMS Medical College, Jaipur. The overall preference for off springs was higher for male child (53.3%) than female child (46.7%). In 2007 a study conducted by S. Puri et al⁶ in slums of Chandigarh observed a nearby (56%) preference for son, which is also similar (56%) to the results of study by B.N. Vadera et al⁷ in Jamnagar, Gujarat. A very similar result was also observed for son preference (58%) in a study by Pavitra M.B. et al⁸ in urban slum of Bengaluru, in 2015. Wadgave et al⁹ in slums of solapur municipal corporation, also observed higher son preference (48%) over daughter (16%), that was very similar to the observation by Rajesh R. Kulkarni et al¹⁰. Ashish srivastav et al¹¹ observed a much higher preference for son (64.6%) as compared to present study. Furthermore, very higher preferences for son were also observed by M. Chavada et al¹²(2009) and Vishal samadhan¹³ (2016), 87.53 and 94.3 respectively. Both of the studies were carried out in rural areas, which might be a reason for difference in findings to present study. Highest Male gender preference was seen in subjects in middle (35-44 years) age group (61.5%), as was similarly reported by Sanjay k saha et al. In present study, preference for son was significantly higher in Hindus as compared to Muslims. This finding was contrary to the results a study done by S K Saha et al¹⁴ in slum of Kolkata (54% for

Muslims and 45% for Hindus), and Wadgave et al⁹ (which might be due to difference in the study area, composition of study population. The occupation of study subjects was not significantly associated with gender preference for off spring in the present study (p value=0.189). Main earning in lower status subjects is from women as they are involved in many occupations like- kathputli making, tailoring. Male preference was higher among skilled workers (56.1%) as compared to labourers (50.70%) and housewives (53.3%). This observation was contrary to the findings in studies carried out by Himadri et al¹⁵ and Eleuther et al¹⁶ (significant association in these studies), probably because present study subjects had a narrow range of type of occupation and different study area and composition of study population. In the present study, socio-economic status of study subjects was significantly associated with preference for gender of child (p value= 0.026). Maximum Male preference was seen in SES class III (60.48%) and decreased in both higher and lower SES subjects. Minimum male preference was seen in class V subjects (48.93%). Vishal samadhan et al¹³ (2016), found that SES was not significantly associated with gender preference for children (p value=0.149) and maximum son preference was seen in SES class IV, and this difference in findings might be due to different study area (Rural area and urban slum). Total number of living children was significantly associated with preference for gender of off springs (p value=0.004). Maximum male preference was seen in those without any child (59.72%) and showed a gradual decline with increasing number of children in the family. Similar proportion for

son preference was observed in study conducted by Pavithra et al⁸ in an urban slum (56.4%). Gender composition of living children was also significantly associated with gender preference of their children (p value<0.001). Maximum Male preference was seen in subjects with three girls and no boy (100%) followed by those with two girls and no boy (86.36%). Similar findings were observed for son preference in those having 3 daughters in studies done by I D Pal¹⁷ (100%) and M B Pavithra⁸ (100%). Gender of last living child was found to be significantly associated with the gender preference of child (p <0.001). Male preference was higher in those with female last child (61.10%) as compared to those with male last child (43.59%). Wadgave et al⁹ also reported significantly higher preference for son (92%). Similarly, 68% preference was seen for son in those not having son as their last child, in a study by Himadri et al¹⁵.

Conclusion

Preference for son is found to be very strong. More emphasis needs to be put on programs and policies that actively improve the status of women and change the attitude towards female child. Greater opportunities for education and employment as well as empowering them with inheritance rights can improve the outlook toward girl child preference. Intensive IEC campaigns should be conducted focusing on improving social security at old age, facilities favouring girl children and steps for elimination of dowry from the society may help in improving the preference for girl children.

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