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Research article

SEX PREFERENCES AMONG RURAL COMMUNITY: PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL CONCERN

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sex preference is choice of selecting the sex of children by their parents or family members. The objective of the study was to study the existence of sex preference among rural community. **Material and methods:** A Cross-sectional study was carried out among 200 ever married women of reproductive age group. Random digits sampling method was used to select 10 villages in Rahata Tehsil of Ahmednagar, while systematic sampling was applied for selection of 20 samples in each village. **Results:** In the previous sex preference for male child was 37.3%, 58.75%, 88.5%, 100% and 100% from firstchild to fifth respectively, while female preference and either sex preference was decreasing. In the current sex preference for male, female and either was 36.8%, 25% and 38.2% respectively. Future sex preference was 40.9% for male child, 22.7% for female child and 36.4% for either sex. The main reason for son preference was for old age care and support, to continue the family name and earning member in the family. **Conclusion:** Study confirms that son preference still exists in the rural community of Maharashtra. Attitude for son preference is mainly because of the economic earning, old age care and continuation of the family name among all groups.

Keywords: Fertility preference, Sex preference, Son preference

INTRODUCTION

Sex preference is choice of selecting the sex of children by their parents or family members. It is observed from historical evidences that, human beings have tried to influence the sex of their offspring's, through termination of pregnancy, infanticide and neglected care. In the mid of the 20th century, due to revolution in technologies, easy detection of sex in pregnancy became possible which then led to sex selective abortion's. Parents mostly prefer male child and ultimately the sex ratio is imbalanced. Son preference, low status of women, social and financial security associated with sons, socio-cultural practices, including a dowry and

violence against women are the major reasons for the imbalance in sex ratio.^[1,2,3]

Though the sex selective abortion is a fairly modern phenomenon, its roots can be traced back to the age old practice of female infanticide.^[1] One of the major causes of son preference in India is related to the perceived economic utility of having sons and old age care. Indian men are also responsible for the funeral rites of their parents and are the only ones who can light the funeral pyre.^[1,2,4]

Sex preference is the social issue and it is also a bad indicator of a healthy society. Hence, this study was carried out to study the existence of sex preference

among rural community of Rahata tehsil of Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Type of study: The cross-sectional study was carried out in the rural community of Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra (November 2013 to April 2014).

Sample size: The sample size was calculated by $n = z^2 pq/d^2$, where $p=0.59$, $q=0.41$, $d=0.07$ and $z=1.96$. 10 villages were selected by simple random sampling (random digits) method, while in each village 20 samples were selected by a systematic sampling method. This study was carried out among 200 ever married women who had a child less than five years old (unsterilized mother) or had no child.

Ethical approval: Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Research Committee prior to research. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained during the interview process and participation in the study was voluntary.

Methodology: All the respondents were interviewed with semi-structured questionnaire, which included 37 questions. Sex preference related questions were taken from NFHS-3 survey, other related research and some were designed by research guide and myself and pilot study was conducted in 15 sample cases; final correction was made and approved by institutional research committee. Collected data was analyzed by using SPSS software (version 21).

RESULTS

Socio-demographic information: Among the total respondent, 51.5% were of the age 20-25 years, followed by 23.5% (15-20 years), 21% (25-30 years) and the remaining were above 30 years old. Nearly one third of respondent got married at age less than 18 years i.e. 34.5% of total respondent and remaining got married at age of 18 and more than 18 years. Among total respondents, 7% were illiterate, 3.5% were educated up to primary level, 69% educated up to secondary level, 12.5% higher secondary level and 8% above the higher secondary level. 81% of the respondents were housewife, 8.5% daily wage labour, 6% agriculture worker and remaining were govt. and private job holder. Among the total, 39% of the families were dependent on daily wages, 38.5% had a small business, while 16% had private job, 9.5% had farming and 4.5% had a

government job. 66% of respondents belong to above poverty line, while 34% belongs to below poverty line.

Previous sex preferences: Previous sex preference is the preference of a particular sex for a previous pregnancy by individuals, couple or family. Out of 200 respondents in the study, 159 respondents had at least one child.

Table1: Birth order of children for previous fertility

Birth order of child	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total children(%)
1 st Child	84 (52.8)	75 (47.1)	n=159 (100)
2 nd Child	29 (36.2)	51 (63.7)	n=80 (100)
3 rd Child	9 (34.6)	17 (65.3)	n=26 (100)
4 th Child	1 (16.6)	5 (83.3)	n=6 (100)
5 th Child	1 (50)	1 (50)	n=2 (100)
Total children	124 (45.4)	149(54.5)	N=273 (100)

The reasons for more than two children were, 76.9% respondents continued for more than two children because they wanted a son, 15.4% wanted more children, while 7.7% had other reasons.

Table2: Sex preference of children in previous fertility

Preference	1 st child	2 nd child	3 rd child	4 th child	5 th child	Total
Male(%)	60 (37.7)	47 (58.75)	23 (88.5)	6 (100)	2 (100)	138 (50.5)
Female(%)	19 (11.9)	19 (23.75)	2 (7.7)	0	0	40 (14.65)
Either(%)	80 (50.3)	14 (17.5)	1 (3.8)	0	0	95 (34.79)
Total(%)	159 (100)	80 (100)	26 (100)	6 (100)	2 (100)	273 (100)

Table-2 revealed that; male child preference up to fifth child has increased drastically. Male child preference for the fourth and fifth children was 100%. This may be in the case of families who were waiting for a son.

Table 3: Sex preference for second child VS sex of first child

Sex of first child	Preference for second child			Total	Outcome of 2 nd child
	Male	Female	Either		
Male (%)	7 (18.9)	18 (48.6)	12 (32.4)	37	29 (36.3)
Female(%)	40 (93)	1 (2.3)	2 (4.7)	43	51 (63.7)
Total (%)	47(59)	19 (23.8)	14 (17.5)	80	80 (100)

$$\chi^2 = 45.329, \text{ d. f.} = 2, P = < 0.001 \text{ (CL=95\%)}$$

Among 200 respondents, 80 had at least two children. Those women who had two children, the sex preference for second child was very high and mainly women who had first female child, 93% of them wanted to have a second child as male.

Current sex preference: Current sex preference is preference of sex of baby for the current pregnancy. Among 200 respondents in the study, 76 respondents (women) were pregnant. Out of which, 36.8% wanted male child, 25% wanted female child, while remaining 38.2% wanted either sex. For the current pregnancy, sex of the baby was mostly preferred by the couple that is 63.2%, followed by 22.4% by all family members, 7.9% by the husband alone and 6.6% by herself.

Table 4: Current sex preference among respondents had one child

Sex of first child	Current sex preference			Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Either (%)	
Male	3 (10.3)	14 (48.3)	12 (41.4)	29
Female	18 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	18
Total	21 (44.7)	14 (29.8)	12 (25.5)	47

$\chi^2 = 36.118$, d. f. = 2, P = < 0.001 (CL=95%)

Those who had a male child at their first pregnancy (29), among them 10.3% wanted a male child again, 48.3% wanted female child and 41.4% wanted either sex. Those who have a female child at their first pregnancy (18), all 100% respondents wanted a male child in their current pregnancy. The chi-square test was applied to find out the association between sex of the first child and preference of the current pregnancy, it was found statistically significant.

Future sex preferences: Future sex preference is the desire for particular sex of the future baby by individuals, couple or family. Among the total respondents (200) of study, 110 i.e. 55% did not want any more children, 37.5% want one child, 6% want two children and 0.5% want three children, while 1% were not decided at the time of interview.

Table 5: Sex preference for future birth order

Sex preference	First child	Second child	Third child
Male(%)	36 (40.9)	2 (15.4)	1 (100)
Female(%)	20 (22.7)	3 (23.1)	0
Either(%)	32 (36.4)	8 (61.5)	0
Total(%)	88 (100)	13 (100)	1 (100)

There were 88 women who want at least one child in the future, among them 40.9% want male child,

22.72% want female child while remaining wants either sex. There were 13 women who want at least two children, among that 15.38% want male child, 23.07% want a female child, while 61.53% wants either.

Table 6: Sex preference future child who had one child

Sex of First child	Future preference			Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Either (%)	
Male	2 (8.3)	16 (66.7)	6 (25)	24 (100)
Female	28 (93.3)	0 (0)	2 (6.7)	30 (100)
Total	30 (55.6)	16 (29.6)	8 (14.8)	54 (100)

The respondents who had one child and desire for the second child were 54, among those respondents who had one female child, 93.3% of respondents preferred male child in the future.

Attitude towards sex preferences: According to the majority of respondents, they preferred male child in old age care and support, i.e. 66.5%, to continue the family name (47%), active and earning member of the family (26%), other reasons were business, agriculture, funeral values, societal values etc.

Reasons for preference of daughter was to take care of family i.e. 38.5%, attachment with the mother (35%), daughter as a son (20%), old age care (8.5%), daughter work hard in the family (7%), societal value related to daughter (6%), take care of two families (6%) and other reasons (8.5%) while 1.5% respondent doesn't mention any reason or they don't know.

The main reasons behind for not preferring a female child was dowry (25.5%), she goes to her husband's house (27.5%), burden for family (21%), not earning member (4%) other reasons (3%).

DISCUSSION

A sex preference is the main reason for decreased sex ratio in India.^[5] From study, it is observed that, more than half of the respondents had no preference for sex. However, sex preference for male child was high. A similar study was conducted in rural Maharashtra among men showed; 53.8% preferred son.^[6] Another study was conducted among men and women in rural area of Andhra Pradesh with regard to sex preference for first child, 70% men and 55% of women wanted first male child, which is more than this study.^[7] Research conducted in Chandigarh also

showed that, 57.8% of mother wanted a first baby as a boy and only 14.4% wanted a baby as a girl.^[8] Sex preference of the second child mainly depends on the sex of a first child and preference is comparatively very high in the second child. From table-2, it is seen that sex preference for male child become stronger for second child. A similar phenomenon was seen for a third, fourth and fifth child. This study revealed that women who had more than three children continued in want of only a male child.

The current sex preference was, 36.8% wanted male child, 25% wanted female child and 38.2% wanted either. Among those women who had one child, and currently pregnant; the sex preference was also very high. 100% women who had a first female child preferred male child on current pregnancy. They think at least one son needs for the family. 'A study on ideal sex composition' showed that, 59.8% wanted at least two sons and 31.1% wanted one son while 87.1% of women wanted at least one daughter.^[9]

Sex preference for future children among the total respondents who had a desire for future children was 40.9% for male child, 22.7% for female child and 36.36% for either sex. A study conducted in Bangladesh among men, 31.5% prefer son, 1.4% daughter while remaining 66.9% had no preferences.^[10] From cross-table (Table-6), it revealed that 93.3% respondent those who had one female child and willing to have a second child, they preferred male child.

The most common reason for preferring a male child was the old age care and support (66.5%), to continue the family name (47%), economically active and earning member for family (26%), agriculture work (1.5%), business (2.5%), societal values (3.5%), funeral values (1.5%) and other reasons were 9%. A similar study was conducted in rural area of Pune district of Maharashtra; the reasons for son preference were 'support in old age' i.e. 57.14%, while demand for male child by 'other family member and community' (32.88%).^[11] In another study in Maharashtra showed that, 46% of men reported strong son preference for supporting each other, while another 23% preferred for old age support and 21% felt that there is a risk of survival of the child and remaining 8% felt the need of sons for continuity of the family name.^[6] A research conducted in Gujarat found the reasons for male child preference was

social responsibilities carried out by male (42.5%), family name continues (23%), dependable in old age (16%), pressure from family (11%), to perform the cremation (4%), dowry (3%) and females are economic liability (3%).^[12] Number of studies conducted all over the India, the reason for the son preference was nearly same.

In this study the reasons for female child preference were to take care of family (38.5%), attachment to the mother (35%), daughter as a son (20%), daughter is lovely in the family (15%), old age care (8.5%), to take care of two families (6%), societal values (6%) and other reasons (8.5%). A research conducted in rural area of Pune; the most common reason for preference of girl child was 'like girl child' i.e. 62.38%.^[11] The belief of people now slowly changing that only son can take care of parents and support the family. Care taking by son is in alarming condition in our society, while the responsibility of taking care of parents is taken by daughter. So people also prefer the daughter, but still daughter preference is low.

The reasons for not preferring a female child was 'she goes to her husband's house' (27.5%), 'dowry' (25.5%), 'burden for family' (21%), 'not earning member' (4%) and other reasons (2%). Indian society is patrilineal and patriarchal, where sons carry the family name and task of supporting their parents in old age. Parents live as extended families with their sons, daughter-in-laws, and grandchildren. On the other hand, parents of girls are typically socially bound to find suitable husbands for their daughters at an early age, often pay all marriage costs, and provide a dowry. Social norms dictate that parents cannot expect much emotional or economic and further contribution to their birth parent from married daughters, who typically move into and become part of their husband's household.^[2,3,13,14]

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that son preference exists in the rural community of Maharashtra. Desire for next child remains high where the percentage of female children in previous fertility were high and the desire for next child comes down with previous fertility with a male child. Attitude for son preference is mainly because of the economic earning, old age care and continuation of the family name among all groups.

Social beliefs and sociocultural practices are the reasons for not preferring a female child.

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