

## **SEX SELECTION: QUESTIONS ASKED FREQUENTLY**

### **1. What is pre-birth sex determination?**

- Pre-birth sex determination is any act of determining/identifying the sex of the foetus and elimination of the foetus if it is of the undesired sex by using any method, scientific or unscientific. The undesired sex in most cases being a female. Pre-birth sex determination refers to elimination before conception or during pregnancy.

### **2. How is pre-conception sex determination done?**

- Pre-conception sex determination can be accomplished in both pre- and post-implantation of an embryo. In pre-implantation stage, sperms of desired sex are separated using various lab techniques and used for fertilization with the egg. In vitro- fertilization is also a popular method for bearing child of a desired sex as the gender selection success rates are high for this technique. The use of ultrasound technology has become most common mode of sex determination in the post-implantation stage. Pre-birth sex determination is then followed by elimination of the foetus if it is of the undesired sex. It has been well documented that the foetus of 'undesired sex' is always a female foetus. Easy access to ultrasound techniques since the early 1980s has led to increased sex determination and elimination, causing a rapid decline in the child sex ratio.

### **3. How else the girl child is further discriminated?**

- Even if a girl child is born, often for the want of male child, parents abandon the child. Still, in some parts of the country the inhuman practice of eliminating the girl child after her birth is practiced with help of traditional birth attendants or nurses with knowledge of doctors. If not abandoned, girls are further deliberately denied feeding or treatment, resulting in adverse impacts on their health, at times even death.

Further, during childhood, girls are deprived of several health and education facilities. Girls are breast fed for shorter periods, given less medical attention, fewer consultations and visit to a doctor, and in case of an emergency and or a major health concern are taken very late or not at all to the hospital. Also, female children in general are given lesser food both in quality and quantity and therefore are undernourished compared to male children. This in turn leads to health issues like anemia and intrauterine growth restriction during pregnancy. If, in this malnourished state the woman gives birth to a female child then the possibility of the female child having survival issues, and nutritional issues becomes higher. Girls in India face higher risks of malnutrition, disease, disability and retardation of growth and development. They have no access to or control over the resources. Their work towards raising a family and in the household chores is undervalued. Some argue that due to the culture that has been in the society for so long that a girl child and her value to the family have been undervalued for long.

As far as education opportunities are concerned, the female child in India is often deprived from her right to an education. The basic facility of education is deprived to her. Also, even if she is in school, the number of girls dropping out of school far exceeds the boys. Definitely, this is because she is expected to help at home, either in household work like washing, cooking or help in taking care of her younger siblings. Also, even with education and financial independence, women might not get the same rights and liberties which a man may have. It is through education in the early

days of a child that we can bring about behavior changes and open doors to opportunities that will enhance their confidence, personality and career.

#### **4. What is population sex ratio?**

- Sex ratio is used to describe the number of females per 1000 of males in a population. Sex ratio is a valuable source for finding the number of women and the ratio of women to that of men in India. When men and women have near equal chances for survival, there are bound to be near-equal number of males and females in society. In India however, the female population is much lower than the male population due to higher mortality among females, particularly during their reproductive span.

In the Population Census of 2011 it was revealed that the population ratio in India 2011 is 940 females per 1000 of males. The Sex Ratio 2011 shows an upward trend from the census 2001 data. Census 2001 revealed that there were 933 females to that of 1000 males. Since decades India has seen a decrease in the sex ratio. But since the last two of the decades there has been a slight increase in the sex ratio. Since the last five decades the sex ratio has been moving around 930 of females to that of 1000 of males. Though the sex ratio of India has gone through commendable signs of improvement in the past 10 years, there are still some states where the sex ratio is still low and is a cause of concern. The falling sex ratio is an indicator of health and social status of women in the society, which has a direct and immediate bearing on other key indicators like child mortality.

Sex ratio is also calculated for various age groups, the most important being 0-6 years. An adverse sex ratio here shows that less girls are being born compared to boys and so indicates discrimination against the female fetus- this could be at the time of conception, gestation or delivery.

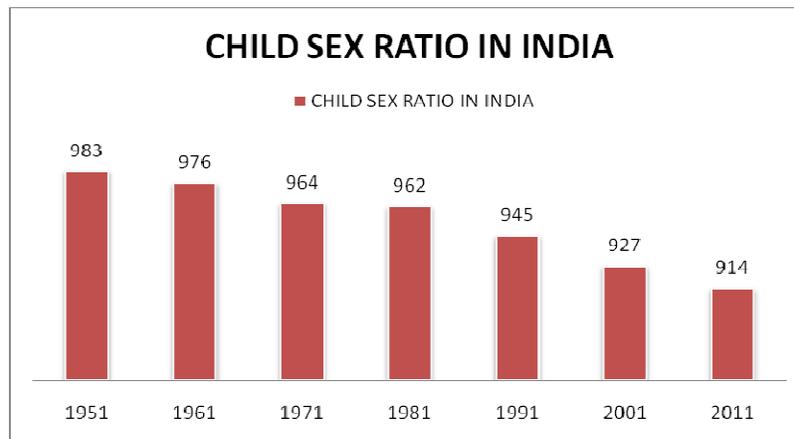
#### **5. What is Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB)?**

- The sex ratio at birth is defined as the number of boys born for every 100 girls born. The natural "sex ratio at birth" is 105. This means that at birth, there are 105 males for every 100 females. Nature provides that the number of baby boys slightly outnumber the number of baby girls because men have a higher risk at dying than women. While there exists no country with a sex ratio at birth below 100, there are several countries that have sex ratios at birth much higher than 105. Whenever a country's sex ratio exceeds the 105-threshold, the ratio is not "natural" any more. Societies with a dominating preference for baby boys tend to intervene in nature and reduce the number of born baby girls by sex-selective abortion and elimination of baby girls. An under-registration of female births also contributes to sex ratios at birth above the natural level. In China for example, more than 120 boys are born to 100 girls, mainly due to the country's one child policy in combination with preference for men. Other countries like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and India also have very high sex ratios at birth owing to strong son preference.

#### **6. What is child sex ratio?**

- In India, the Child Sex Ratio is defined as, the number of girls per 1000 boys in the 0-6 years age group. In India, the ratio has shown a sharp decline from 976 girls to 1000 boys in 1961 to 914 as per Census 2011. The child sex ratio reflects the imbalance between the number of girls and boys and is a sensitive indicator that displays the health and social status of women. The skewed child

sex ratio indicates discrimination against the female foetus by rampant usage of pre-birth diagnostic techniques. An adverse child sex ratio also reveals the play of socio-cultural factors in determining female survival chances.



## 7. Why do families not want daughters?

- India has a value system based on male domination and son preference. The patterns of inheritance are typically patrilineal in India with property passing from father to son. In an increasing trend for a nuclear family, son preference has grown stronger to ensure that the property rights are passed on to a son and not a daughter who has to leave her natal home after marriage.

A common explanation for the existence of son preference is that sons can provide old age support. In India, the majority of the old live with their sons, motivated by their concerns about their own security in old age. A male child is also valued for perceived final salvation of the parents through the performance of their last rights.

Daughters are associated with a double 'loss'. Firstly, a daughter leaves the natal family upon her marriage and the benefits from investments made in her upbringing be it on nutrition, health or education accrue to the new family, thus constituting a loss for the natal family. This is further compounded by the burden of expenses of her marriage. In this lineage system women are left out and become dispensable essentially because they count for very little as individuals. In other words, even though a woman's status might improve, it does not change the nature of the social order, as it does not directly correlate to a change in her position within it. While valuing adult women's contributions to the household, the system generates strong disincentives to raising daughters. Preference of male child devalues the female child and denies her basic right for survival, growth and development.

## 8. Is Sex selection caused by poverty and illiteracy?

- No. The practice is observed across all regions of the country, irrespective of prosperity and literacy. In Census 2011, the child sex ratio (0-6 yrs) has registered an increasing trend only in Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Mizoram and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. In the all remaining 27 States/UTs the ratio has declined. Select richer and developed states in India show a consistently declining sex ratio since 1981;

STATE	CENSUS YEAR			
	1981	1991	2001	2011
MAHARASHTRA	956	946	913	883
GUJRAT	947	928	883	886
DELHI	926	915	868	867
CHANDIGARH	907	899	845	867
PUNJAB	908	875	798	846
ANDHRA PRADESH	992	975	961	943

The Census 2011 highlights that the practice of sex selection is rampant in urban areas as compared to rural areas.

STATE	CENSUS 2001			CENSUS 2011		
	TOTAL	RURAL	URBAN	TOTAL	RURAL	URBAN
INDIA	927	934	906	914	919	902

Further, comparing the slum and non slum areas in urban parts of the country it has been found that the child sex ratios are lower in the non slum areas. In the slum areas of the country the child sex ratio is at 921, compared to 903, recorded for non-slum urban areas<sup>(1)</sup>.

The rural areas or the slum areas are indicators of the socio-economic status of any region. The lower child sex ratios in the urban and non slum areas amongst them refute the notion that sex determination and elimination are directly linked to poverty and illiteracy.

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<sup>(1)</sup>Slums in India-Statistical Compendium, 2011

## 9. What is the impact of sex selection?

- India remains a highly patriarchal society where women are marginalized and denied development benefits. The adverse child sex ratio can severely impact the delicate equilibrium of nature and damage the social fabric as well. Fewer girls in a society will not enhance their social status. In fact, a falling sex ratio is but reflection of the existing gender bias.

In places where sex selection is rampant, there can be an increase in violence and discrimination against women and at times forced polyandry. Men, from certain areas, will not find young or marriageable women in their own regions or communities and will have to try to find wives from those areas where the sex ratio is more balanced. In order to cater to such a demand, there will be an increase in the trafficking of poor and illiterate girls – from rural areas as well as from neighboring countries like Nepal and Bangladesh – for the purpose of marriage. A fall in the number of females in society is likely to increase sex-related crimes against women, like bride selling, prostitution, sexual exploitation.

The society that is responsible for the subordination of women will not treat them in a more humane way simply because their number is less. It will lead only to denial of the rights of women rather than their empowerment.

Along with various socio-economic implications, there are health implications of a declining sex ratio as well. The health of the woman is affected as she is forced to go for repeated pregnancies and abortions. Sex related crimes against women, prostitution or forced polyandry will only increase in incidence of STD and HIV/ AIDS.

#### **10. Should we restrict access to abortion services to stop pre-birth sex selection?**

- No. A woman needs to have rightful access to safe and legal abortion services as per Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971. Sex of the foetus can be determined only in the second trimester of pregnancy. However, data shows that, 80 to 90 percent of reported abortions in India take place in the first trimester.

In India, some women delay pregnancy termination until they are in the second trimester for reasons other than sex selection. Cases of delay in abortion seeking are common amongst poor, young, and unmarried women in particular, who are often poorly informed on many fronts: they may not understand the signs of pregnancy, the possibility or legality of obtaining an abortion, the importance of seeking early abortion (in the first trimester) and the location of safe services.

In addition to the difficulty of enforcing the legal prohibition of sex detection and resulting sex-selective abortions, evidence shows that if women do not have access to safe abortion services they often turn to unsafe options. This in turn has detrimental effects on the physical as well as the mental health of women. Apart from having long term health consequences, restricting access to safe abortion services may also violate the human and reproductive health rights of women.

#### **11. Is it justified for a couple to undergo sex selection if they have two or more daughters?**

- NO. Discrimination on the basis of sex is unacceptable. There is often a societal pressure to have a male child irrespective of the birth order. The couple often chooses to undergo sex selection even if it is first or second pregnancy. Census data indicates that even for the first born, there is a preference for a male child. This trend is even more noticeable where the first born is a girl child. The notion of having a male child often results in denial of a girl child being born. Preference for a male child is wrong because it devalues the female child and denies her basic rights for survival, growth and development. The process of sex determination and elimination cannot be justified for want of a male child.

## **12. Is Sex selection a solution to dowry?**

- NO. Unfortunately, the practice of sex selection is intrinsically linked to the dowry system, which is adversely affecting the social fabric of the society. The National Crime Records Bureau recorded 8233 dowry deaths in 2012 in India. The solution to dowry system lies in the effective implementation of the anti-dowry act and in empowering the women to access their rights and entitlements. Change in the mindset of society towards perception of daughters as 'assets' and not liabilities alike the son is essential for uplifting the status of girl child.

## **13. Does a mother have the right to choose the sex of her future child?**

- NO. Women often feel pressured to have sons. They often opt for sex selection owing to fears of violence, desertion, and also the desire to establish one's value in the family. This cannot be called as a mother's choice. Also, many times women feel that it is better not to give birth to a girl child to avoid the chances of her going through similar societal devaluation and discrimination. However, on any grounds one cannot choose to bear a child of particular sex. Sex selection cannot be treated as matter of right and choice, in a social context which is very much biased against the girl child.

## **14. Does sex selection aid in population control?**

- No. The practice of sex selection in no way aides the population control. Population stabilization is a stage when the size of the population remains unchanged. In fact, the desire for having a male child leads to the couples increasing their family size till a son is born. NFHS 3 suggests that 77% women want atleast one son among their children, whereas 70% men want atleast one son.

The strength of son preference varies substantially across the states. Son preference tends to be stronger among both women and men in the northern part of the country, especially in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Other states with a particularly high son preference include Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Manipur, Jharkhand, and Jammu and Kashmir. The weakest son preference is found in the South and West Regions and parts of the Northeast Region.

It has been well researched <sup>(2)</sup> that, for fulfilling the desire for sons, women continue to give birth to children despite having born a certain number of children. This delays India's demographic transition by keeping fertility rates higher than they would be otherwise, because parents who have not achieved their "son target" continue to procreate.

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<sup>(2)</sup> "The Desire for Sons and Excess Fertility: A Household-Level Analysis of Parity Progression in India" by Sanjukta Chaudhuri, *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* (December 2012). The Guttmacher Institute, [www.guttmacher.org](http://www.guttmacher.org).

## **15. Is sex selection against the law?**

- YES. The Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act regulates sex selection, before or after conception. The law was first enacted in 1994 and amended in 2003. Its purpose is to prevent the misuse of technologies such as ultrasound that enable testing the sex of the foetus and eliminating girl child. It is illegal to determine the sex of the foetus for non medical reasons, except in the case of a few genetic disorders which are gender specific. The law provides for imprisonment, which may extend to 3 years and fine up to Rs 10,000 for the first

conviction. The law suffers from bottlenecks in implementation and there have been few convictions so far. The major difficulty relates to proving the offence conducted with the agreement of the medical service provider and the parents.

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