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Son Preference and its Socioeconomic Determinants in Eastern Indian

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Abstract:
Son preference means favoring male child over female child. There are enough evidences to reveal that most Indian couples have a strong preference for sons over daughters and this practice may affect demographic behavior of parents' and children's health as well. This paper aims to examine prevalence of son preference in the four states (Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal) of India and it also aims to examine the factors that influence preference of sons over daughters.

1. Introduction
Son preference means favoring male child over female child. Son preference is generally prevalent in a patriarchal society wherein male child has culturally accepted advantage and economic potential. It is especially prevalent in south Asia, East Asia and North Africa whereas there is balanced sex composition of children. There are enough evidences to reveal that most Indian couples have a strong preference for sons over daughters and this practice may affect demographic behavior of parents' and children's health as well. Some of devastating outcomes of son preference are induced abortions and consequent skewed child sex ratios and even high fertility rate where induced abortion is not so prevalent.

2. Previous Studies
Altekar (1959) has observed that in ancient times in all patriarchal societies the birth of a girl was generally an unwelcome event whereas everywhere the son was valued more than the daughter. Clarke (1960, p.29) has observed that in almost all the countries of the world a family is considered complete on the attainment of a son. The similar findings by Josi and Saroja (1968) that the couples were less likely to limit their families until they had attained the desired number of sons and they revealed a clear preference for sons. Arora Gomati (1990) in her study explored the relationships between various aspects of social structure viz family structure, son preference, caste, socio-economic status, occupation, age at marriage, mobility and fertility behavior. She enlisted the following reasons for son preference- (A) to continue the family lineage: (B) to perform funeral ceremonies (C) to contribute to the family income and (D) to provide support to parents in their old ages.
G.N.Ramu (1998) in his study has emphasized on values of children (values of sons) and fertility behavior. He maintained that children are the expression of Masculinity and Femininity. As family size is associated with son preference, he found that the preferred average number of children by wives was 3.2 and by husbands 2.8. This study shows one of the small family mindedness. Richard Anker and Martha Anker (1982) study focused on two castes groups Patidars, a high caste and Barias a lower caste. It was found that the average ideal family size in the sample was only 3.2 and there was very strong son preference tendency. The sex ratio at birth was1.08, the ratio of idea number of sons to ideal numbers daughter's was 1.86. Fifty- three percent of the respondents gave three children as their family size and 74 percent gave two sons as ideal. Patidars had a lower ideal family size (2.8 vs. 3.5) and a lower number of sons (2.0vs 2.2) than Barias. The differences are significant at the .001 and .05 level of significant to a two sample t-test. Lahiri (1974) conducted of 16,000 husbands in India also confirmed strong preferences for a son. According to above study, two sons and one daughter were considered ideal by Indian husbands. Mallika Chavada et al. (2009) carried out a study to know the effect of socio-cultural factors on the preference of the sex of the children by women in Ahmadabad district of Gujarat. It was found that 88 percent of the total women under study held view of son preference.93 percent of illiterate women preferred male child whereas 69 percent of the women who completed graduation had the preference for son. Their study found that education, place of residence and cultural factors play a role in son- preference.
F. Van Balen et al. (2003) analyzed the developments in the field of reproductive technology regarding sex selection and investigate their consequences for offspring-preference behavior, in the light of compelling data that demonstrate ongoing patterns of son preference/daughter discrimination around the world, particularly in Asia. They argued that whatever the rules, parents

have been trying to influence the sex of their offspring throughout recorded human history, and they will probably continue to do so in even greater numbers as each new and improved reproductive technology for sex selection becomes available.

Elisabeth Croll (2000) in her book Endangered Daughters: Discrimination and Development in Asia, she powerfully demonstrates that discrimination against daughters, as manifested in increasing g excesses of female mortality before birth, at birth, and in infancy and childhood, has continued to rise, even with significant economic and educational improvements in both countries china and India. According to Croll, the reasons for son preference in china and India include – to worship ancestors and carry on the family line, virilocal marriage patterns, the perceived economic value of sons and concomitant perceived economic burden of daughters.

M Shah (2005) in his study son preference and its consequences (A REVIEW) argued that preferential sex treatment may lead to several problems while taking its consequences on human behavior, personality build up, economic implications and family size. But according to him, the followings could be the utmost consequences of son preference or preferential sex treatment.-First, frustration amongst females and second, increased fertility rate and larger family size.

Sidney B. et al (2007) in their Asia Pacific Issue entitled, "how does son preference affect populations in Asia?" argued that son preference has resulted in unusually high death rates for female infants and girls. And thus, resulting gender imbalances have led to concerns that a shortage of women will make it difficult for men to find wives. According to them population projections and survey data suggest that falling fertility and women's reluctance to marry have a much larger effect than sex-selective abortion on the availability of women in the marriage market.

3. Data and Methodology

This paper is based on the nationwide survey database i.e. District Level Household and Facility Survey (DLHS-3), 2007-08. The practice of son preference was extracted from asking ever married women "would you prefer your next child to be girl or boy or it doesn't matter". The dependent variable has four outcomes viz., boys, girls, doesn't matter and up to God. For the sake of convenience only three responses were taken into consideration. The gross results were obtained by cross tabulation of independent variables such as type of locality, age of mothers, birth orders, social and religious groups, education of parents and wealth index by dependent variable. For the net of effects of independent variables on dependent variable, multinomial logistic regression has been used to analyze the data. Son preference index (SPI) was computed to examine preference of sons over daughters. It is defined as the ratio of the number of mothers who preferred the next child to be male to the number of mothers who preferred the next child to be female.

4. Results

Variables	Sex Preferred						
	Sons		Daughters		Doesn't Matter		SPI
Type of Locality	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Rural	18371	52.8	4495	12.9	11933	34.3	4.1
Urban	2746	39.4	1009	14.5	3206	46.1	2.7
Mothers' Age							
15-19	3723	44.2	1046	12.4	3656	43.4	3.6
20-29	13861	51.1	3847	14.2	9423	34.7	3.6
30-39	3215	57.4	576	10.3	1808	32.3	5.6
40-49	318	52.7	34	5.6	251	41.6	9.4
Birth Order							
1	6031	49.2	2471	20.1	3764	30.7	2.4
2	3948	63.8	954	15.4	1285	20.8	4.1
3	2338	77.5	284	9.4	395	13.1	8.2
4	115	81.3	108	7.6	157	11.1	1.1
>=5	875	79.3	66	6	163	14.8	13.3
Social Groups							
SCs	4675	53.9	1124	13	2876	3.2	4.2
STs	3821	48	1125	14.1	3014	37.9	3.4
OBCs	8982	54.7	1771	10.8	5665	34.5	5.1
Others	3292	42.3	1245	16	3240	41.7	2.6
Religious Groups							

Hindus	17526	51.4	4197	12.3	12396	36.3	4.2
Muslims	2283	46.1	831	16.8	1836	37.1	2.7
Christian & Sikh	423	44.9	152	16.1	368	39	2.8
Others	9	25.7	8	22.9	18	51.4	1.1
Mothers' Education							
No Schooling	102	62.6	21	12.9	40	24.5	4.9
1-5	3176	50.3	819	13	2316	36.7	3.9
6-10	4882	43.5	1828	16.3	4506	40.2	2.7
>=11	1068	32.6	550	16.8	1663	50.7	1.9
Fathers' Education							
No Schooling	62	60.2	12	11.7	29	28.2	5.2
1-5	3929	52	1007	13.3	222	34.7	3.9
6-10	7605	49.9	2104	13.8	5543	36.3	3.6
>=11	2563	40.8	944	15	2776	44.2	2.7

Variables	**Sex Preferred**						
	Sons		**Daughters**		**Doesn't Matter**		**SPI**
Working Status	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Yes	2196	54.8	545	13.6	1264	31.6	4.0
No	13185	47.6	3775	13.6	10739	38.8	3.5
Wealth Index							
Poor	14357	54.9	3106	11.9	8704	33.3	4.6
Middle	3238	50	892	13.8	2346	36.2	3.6
Rich	3521	38.6	1506	16.5	4089	44.9	2.3
Total	21117	50.6	5504	13.2	15139	36.3	3.8
Eastern States							
Bihar	9378	59.2	1624	10.2	4842	30.6	5.8
Jharkhand	5079	52.2	1412	14.5	3246	33.3	3.6
Orissa	4079	40.2	1052	10.4	5018	49.4	3.9
West Bengal	2580	42.8	1415	23.5	2033	33.7	1.8
Total	21116	50.6	5503	13.2	15139	36.3	3.8

Table 1
Source: Computed by Authors, (DLHS-3, 2007-08)

Table 1 reveals that there was rural-urban differential in preference of sons over daughters in eastern India. The people living in rural areas favored more sons than daughters. The mothers of middle age groups had the higher proportion of favoring sons over daughters as compared to the younger and older mothers. On average there was a direct relationship between birth orders and tendency of favoring male children over female children in eastern India.

As far as social groups is concerned, women belonging to OBC class of social groups had the higher proportion of favoring sons over daughters which was followed by SCs class of social groups. Others class of social groups had the least proportion of favoring male child over female child. There was religious differential in practice of favoring sons over daughters wherein women belonging to the Hindu religion had the highest proportion of favoring male child over female ones. The reasons for this may be attributed to some religious acts that are performed by sons only according to Hindu mythology in Hindu religion.

There was an inverse relationship between practice of son's preference and completed years of schooling of parents. It means as the education level rising, the proportion of parents favoring sons over daughters is decreasing. Not only mothers' education shows its impacts on gender differentiation in having children but fathers' education also lowering practice of son preference in eastern states of India.

Working mothers had higher proportion of favoring male child over female child as compared to their non working counterpart. On the other hand, there is indirect relationship between practice of sons over daughters and wealth index. It means for wealthy people sex of child doesn't has to say in their life. There is regional differential in preferring sons over daughters. It is worthy to note that Bihar remained at top (59.2%) followed by Jharkhand (52.2) and Orissa remained at bottom in terms of favoring sons over daughters.

Variables	Next child to be			
	Boys		Girls	
Type of Locality	S.E.	Exp(β)	S.E.	Exp(β)
Rural	0.064	1.651***	0.08	1.691***
Urban	Reference Category			
Mothers' Age				
15-19	0.891	0.443	1.008	0.454
20-29	0.888	0.379	1.005	0.385
30-39	0.893	0.482	1.012	0.375
40-49	Reference Category			
Birth Order				
1	0.317	0.138***	0.479	0.896
2	0.318	0.310***	0.481	1.009
3	0.331	0.630	0.499	1.075
4	0.366	0.769	0.564	0.764
>=5	Reference Category			
Social Groups				
SCs	0.077	1.087	0.094	1.291**
STs	0.112	1.143	0.137	1.342*
OBCs	0.063	1.065	0.079	1.099
Others	Reference Category			
Religious Groups				
Hindus	0.796	2.352	0.98	3.415
Muslims	0.800	1.168	0.985	2.819
Christian & Sikh	0.810	1.465	0.994	3.752
Others	Reference Category			

Variables	Next child to be			
	Boys		Girls	
Mother's Schooling	S.E.	Exp(β)	S.E.	Exp(β)
No Schooling	0.332	1.072	0.437	0.804
1-5	0.098	1.113	0.121	0.818
6-10	0.079	1.151	0.095	1.042
>=11	Reference Category			
Fathers' Education				
No Schooling	0.515	1.055	0.649	0.882
1-5	0.093	1.119	0.115	1.102
6-10	0.066	1.119	0.081	1.097
>=11	Reference Category			
Wealth Index				
Poor	0.074	1.107	0.091	0.989
Middle	0.073	1.135	0.091	0.962
Rich	Reference Category			
Eastern States				
Bihar	0.068	1.737***	0.087	1.55***

Jharkhand	0.084	2.543***	0.098	3.514***
Orissa	0.073	1.383***	0.093	1.405***
West Bengal	Reference Category			

Table 2: Results of Multinomial Logistic Regression taking next child to be boys or girls or doesn't matter as dependent variable
*P<0.001***, p<0.01**, p<0.05*, Source: Computed by Authors*

5. Discussion

Table 2 shows the results obtained from Multinomial Logistic Regression taking choice of mothers for their next child to be boys or girls or it doesn't matter as dependent variable. The last category i.e., doesn't matter has been taken as the reference category for the analysis. The final Model Chi- square in the table termed Model fitting information confirmed there was overall relationship between dependent variable and set of independent variables. Likelihood ratio test confirmed statistically significance relationship between dependent variables and independent variables.

Women from rural area were more likely to prefer boys than the women from rural areas to which sex of the child didn't matter. Women with 1 and 2 birth orders were less likely to have male child as compared to women with 1 and 2 birth orders for whom sex of child didn't matter.

Women from three states viz, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa were more likely to desire for sons over daughters as compared to women belonging to these same states and for them there was no difference with male and female children.

In terms of desire for girl children, women from rural areas more likely to have male child as compared to women from rural areas who didn't differentiate between to sex. SCs and STs were more likely to have girl's children as compared to compared to SCs and STs for who sex of child didn't matter. Women belonging to states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa were more likely to have girl child as compared to women of the states who didn't desire for particular sex of children.

6. Conclusion

The practice of preferring sons over daughter was prevalent in the eastern Indian states (Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal). There was rural-urban and gender differentiation in practice of preferring male child over female child. There were differential in son preference by social and religious groups. There was an inverse relationship between desire for sons and parents' years schooling and wealth index. Some of the factors viz type of locality, birth orders for sons and type of locality and social groups for daughters were significantly related. Son preference index (SPI) is the function of the number women desired sons and the daughters. The number of women desiring sons is taken as numerator and number of women desiring daughters taken as denominator. So, whenever larger women desired sons, ultimately women desired for daughters will be lesser and hence SPI will be higher.

Son preference is one of the evil of the society has potential to disturb demographic composition of the society and nation as well. It also induces gender discrimination. So, parents should be made aware of gender sensitivity and practice of son preference should retarded in interests of balanced sex ration.

7. References

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