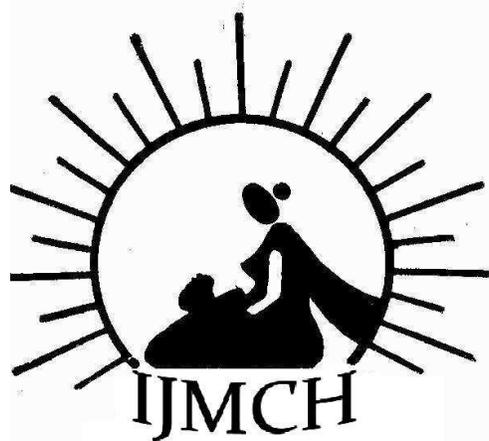


Preference for Male Child amongst Pregnant Women Attending Antenatal Clinic in a Tertiary Hospital in New Delhi, India

*Kaur Suminder
Sharma Rahul
Talwar Richa
Verma Anita
Singh Saudan*

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To ascertain the preference for male child amongst pregnant women and to find the various associated factors.

Preference for Male Child amongst Pregnant Women Attending Antenatal Clinic in a Tertiary Hospital in New Delhi, India

Kaur Suminder,* Sharma Rahul,* Talwar Richa,** Verma Anita,*** Singh Saudan.****

*Senior Resident, **Associate Professor, ***Assistant Professor, ****Professor and Head, Department of Community Medicine, VMMC and Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi

Correspondence: Dr.Suminder Kaur

e-mail address: dr_suminderkaur@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Background: A deep rooted *sons only* ethos continues in many parts of our society even today. Women themselves perpetuate the aversion to female infants because of their own misery, low status, abuse and dowry.

Objective: To ascertain the preference for male child amongst pregnant women and to find the various associated factors.

Methodology: A cross-sectional study conducted in Aug-Sep 2008 among 300 pregnant women attending Antenatal Clinic in tertiary care hospital of Delhi using systematic random sampling. **Statistical analysis:** Proportions, Chi Square tests & Correlation.

Results: Majority (251; 83.7%) respondents wanted ≤ 2 children. In present pregnancy, 129 (43.0%) women wanted to have a male child, which was significantly associated with low education status ($p < 0.001$). No respondents whose last born child was female wanted to have a female child in present pregnancy ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: Pregnant women themselves have more preference towards male child, and it is more among less educated females and whose last born child was a female.

Key Words: Sex preference, male child, pregnant women, education

INTRODUCTION:

A deep rooted *sons only* ethos continues in many parts of our society even today and girls and women face inequity and inequality in many instances. They are many times even denied the right to be born, if their families do not wish them to be born (1). It is seen that sex discrimination replicates itself generation to generation (2). A daughter is pitied at birth and a mother is blamed (3). Son preference is both a cause and a consequence of the low status of women. (2)

While the views of the other members in the family many times hold sway over the to-be mother's own views, it is important to explore what are the felt desires of the expectant mothers themselves as to the outcome of their current pregnancy. It has been observed that women themselves perpetuate the aversion to female infants because of their own misery, low status, abuse, and the burden of the dowry (4). The present study was undertaken to ascertain the preference for male child amongst pregnant women coming for antenatal checkup to a tertiary hospital in Delhi - the capital city of the nation, and the various associated factors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was cross-sectional in nature and conducted during August-September 2008. The sample consisted of pregnant women attending the Antenatal Clinic in a tertiary care hospital in Delhi. The Ante-natal clinic is conducted daily and it caters to population not only from the urban areas of Delhi but also from rural areas both within and outside Delhi. The women coming for their antenatal checkup were approached while waiting for their appointment with the doctor, informed about the purpose of the study and then interviewed after their informed consent. Clearance was taken from the ethical committee of the hospital to conduct the study and permission was taken from the Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology. A systematic random sampling was done with every fifth antenatal women coming to the center being interviewed.

A total of 300 Antenatal clinic attendees were interviewed as part of the study. The interviews were carried out by sixth semester MBBS students of our institute, who were suitably trained before data collection. A close-ended questionnaire was designed after reviewing the available literature. The questionnaire included the socio-demographic features, obstetric history, sex preference in the present pregnancy and the knowledge about pre-natal sex determination and sex ratio. The questionnaire was pre-tested and suitably modified before use. The inclusion criteria were all currently pregnant women coming for consultation or examination at the ante-natal clinic, irrespective of their parity. Excluded were females who refused to participate in the study. The non-response rate was about 0.5%. Data was transferred into a computer based spreadsheet. Proportion, Correlation and Chi Square test were applied as a part of the statistical analysis. During the interpretation of results, $p < 0.05$ was considered as significant.

RESULTS

The sample consisted of 300 currently pregnant women attending the antenatal clinic. Out of the total, 175 (58.3%) were from an urban area. Majority (267; 89%) were housewives and more than half (173; 57.7%) were living in a joint family.

Table I: Factors associated with the sex preference for child (in present pregnancy) amongst the pregnant women

S. No.	Factor	Male preference N (%)	Female preference N (%)	No Preference N (%)	Total	p [#]
1.	Background					
	Urban	69 (39.4)	25 (14.3)	81 (46.3)	175	0.15
Rural	60 (48.0)	10 (8.0)	55 (44.0)	125		
2.	Education of female					
	Illiterate	22 (48.9)	5 (11.1)	18 (40.0)	45	0.02
	≤ X th	72 (40.2)	7 (3.9)	100 (55.9)	179	
> X th	23 (30.3)	12 (15.8)	41 (53.9)	76		
3.	Occupation of female					
	Housewife	121 (45.3)	30 (11.2)	116 (43.4)	267	0.07
Working	8 (24.2)	5 (15.2)	20 (60.6)	33		
4.	Type of family					
	Nuclear	56 (44.1)	14 (11.0)	57 (44.9)	127	0.93
Joint	73 (42.2)	21 (12.1)	79 (45.7)	173		
5.	Sex of the last born child*					
	Male	17 (27.9)	21 (34.4)	23 (37.7)	61	<0.001
Female	50 (72.5)	0 (0.0)	19 (27.5)	69		
6.	Pregnancy status					
	Primigravida	58 (34.1)	15 (8.8)	97 (57.1)	170	<0.001
Multigravida	71 (54.6)	20 (15.4)	39 (30.0)	130		
TOTAL		129 (43.0)	35 (11.7)	136 (45.3)	300	

* Total for this variable is 130, which is the number of women who were multigravida.

p<0.05 was considered as significant

The mean age of the respondents was 23.7 ± 3.4 years and the mean age of their husband was 27.0 ± 3.9 years. Among the respondents, 45 (15.0%) were illiterate, while the education status of 63 (21%) was Primary, 52 (17.3%) Middle, 64 (21.3%) High, 36 (12%) Secondary, 34 (11.3%) Graduate and 6 (2%) Post-graduate. About half of the respondents (170; 56.7%) were primigravida. Among the remaining (130; 45.2%) multigravida women, 69 (23.0%) had delivered a female child and 61 (20.3%) had delivered a male child in the previous pregnancy.

In the present pregnancy, 136 (45.3%) women had no sex preference, 129 (43.0%) wanted to have a male child while only 35 (11.7%) wanted to have a female child. It was found that none of the respondents whose last born child was a female wanted to have a female child

in present pregnancy, while one-fourth (17; 27.9%) of those who had a male child previously still wanted another male child ($p<0.001$). Male preference was associated significantly with multigravida ($p<0.001$), and with decreasing education status of the women ($p=0.02$) (**Table 1**).

When the women were asked about the sex preference amongst their family members, 163 (54.3%) said their family members wanted the child to be male, 121 (40.3%) had no preference, while only 16 (5.3%) preferred a girl child. Majority (228; 76.0%) respondents said that they were not having any pressure from family members to give birth to a male child. However, 43 (14.3%) respondents said that there was pressure by their husband and 26 (8.7%) from in-laws. It was found to be significantly more in case of multigravida ($p=0.04$) and in case the last born child was female ($p=0.02$).

About half (156; 52%) respondents said that the sex of the child depends on 'God's will', 50 (16.7%) said that it depends on father and 9 (2.8%) said on mother. About one fourth (85; 28.3%) expressed no opinion about it. Significantly more correct knowledge was present among the women from urban background ($p<0.001$), among higher educated females ($p<0.001$), working women ($p=0.01$) and among those whose husband were more educated ($p<0.001$).

Many respondents had heard the messages related to girl child on mass media. The common mass media were TV, radio, newspaper, hoardings, magazine and pamphlets by 183 (61%), 55 (18.3%), 53 (17.7%), 28 (9.3%), 26 (8.7%) and 19 (6.3%) respectively. About half of the respondents (141; 47%) were aware of various government benefit plans for a girl child.

When the knowledge of women about sex determination during pregnancy by ultrasound was assessed, it was found that maximum (183; 61%) knew that it is illegal, 22 (7.3%) said that it is legal and the remaining (95; 31.7%) didn't knew about it. It was found that significantly more women from urban area ($p=0.005$), multigravida ($p=0.001$), higher educated women ($p=0.004$) & those with higher educated husband ($p<0.001$) knew that it is illegal to get an ultrasound done for sex determination during pregnancy. It was also found that 171 (57%) knew that sex ratio is decreasing in India, 36 (12%) said it is increasing, 20 (6.7%) said it is stable while the remaining (73; 24.3%) didn't knew about it.

About three-fourth (235; 78.3%) women wanted to have only two children in their life; while 16 (5.3%) wanted one child, 42 (14%) wanted three children and 7 (2.3%) wanted four children. Thus, majority (251; 83.7%) women wanted ≤ 2 children and only 49 (16.3%) wanted > 2 children. There was a positive correlation with the number of children which they said that their husband wants to have ($r=0.697$, $p<0.001$). A significantly higher proportion of respondents whose last child was a female ($p=0.01$) and who had low literacy status ($p=0.01$), had desire of more than two children (**Table 2**). It was found that 176 (58.7%) respondents wanted to have one male child in their life, 38 (12.7%) wanted two and 4 (1.3%) wanted three male children, while 82 (27.3%) respondents had no preference.

Table II: Factors associated with the desired number of total children which the respondents want to have.

S. No.	Factor	≤ 2 children n (%)	> 2 children n (%)	Total n	p [#]
1.	Background				0.08
	Urban	152 (86.9)	23 (13.1)	175	
	Rural	99 (79.2)	26 (20.8)	125	
2.	Education of female				0.01
	Illiterate	35 (77.8)	10 (22.2)	45	
	≤ 10 th	144 (80.5)	35 (19.5)	179	
	> 10 th	72 (94.7)	4 (5.3)	76	
3.	Occupation of female				0.49
	Working	29 (87.9)	4 (12.1)	33	
	Housewife	222 (83.1)	45 (16.9)	267	
4.	Type of family				0.24
	Nuclear	110 (86.6)	17 (13.4)	127	
	Joint	141 (81.5)	32 (18.5)	173	
5.	Sex of the last child *				0.01
	Male	54 (88.5)	7 (11.5)	61	
	Female	49 (71.0)	20 (29.0)	69	
6.	Pregnancy status				0.24
	Primigravida	146 (85.8)	24 (14.2)	170	
	Multigravida	105 (80.8)	25 (19.2)	130	
	TOTAL	251 (83.7)	49 (16.3)	300	

* Total for this variable is 130, which is the number of women who were multigravida.

p<0.05 was considered as significant

DISCUSSION

In the present study, it was encouraging to note that majority (78.3%) respondents wanted to have two children in their life and none of them was in favor of more than four children. However, it was found that about two-third respondents wanted to have at least one son. Similar findings were observed among mothers in West Bengal in India. (5)

In the present study, 43% pregnant women wanted to have a male child as outcome of the present pregnancy. However, 58.5% of the pregnant women in Gujarat (India) (6) and 56% women in the slums of Chandigarh (India) showed preference to male child (7). The reason for the difference in the finding is that an option of 'No specific preference' was kept in the present study which would have diluted the percentage that would have been obtained if no such option had been given. However, the number of women clearly expressing a male child preference (129), even when the option of expressing no preference was available, was nearly four times more than those having a female preference (35). Not only India, but other countries like China have also attracted the most intense media attention and scrutiny for the son preference and the consequent problems. (8,9)

In the present study, factors associated with male preference were low literacy status of females and the sex of the last born child being female. Similar results were also seen in some previous studies in India, (6,7) and also in other countries (8,10). Mothers' education is the single most significant factor in reducing son preference (11). It was found that none of the respondent whose last born child was a female wanted to have a female child in present pregnancy ($p < 0.001$). Similar results were found in a previous study which revealed that all the mothers with a daughter and no son desired for a boy child (5). Male preference was found to be significantly associated with multiparity ($p < 0.001$). This data is also supported by the fact that the yearly sex ratio figures continue to be close to normal for first parity births but become increasingly unbalanced for higher order births. (9)

When the knowledge of women about sex determination was assessed, it was found that 61% knew that it was illegal while only 16.4% women attending the rural health centre in Chandigarh were aware of the legal punishment/penalty for determining sex (7). The difference can be because of the fact that the present study was conducted in a tertiary hospital in Delhi and 58% of the respondents were from urban area as compared to the latter study conducted in a rural health centre.

CONCLUSIONS

It is a disconcerting finding of the study that not only the family members but also the pregnant women themselves have more preference towards male child, which is not related with the urban or rural background of the respondent. Sex of the last born child being female was significantly more associated with male preference. Also, low literacy status of women was found to be significantly associated with male preference. Efforts to improve the female literacy status can be a good investment to make the outlook of women towards the yet-to-be-born girl child more positive.

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