



# DETERMINANTS OF GENDER PREFERENCE AND DECLINING SEX RATIO IN JAMMU (J&K)

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**Abstract:** The present study was undertaken to know the determinants of gender preference and declining sex ratio on a sample of 800 respondents including 600 family members, 100 ICDS functionaries and 100 community members. The sample was selected from 6 ICDS blocks of Jammu District. Multistage random sampling technique was used to draw sample for the study. A self-devised interview schedule and interview guide were used as a tool for data collection. Findings revealed that to carry family name and lineage, to perform the funeral rites of parents and to provide support in old age were the major reasons for male child preference. Daughters were not preferred due to escalating demands of dowry, increasing financial pressure and increase in sexual violence. Respondents were aware about the phenomenon of declining sex ratio. Various socio-cultural and economic factors essentially contributing to the declining sex ratio mentioned by the respondents were dowry, financial pressure, sex selective abortion followed by family pressure and obsessive desire for a son. Consequences regarding declining sex ratio perceived by the respondents were non-availability of brides in future and further increase in rate of crimes against girls.

**Key words:** Declining Sex Ratio, Determinants, ICDS, Gender preference, Jammu

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The girl child in India is treated right from her birth as an additional burden, an extra mouth to feed, a liability and another man's property (Yadav and Purohit, 2015). Son preference has been one of the most evident manifestations of patriarchal society. It has worked against the female sex particularly in their infancy and early childhood. A girl child is discriminated against in many ways-ranging from abandonment of girl children, fewer months of breastfeeding, less of nurturing and play, lesser medical treatment if females ill etc., all working against the very existence of girl child (Desai and Thakkar, 2001).

The matter of girl child has always been an inquiry. There is a strong preference for male child or "Male Syndrome" as son is regarded as valuable, while girl child is thought a responsibility (UNICEF, 2007). The age old male child preference is regarded by financial, religious, social and emotional wishes and norms that favour sons and makes daughters less advantageous. Parents hope for male child -but not for female child- to give economic and emotional care, especially in their old age; males add up to household luxury and possessions. While female children drain it through dowries; male children carry the family ancestry while

female children are after marriage go to another family; males perform significant religious roles; and protect or exercise the family's power while females have to be depended and safeguarded, creating a perceived burden on the family (Sarna, 2003; Pande and Malhotra, 2006 and Punam, 2014). Birth of a female in the household is unwanted and bringing up of a female child is thought to be "watering in neighbour's garden" (Chaudhary, 2012 and Singh et. al, 2015). This stereo type belief of women as "burden" is one of the major cause responsible for female foeticide (Salunkhe et. al, 2014). National Family Health Survey-3 Jammu and Kashmir support these arguments. The portion of ever married women (15-49 years) who prefer more male children than female children is 29% in opposition to 3.6% of those who prefer more female children (IIIPSb, 2006:46). This means that patriarchal ideology is all prevalent in Jammu and Kashmir. Experts have remarked that there is reduced girl child among the literate, urban elite where the family sizes have largely declined but the perverse culture, guided by an unpleasant and retrogressive mentality, of discerning adverse to the female child continues to persevere (Kashmir Times, 2011).

Today with the 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 and selective abortion, if found female (Desai and Thakkar, 2001). Progress in technology and diagnostic provisions have developed path for the female child enemies directing to grave disruptions in the gender ratio as a result of sex selective abortions. Wish for sons is exhibited so blatantly that families have no worry about repeated, closely spaced pregnancies, untimely loss of life and even aborting child before it is born (Singh et. al, 2015). This is occurring across the country regardless of an enormous influx of lawful ruling prohibiting the same (Srivastava et.al, 2011). With the arrival of privatization and commercialization, the use of sex determination methods is growing into a prospering profession in India (Anand, 2005). It is they who start publicity campaigns for pre natal gender discovering tests by putting up large hoardings of "Pay Rs. 5000/- now or Rs. 5 lakhs later". It is a shame that instead of criticizing it as a shameful act individuals patronize it and protect their movement by proverb "It is a blessing for parents who previously have girl children and do not desire more (Madan and Khanna, 2011).

Adverse sex ratio in any society reflects the prevalence of gender discrimination and the discriminatory and oppressive condition of women and girl children. It reflects how they are treated since childhood (Rani, 2017). India is one of the countries in the world where males outnumber females. It is evident that among the ten most populous countries of the world, India is at the lowest position among all in terms of sex ratio (Sharma, 2014). The overall sex ratio, which is now 940 in the high countrywide from the time of Census 1971 and a shade lesser than 1961 give reflection to a keep on male child preference (Sharma, 2011 and Mehta, 2017). Child sex ratio (0-6 years) is a more realistic indicator of trends of eradication of girls before birth. 15<sup>th</sup> Indian census indicates that the sex ratio of children has dropped from 927 in 2001 to 914-the lowest ever since independence reveals continued preference for a son. In 1961, there were 978 girls/1000 boys, by 2011 the number had declined to 914. Till the 1980's, the sex ratio of children was much greater than the overall sex ratio then it starts diminishing (Kashmir Times, 2011). The education level has jumped up from 64.83% in 2001 to 74.04% in 2011 Census (Sinha, 2011). The gender ratio is specifically lowest among parents where first child is a female in comparison to parents who have a male as their first child (Jha et. al, 2011). The tradition of elimination of female child before birth is presumed to be one of the leading reasons for the adverse juvenile sex ratio (Balodi and Balodi, 2013).

The number of females per thousand males in Jammu and Kashmir according to 2011 census is 883 and it was 892 in 2001, the general figure shows a decline as compared to Census 2001 (Daily Excelsior, 2014). The sex ratio of children (0-6) years in Jammu and Kashmir has also dropped to 859 from 941, making it third defeat place in the nation after Haryana (830) and Punjab (846) (Kashmir Times, 2011). On the other hand, Jammu and Kashmir is well on path of reaching 100 percent literacy rate from 55 to 68.74 percent in year 2011. At district level, it shows that sex ratio of children has decreased in all districts of J&K, which places them at an alarming place. 2011 census figures reflect that in Jammu, the female child sex ratio declined to 795 in 2011 from 819 in 2001 which indicates prevalence of sex selective abortions. In Jammu

region, six districts out of ten have juvenile sex ratio below 900 (source: [www.pcndtjk.in/statistics.php?link=static](http://www.pcndtjk.in/statistics.php?link=static)).

Reduction in the number of females is worse in the urban areas of Jammu and Kashmir than the rural areas. It shows that practice of identification of sex of foetus has increased common in the literate parts of J&K (Jarul, 2012). The continually deteriorating sex ratio is a proof to the malfunction of laws against prenatal sex determination and large scale occurrences of female foeticides nevertheless of fact that PNDDT act ban gender selection which show not just the deficiency of present laws in J&K but also an entire communal and authorised undesirable response to the awfully troubling situation. Declining sex ratio is a relatively crucial state. However the catastrophe is actual, and its persistence has dangerous and shocking repercussions for the society and the future of humankind because an unfair gender ratio not only predicts financial and communal tragedy but also mean an uncertain upcoming and a deprived quality of life for remaining girls and their potential.

The current trends in sex ratio reflect the drop in the number of females which directly indicates the prevalence of discrimination against them. Keeping in view the above said facts, the present investigation was planned on 600 family members (including 200 mothers, 200 fathers and 200 grandmothers), 100 ICDS functionaries (100 Anganwadi workers) and 100 Community members (including 50 multipurpose health workers and 50 elected representatives) to get detailed information about factors responsible for gender preference and declining sex ratio. Sample subjects were selected as part of society, who either are accountable for this social sin or the ones who would end up this social evil.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The sample for the present study comprised of 600 family members (200 mothers, 200 fathers and 200 grandmothers), 100 ICDS Functionaries (100 Anganwadi workers), 100 Community members (50 Multipurpose health workers and 50 Elected representatives) from six ICDS blocks of Jammu district i.e. Gandhi Nagar, Jammu, Bishnah, Kot Bhalwal, R.S Pura and Marh. Multistage random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study.

### 2.1 TOOLS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

Selected subjects were contacted personally for data collection. Data was collected using a self-devised interview schedule and interview guide. Before finalising the tools, pre-testing was done on 10 percent of respondents to see the appropriateness of the interview schedule and interview guide in the form of additions and deletions keeping in mind the objectives of the study so that it could be used to get an in depth information required from the respondents and then the tools were finalised and applied on the respondents.

### 2.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Collected data was entered in Microsoft excel and analysed by using both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain detail knowledge about gender preference and deteriorating sex ratio.

## 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The perception of the respondents towards gender preference and declining sex ratio was drawn out by using an interview schedule and interview guide. The major aspects were investigated and related findings are detailed out below:

Fig 1 shows the age of the respondents. It reveals that majority of the respondents were in the age group of 21-40 years.

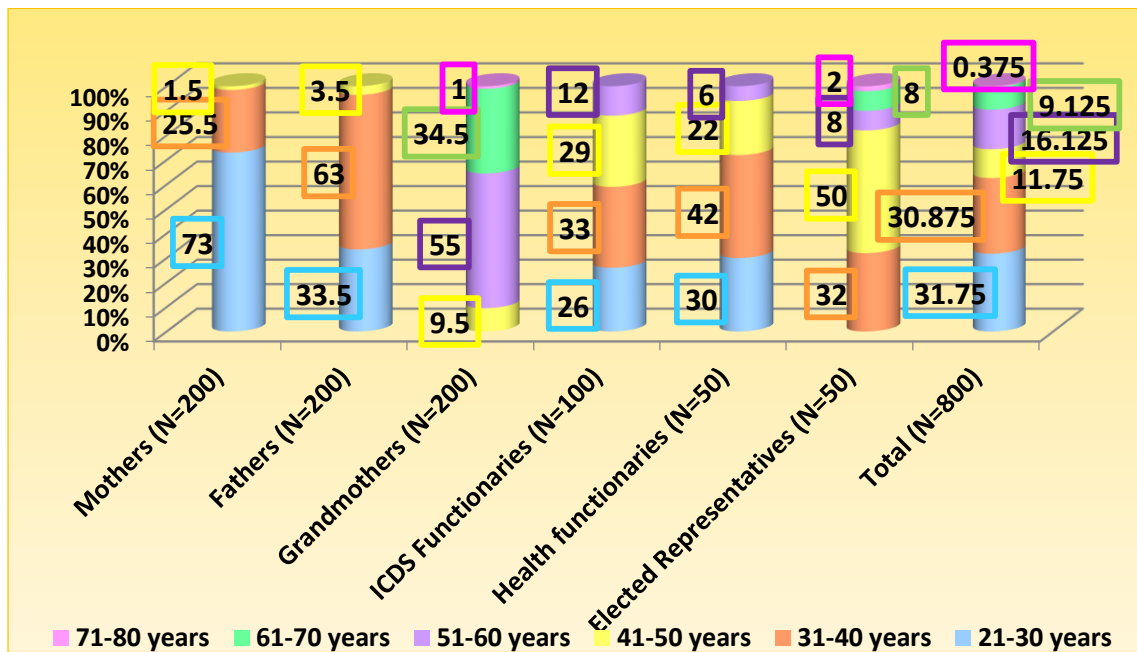


Fig 1: age wise distribution of respondents

Fig 2 shows educational qualification of respondents and indicated that (27.3%) respondents were qualified up to matric, (22.7%) were illiterate and (16.3%) were studied up to middle.

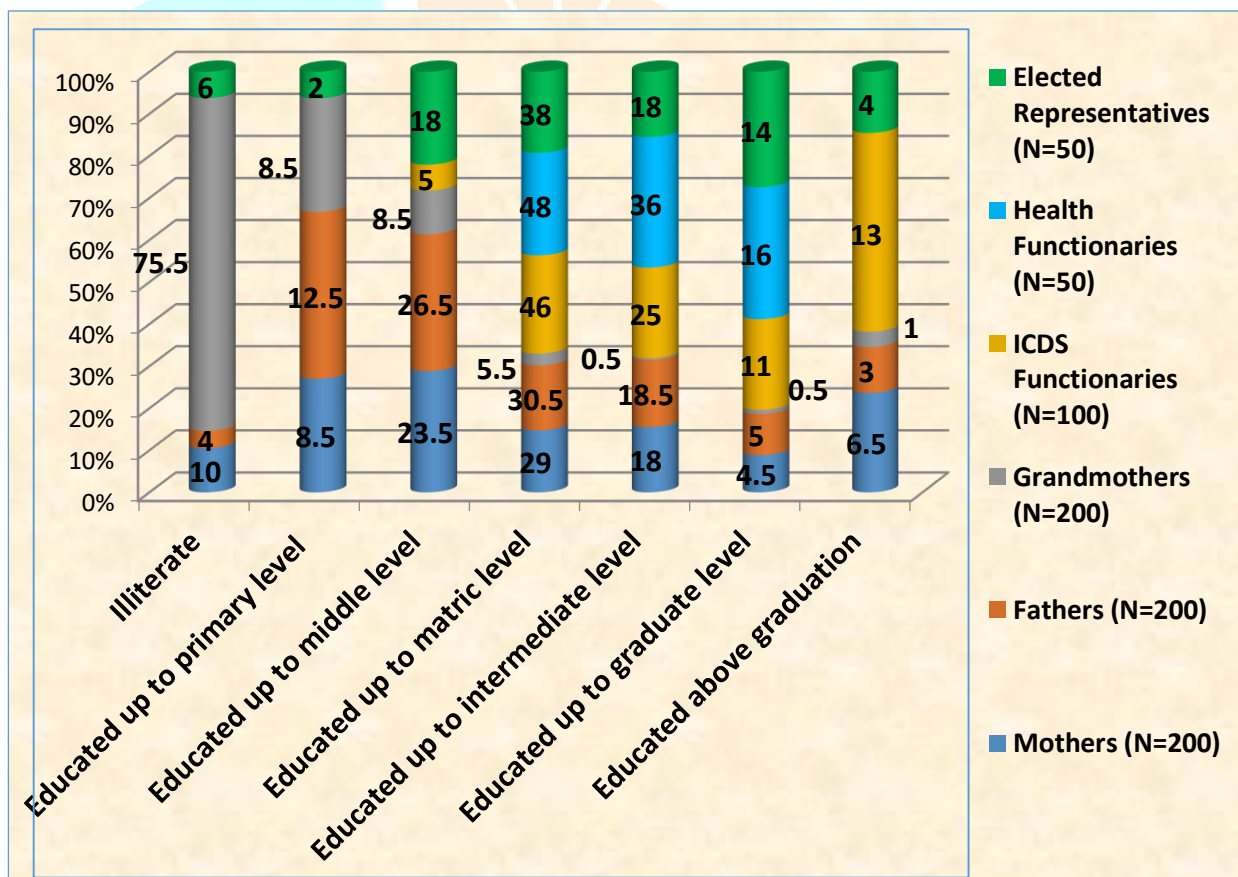


Fig 2: educational status of respondents

Fig 3 reveals that majority of mothers (90.5%) and grandmothers (95.5%) were home makers whereas greater percentage of fathers (55%) had their own business.



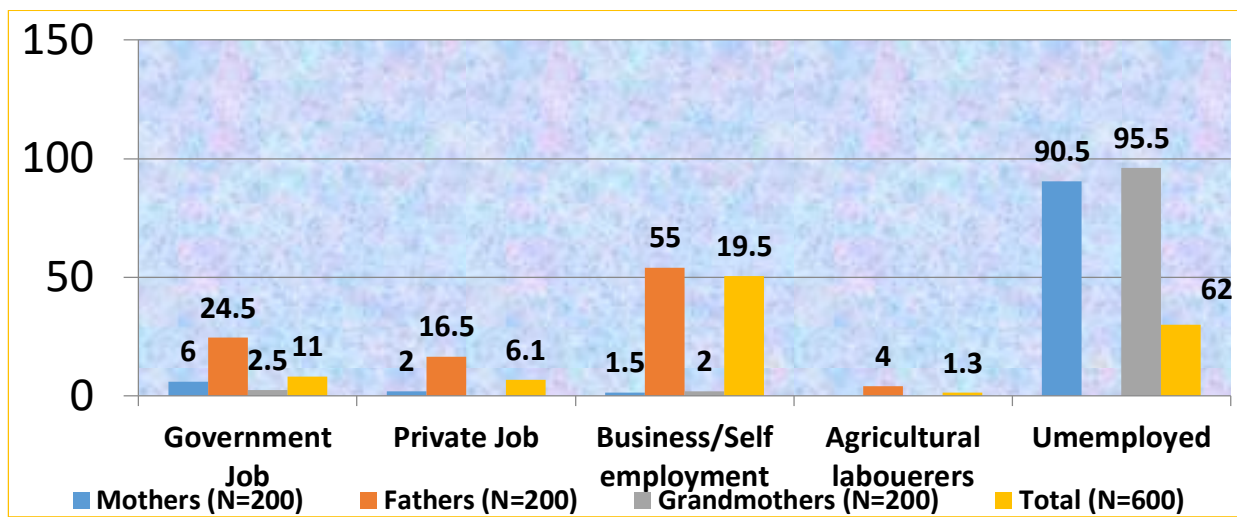


Fig 3: occupational status of respondents

Table 1 gives an insight into Family Members, ICDS Functionaries, Health Functionaries and Elected Representatives opinion on factors for male child preference. Majority of respondents were of the view point that son is preferred for carrying family name and lineage, performing the last rites of parents and economic support to old age parents. Similar results were also revealed by Pathania 2014, Manhas and Banoo 2013, Khichi and Bir 2012, Siddharam et.al 2011, Chaudhary et.al 2010.

Table 1: respondents opinion on factors for male child preference

Factors for male child preference	Group A			Group B			Total (N=800)
	Family Members			ICDS Functionaries	Health Functionaries	Elected Representatives	
	Mothers (N=200)	Fathers (N=200)	Grand mothers (N=200)	Anganwadi workers (N=100)	Multipurpose Health Workers (N=50)	Panches/ Sarpanches/ Ward Corporators (N=50)	
Son is responsible for continuation of the family line.	164 (82)	159 (79.5)	172 (86)	92 (92)	24 (48)	38 (76)	649 (81.1)
Son performs the last funeral rites of parents	98 (49)	106 (53)	62 (31)	27 (27)	36 (72)	19 (38)	348 (43.5)
Son Provides financial support to parents at old age	57 (28.5)	49 (24.5)	41 (20.5)	63 (63)	22 (44)	2 (4)	234 (29.2)
Birth of son increases respect of mother in society	5 (2.5)	-	-	-	-	5 (10)	10 (1.2)
Son is only caretaker of family property	5 (2.5)	3 (1.5)	6 (3)	2 (2)	-	-	16 (2)
Son is necessary for performing social responsibilities	3 (1.5)	-	21 (10.5)	-	-	-	24 (3)
Son brings dowry after marriage at home	-	18 (9)	-	18 (18)	-	1 (2)	37 (4.6)

\*Multiple responses

Percentage in parenthesis

Table 2 presents perception of Respondents-Family Members, ICDS Functionaries, Health functionaries and Elected Representatives regarding reasons for not wanting daughters. Respondents were of the view point that people were not in favour of daughter's birth due to problem of dowry. Other factors were economic liability and wasteful investment because they got married and give their services to in-laws, lack of safety, fear of harming family honour and high expenditure on marriage arrangement of daughters. Similar results were also revealed by Choudhary 2014, Siddharam et.al 2011, Chavada and Bhagyalakshmi 2009, Srivastava et.al 2005.

Table 2: respondents views on reasons for female child non preference

Reasons for not wanting daughters	Family Members			ICDS Functionaries	Health Functionaries	Elected Representatives	Total (N=800)
	Mothers (N=200)	Fathers (N=200)	Grand mothers (N=200)	Anganwadi workers (N=100)	Multipurpose health workers (N=50)	Panches/Sarpanches/Ward Corporators (N=50)	
Dowry system	135(67.5)	114 (57)	106 (53)	89 (89)	12 (24)	33 (66)	489 (61.1)
High expenditure on marriage arrangement of daughters	133(66.5)	16 (8)	33 (16.5)	88 (88)	9 (18)	27 (54)	306 (38.2)
Girls are considered as an economic liability and wasteful investment because they get married and give their services to in-laws	131(65.5)	113 (56.5)	1 (0.5)	48 (48)	14 (28)	31 (62)	338 (42.2)
Trend of small family norm	5 (2.5)	9 (4.5)	-	1 (1)	-	2 (4)	17(2.1)
Lack of safety for girls and fear of harm to family honour	68 (34)	33 (16.5)	128 (64)	75 (75)	-	25 (50)	329 (41.1)
Non assistance to parents after marriage	19 (9.5)	41 (20.5)	75 (37.5)	6 (6)	31 (62)	10 (20)	182 (22.7)
Worries about girls future marital life	30 (15)	6 (3)	13 (6.5)	38 (38)	-	-	87 (10.8)
*Multiple responses							

Percentage in parenthesis

Fig 4 highlights knowledge on declining sex ratio as reported by the respondents. Findings revealed that overwhelmingly majority (79.8%) respondents were aware about the problem of declining sex ratio. Studies conducted by Singh et.al in 2015, Dadwani and Tintu in 2014 Srivastava et.al in 2014, also observed that majority of respondents were aware of the decreasing sex ratio.

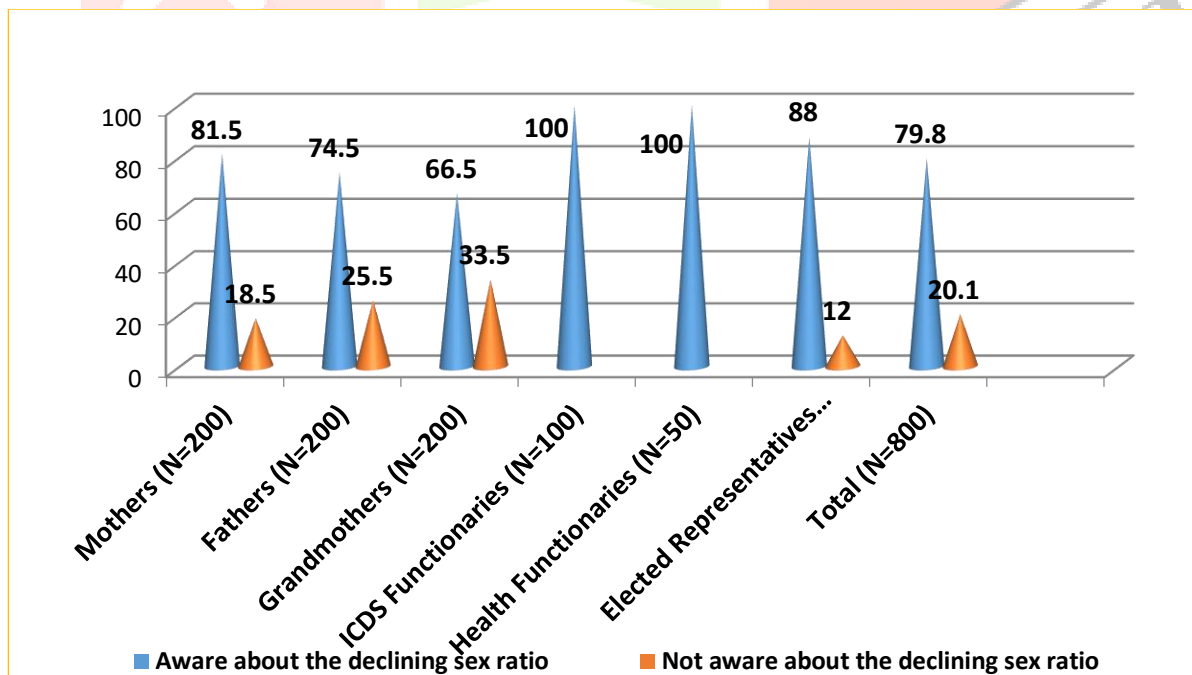


Fig 4: awareness regarding declining sex ratio

Table 3 shows socio-cultural factors contributing to the declining sex ratio according to respondent family members, ICDS Functionaries, Health Functionaries and Elected Representatives. The socio-cultural factors responsible for the declining sex ratio as perceived by the majority of the respondents were son preference for carrying family name and lineage, fear of harming family honour and increase in crime towards girls.

Table 3: respondents perspective on socio-cultural factors responsible for declining sex ratio

Socio-cultural factors contributing to the declining sex ratio	Family Members			ICDS Functionaries	Health Functionaries	Elected Representatives	Total (N=800)
	Mothers (N=200)	Fathers (N=200)	Grand mothers (N=200)	Anganwadi workers (N=100)	Multipurpose health workers (N=50)	Panches/Sarpanches/Ward Corporators (N=50)	
Strong preference for sons for family name and lineage	106(53)	95(47.5)	69(34.5)	96 (96)	38 (76)	24 (48)	428 (53.5)
Fear of harming family honour	44(22)	25(12.5)	114(57)	41 (41)	11 (22)	19(38)	254 (31.7)
Due to increase crime towards girls	17( 8.5)	8 (4)	19(9.5)	39 (39)	14 (28)	9 (18)	106 (13.2)
Illiteracy and lack of education of parents	8 (4)	8 (4)	-	28 (28)	9 (18)	6 (12)	59 (7.3)
Problem in mate selection	28(14)	7 (3.5)	12(6)	37 (37)	-	3 (6)	87 (10.8)
Social status of mother	5 (2.5)	-	-	-	-	5 (10)	10 (1.25)
Low status of females in society	22 (11)	9 (4.5)	-	-	-	-	31 (3.8)
Outdoor work and social responsibilities can performed only by males	5 (2.5)	-	28(14)	-	-	-	33 (4.1)
Insecurity about daughters marital life	12 (6)	2 (1)	4 (2)	7 (7)	6 (12)	8 (16)	39 (4.8)
<b>*Multiple response</b>							

Percentage in parenthesis

Table 4 presents economic factors contributing to the declining sex ratio according to respondent family members, ICDS Functionaries, Health Functionaries and Elected Representatives. It depicts that among a total of respondents dowry and increasing financial pressure were considered the major economic factors responsible for declining sex ratio. Khichi and Bir in 2012 conducted a study also found dowry as a major reason for declining sex ratio.

Table 4: economic factors responsible for declining sex ratio

Economic factors contributing to the declining sex ratio	Group A Family Members			Group B ICDS Functionaries Health Functionaries Elected Representatives			Total (N=800)
	Mothers (N=200)	Fathers (N=200)	Grand mothers (N=200)	Anganwadi workers (N=100)	Multipurpose Health workers (N=50)	Panches/Sarpanches/Ward Corporators (N=50)	
Dowry	142 (71)	133 (66.5)	123 (61.5)	83 (83)	35 (70)	37 (74)	553 (69.1)
financial pressure	121 (60.5)	124(62)	114(57)	82 (82)	31 (62)	15 (30)	487 (60.8)
Heavy cost of marriage	132 (66)	18 (9)	49(24.5)	86 (86)	28 (56)	35 (70)	348 (43.5)
No economic support to parents in old age	59 (29.5)	51 (25.5 )	44 (22)	67 (67)	36 (72)	6 (12)	263 (32.8)
Investment on daughters perceived as waste	55 (27.5)	128 (64)	3 (1.5)	34 (34)	23 (46)	17 (34)	260 (32.5)
Ability to pay for sex determination and abortion	7 (3.5)	5 (2.5)	-	4 (4)	-	3 (6)	19 (2.3)
Business of doctors for making money	-	-	2 (1)	-	30 (60)	-	32 (4)
Property inheritance	6 (3)	5 (2.5)	7 (3.5)	4 (4)	-	25 (50)	47 (5.8)
Societal acceptance of small family	119 (59.5)	117(58.5)	71(35.5)	18 (18)	16 (32)	27 (54)	368 (46)
<b>*Multiple responses</b>							

Percentage in parenthesis

Table 5 reveals that majority of mothers, fathers, grandmothers, ICDS functionaries, Health functionaries and elected representatives were of the view that declining sex ratio would lead to non-availability of brides in future for sons, difficult to carry family lineage and increase in cases of sexual and social insecurity among women. Similar consequences were found by Kansal et.al 2010, Vadera 2007 and Ghosh et.al 2005.

**Table 5: respondents perception about possible consequences of declining sex ratio**

Consequences of declining sex ratio	Family Members			ICDS Functionaries	Health Functionaries	Elected Representatives	Total (N=800)
	Mothers (N=200)	Fathers (N=200)	Grand mothers (N=200)	Anganwadi workers (N=100)	Multipurpose Health workers (N=50)	Panches/ Sarpanches Ward corporators (N=50)	
Non-availability of brides	171(85.5)	154(77)	183(91.5)	97 (97)	33 (66)	38 (76)	676 (84.5)
Difficult to carry family lineage	71 (35.5)	53( 26.5)	9 (4.5)	44 (44)	16 (32)	10 (20)	203 (25.3)
Demographic Imbalance of male and female in society	21 (10.5)	11 (5.5)	18 (9)	27 (27)	19 (38)	9 (18)	105 (13.1)
Increase in Status of women	7 (3.5)	18 (9)	2 (1)	1 (1)	7 (14)	2 (4)	37 (4.6)
Polyandry will start	15 (7.5)	3 (1.5)	9 (4.5)	12 (12)	-	4 (8)	43 (5.3)
Social insecurity among women will increase	30 (15)	24 (12)	27(13.5)	65 (65)	24 (48)	8 (16)	178 (22.2)
Stoppage of traditions like Raksha Bandhan and Bhaiyadooj	3 (1.5)	4 (2)	-	-	-	1 (2)	8 (1)
Lack of help in household chores and emotional support	4 (2)	13 (6.5)	-	2 (2)	8 (16)	-	27 (3.3)
Exchange marriage system	-	5 (2.5)	1 (0.5)	-	-	-	6 (0.7)
Not responded about the consequences	-	-	9 (4.5)	-	-	-	9 (1.1)

Multiple responses

Percentage in parenthesis

## CONCLUSION

A number of factors influence the relative benefits and costs of sons and daughters and ultimately effects the parents' gender preferences. The serious warning in our country is the threat of distorted sex ratio. It is a matter of grave concern which requires to be answered to sensitively and rigorously using all the means and resources at hand. To carry family name and lineage, to perform the last rites of parents and to provide support in old age were found major reasons for son preference while daughters were not wished due to increasing demands of dowry, financial pressure and social insecurity. Respondents were aware about the phenomenon of declining sex ratio. Important factors responsible for the declining sex ratio mentioned by the respondents were dowry, financial pressure, sex selective abortion followed by family pressure and obsessive desire for a son. Major consequences of declining sex ratio perceived by the respondents were non-availability of brides in future and increase in crimes against girls.



# SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ A strong need exists for awareness programmes about female foeticide among couples, public, elderly ladies, Anganwadi workers, Health workers and Elected representatives.
- ✓ Continuous updating of the figures regarding gender ratio existing at health agencies and Anganwadi centres should be started at regular intervals under supervision of concerned authorities which will in turn help to implement various actions and schemes so as to get fruitful results for curbing the problem of declining sex ratio.
- ✓ Government and other agencies should help those parents and youth who set example by not taking and giving dowry.
- ✓ Economic profits should be started by the government for education as well as marriage of female children so that parents find it easy to educate girl child and to remove female foeticide rather than seeing them as wasteful spending, monetary burden and low status for parents.
- ✓ Eliminating gender bias, combating domestic violence, providing employment chances for girls will further aid to resolve the problem of reducing sex ratio.

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