

Original Article

A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY ON AWARENESS OF SEX DETERMINATION TECHNIQUES & GENDER PREFERENCE AMONG MARRIED WOMEN IN AN URBAN SLUM OF MAHARASHTRA

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ABSTRACT

Background: Skewed sex ratio is an issue of major concern & has long term Sociodemographic consequences which may be due to patriarchal social framework & strong son desire in India. The problem is getting worse as scientific methods of sex determination & termination of pregnancy are improving leading to female feticide. Hence the present study tries to evaluate knowledge & practice of sex-determination techniques & reasons for son preference gender among married women in an urban slum of Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Methodology: A community based, cross-sectional study was carried out among 900 married women of reproductive age group selected by systematic random sampling in an urban slum of community of Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Results: the present study shows that most of the women were muslims & they were educated. In spite of good education most of the women were engaged in household work. Most of the women i.e. 58.8% were aware of sex determination practices of which majority knew the method & place of sex determination as well as majority knew that sex determination is crime & few women were aware about the penalty for the same. Overall male child preference was seen in 49.6% women. The desire for male child becomes stronger as the number of girl child increases. Major reasons for male child preference were to carry forward family name & business, for their old age support & to carry out religious function.

Conclusion: The present study reflects that knowledge of sex determination techniques were quite good among study women as well as they were having strong preference for male child.

Key Words: Sex determination, Gender Preference, Urban Slum in Maharashtra

INTRODUCTION

Female sex ratio (sex ratio) is the number of females per every 1000 males in a given place, which is recalculated based on age groups 0 to 6 years or 6 years & above. The number of female in age group of 0 to 6 years is termed as child sex ratio. As per the latest Census 2011, total female sex ratio in India is 940 per 1000 males & female child sex ratio is 944 girl children per every 1000 boy children of the same age group. The overall female sex ratio has increased by 0.75 % in the Census 2011 as compared to the previous Census of 2001¹.

In India, Patriarchy structure of the society along with sex selective abortions, preference of male child & neglect of the girl child are more responsible factors de-

clining sex ratio. Today, with technological advancement in medical diagnosis this discrimination begins even before her birth. Various medical technologies have been put into practice to identify the sex of the child before birth & selective abortion, if found female. Of the various medical technologies, ultra sound machines are the most misused one in the sex selective practices². Hence the present study was carried out to study awareness about sex determination techniques, son preference & reasons for son preference.

METHODOLOGY

The present community based, cross-sectional study, was carried out over duration of 12 months (January

to December 2007), among married women of reproductive age group in an urban slum community of Mumbai, Maharashtra, which is having migrated population from different parts of India, mainly from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and with thick Muslims population, followed by Hindus and Buddhist.

The selected community were having fifty plots with twenty rows in each plot and nine houses in row and hence there were total 180 houses in each plot. From each plot 18 houses were selected (which is also equivalent to 10% of the total no. of houses 180). Using systematic random sampling method, first house was selected randomly using random number table from initial 10 houses and then every 10th house was selected to cover a sample size of 900 women (sampling interval = 180/18=10). In case of locked houses, it was revisited and then the next house was selected if necessary. In case of joint family, by random sampling one woman was selected from each house. The women of reproductive age group having at least one child and who were willing for participation were included from each of the selected house in the present study.

The household survey was carried out among these women to reveal their socio demographic characteristics, sex preference & child rearing practices & health seeking behaviour.

The data was analyzed using SPSS statistical package version 10.0 & then compared with various studies done previously and presented in the form of tables and graphs.

RESULT

Out of 900 women, 42.4% women were from age group 21-35 years. Most of the women were Muslims (72.4%). Majority women (87.3%) were literate & belonging to high socio-economic class (according to modified B.G. Prasad classification) & only 12.7% women were illiterate. In spite of good education most of the women were engaged in household work. Majority women were having nuclear family & husband as head of family. Most of the women got married after legal age of marriage (58%), most of the women had pregnancy after 19 years of age (67.7%) & less than or equal to two living children (67.1%). Only 16.6% women had abortion of which majority had induced abortion (59.6%) & i.e. at private set up (74.5%).

The above table shows that 58.8% women were aware of sex determination practices, in which 96.8% knew the method of sex determination i.e. USG and told that it is done only in private clinic or hospital. Sex determination is considered a crime & it was agreed by 92.4% women & only 28.5% women knew about legal punishment for sex determination in the present study.

Table 1: Distribution of women according to knowledge about sex determination

Variables	No (%)
Knowledge about sex determination (N= 900)	
Yes	529 (58.8)
No	371(41.2)
Places where sex determination can be done (n=529)	
Pvt. Hospital	512 (96.8)
Govt. Hospital	017 (03.2)
Aware that Determining sex of child considered crime (n=529)	
Yes	489 (92.4)
No	40 (07.6)
Aware of Legal punishment for determining sex of child (n=529)	
Yes	151(28.5)
No	378(71.5)

Table 2: Son preference by different sex composition of children in their family

Sex composition of living children	Preference for son (%)
1 st & 2 nd girl	91.80
All three girls	100
1 st Boy	9.40
1 st & 2 nd boy	11.1
All 3 boys	00
Combined	
Boy > girl	20.00
Boy=girl	56.00
Boy< girl	97.00

Table 3 Distribution of women according to Reason for son preference

Reason	No. (%)
Family lineage	468 (41.31)
Old age support	333(29.39)
Economic productivity	177 (15.62)
Religious	079 (6.97)
Marital security	023 (2.03)
No response	053 (4.68)
Total	1133

Out of 124 (123 desired another child) women with first child as baby girl 94 (76.4%) keenly wanted second baby as a boy and only 1 (0.8%) did not want any further child. Out of 96 women who had two baby boys (36 desired another child), 18 (50%) wanted their third baby as a girl and 60 (62.5%) did not want to conceive further. Among 69 (61 desired another child) women with two girl child a strong desire for male child was seen 56(91.8%) while strong desire for male child was 100% among women having all three girl children (22 women were having three girls out of which 18 women desired further children). Overall male child preference was seen in 49.6% women.

In the present study desire for male child preference was seen in majority of the women and gave multiple reasons for that of which most common reason was family lineage, old age support & economic productivity [Table 3].

DISCUSSION

Sex ratio is an important social indicator of gender inequalities. The adverse sex ratio indicates less number of females which has resulted due to female foeticide as a result of easy reach & availability of easy method for pre-determination of sex in spite of various modifications done under PCPNDT act³.

The present study shows that 58.8% women were aware of sex determination practices, in which 96.8% knew the method of sex determination i.e. USG and told that it is done only in private clinic or hospital. Similar result was also found in a study done by A.J.Singh & A.K.Arora in North Indian Village. In that study 95% of respondent knew that sex determination is done by USG. They also told that test was available in private clinic only⁴. Result obtained in a study done by S. Puri, V. Bhatia and HM Swami, only 11.8% (44/373) women were aware of sex determination test and majority of the women 88.2% (329/373) were not aware of the test. 97.7% (43/44) women said that test is done in private clinics only⁵.

In India, the birth of girl child is unwelcomed because of huge dowry payment, further many parents think that it is pointless to spend so much on a girl education & upbringing only to leave for another's home, without repaying which further leads to girl's negligence in terms of food, education & health seeking in case of illness. In the present study overall male child preference was seen in 49.6% women. It was found that desire for son was more among women who were already having girl child as compared to those who were having boy child & the desire for son was becoming stronger as the number of girl child increases. Similar results were obtained by S. Puri, V. Bhatia and HM Swami, out of 93 women with first child as baby girl 74 (79.5%) wanted second baby as a boy and only 5 (5.3%) did not want any further child. Out of 33 women who had two baby boys previously, 11 (33.3%) wanted their third baby as a girl and 14 (42.42%) did not want to conceive further. A strong desire for male baby in 30 (75%) women was seen among women with two baby girls. Overall son preference was found in 209 (56%) women⁵. Similar kind of preference has been obtained in different parts of the country evident from studies of Mumbai & other states^{6,7}.

The major reasons for that were family lineage, old age support & economic productivity. As per report published by UNFPA in conjunction with MOHFW & Office of Registrar General & Census Commissioner India 2003, there was strong male child preference in India for multiple reasons such as son being responsible to carry forward family name & occupation, being only source of support in old age & to perform religious rites during cremation⁸.

CONCLUSION

The present study shows that male child preference is still persistence in our country for many reasons. Children should be considered as God's gift regardless of their gender. Therefore to have balanced sex ratio, apart from legal enforcement of PCPNDT Act orthodox views of people should be improved.

These can be achieved by the following

- People and religious leaders should be motivated to perform rituals by daughter over son at parent's cremation and at every death anniversary thereafter.
- The availability of reliable and affordable old age pensions, social security and life insurance programmes should be accessed to all, which will be helpful in reducing dependence on son.
- Law should be enacted to share the earning of married daughters for old parents, which would reduce the preference for male child.

Oh, God, I beg of you,
I touch your feet time and again,
Next birth don't give me a daughter,
Give me Hell instead...

An old Folk Song From Uttar Pradesh

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