Son Preference and Contraceptive Use among Different Parity Women in Northern India

Abstract:

A preference for sons, resulting from traditional religious beliefs, social customs (dowry system, lineage, familial and kinship ties etc.) and economic benefits, including support of ageing parents is widespread in India. Researchers in India and elsewhere have also noted that fertility declines over the past decade or so have intensified pressure on women to act to achieve their desired family sex composition within the confines of a smaller family size. This study examines the hypothesis that families in Uttar Pradesh want (or need) sons than families elsewhere, and also examines how the sex composition of women's current parity influences both fertility desires and full range of reproductive actions women may take to realize them including temporary contraception, sterilization in Uttar Pradesh, India where popular notions of ideal family size and sex composition are dominated by son preference. The analysis is based on NFHS-III dataset using 1457 and 1794 currently married women for parity two and three respectively. The dataset contains interval-specific information on the outcomes of interest – fertility desires, contraceptive use and about sterilization – as well as on work experience, living arrangements, women's autonomy and a range of household characteristics. As a result, this study explores in detail a wider range of women's reproductive behaviours, including sterilization, and their determinants than has been possible in other studies on this topic. 649 and 505 women for temporary method use respectively for parity two and three and 529 and 195 women for the analysis of sterilization for parity two and three respectively. The analysis of sterilization model is restricted to those intervals, in which a woman had at least two surviving children. The result indicates women's preference go beyond a singular preference for male children, it may co-exist with a desire for daughters under specific circumstances. However, while families may want one daughter, very few want more than that and most definitely want at least one or two sons. Women with this combination are 42% less likely to report having wanted another child relative to those with three girls. Women with two or more boys and no girls or those with two girls and one boy are significantly and considerably less likely to want another child (64% and 84%) less likely, respectively.

India is a very clear example of a strong patriarchal society, one which can be expected to generate strong son preference that will influence fertility decisions .Sons are critical to families in variety of ways ,for continuity of lineage ,for performing ancestor worship rites. For providing support in old age. Daughters cannot perform these functions in Indian traditional societies and are therefore of far less consequence to families than are sons. But on another side there is prevalence in India that most families want a daughter under specific reasons just like "kanyadan". The influence of normative expectations and preferences about what constitutes the 'ideal' family, both in terms of size and composition, on women's reproductive behavior has long been of interest to demographers and other social scientists. "For India as a whole, the evidence suggests that son preference is primarily culturally determined the scarcity of resources may at most accentuate the effects of sex bias." Explanations for the different comparative values of sons and daughters along these dimensions include the type of agriculture, kinship systems and custom concerning the linkages between the parents and offspring after marriage and socio economic capacity. sex ratios at birth favour girls in families with only sons , and boys in families with only daughters, though the balance is tipped in favour of boys in families with only daughters.

There are three interrelated dimensions to socioeconomic status in India: economic, political, and ritual rankings. Srinivas described “high” castes, or castes that have achieved a high ritual status, as “Sanskritized.” In Sanskritized castes, women are subordinate to men in religious rituals, do not work outside the home (and in some cases, do not leave the home), and, in order to preserve their social status, they need to marry and have male children and male grandchildren. They cannot initiate a divorce, and they cannot remarry as widows. Parents are responsible for finding a suitable husband for their daughter, generally within the caste; finding a husband of higher status than one’s own—a practice called hyper gamy—is looked upon positively. Not being successful in arranging a marriage for one’s daughter, however, reflects badly on the unmarried daughter and her family. Parents of the bride pay all marriage costs and give some dowry and/or some substantial cash payment to the family of the groom. After marriage, the daughter is completely committed to the family of her husband and can no longer provide emotional, physical, or economic support to her own family, so parents can count exclusively on male children as support for old age . The more Sanskritized a caste and the higher one’s status in the caste hierarchy (status being determined on all three aforementioned axes), the more costly it is to have a daughter instead of a son and the more barriers there are for women to integrate into the productive economy. Modern dowry or groom prices have become more and more common and have spread to all areas of India.

Previous research showed that fertility decline in India is accompanied by an increase in the ratio of male to female children aged six and younger, and suggested that persistent son preference increases the rate of female feticide or infanticide at low parities, despite a reduction in the number of unwanted daughters at high parities.

The sample specially for parity two women is primarily composed of upper caste Hindu women with education their husbands are educated also living in urban and also more than half sample contributed by women who had married before age 18. Women frequently experience physical mobility is restricted is near about 68% belongs to non nuclear and high standard of living family structure. Now sample for parity three women is composed of lower caste Hindu women with no or little education and also their husbands are uneducated living in rural area and about three quarter sample contributed by women who had married before age 18, reflecting the prevalence of early marriage in this context. Women belong to nuclear and on average standard of living family structure. Respondents were asked what their hypothetical ideal family size and sex composition would be if they could repeat their life. Women report a mean ideal family size of 2.96 and 3.80 very slightly more daughters than sons, slightly more sons than daughters respectively for parity two and three. The most common composition is for parity two of one son and one daughter which is universal known as ideal composition while for parity three two sons and one daughter composition is most preferred in Uttar Pradesh. This reflects that most couple desire at least one daughter.

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Sex composition of a woman’s surviving children at the start of an interval is the key independent variable throughout the analyses. Rather than measuring number of sons, which does not adequately capture sex preferences for one or more daughters alongside that for sons. Different category variable according to parity is used with the following combinations is used:
Such as for parity two: two daughters only and two sons only and one daughter and one son, and for parity three: three daughters only and three sons only and one sons two daughters also one

daughter and two sons. The reference category is two daughters only and three daughters only respectively for parity two and three. This composition is likely to be the least desirable because it both lacks sons and approaches the ideal family size in this region. Since the study examines whether and what reproductive actions women take to reach particular sex compositions – in particular, the desired sex composition – it is posited that choosing as the reference category the least-preferred composition allows for clearer interpretation of results for other (more preferred) combinations. In particular, it is possible to more clearly gauge which of the other compositions is most preferred relative to the least-preferred option. The sex composition variable measures family size indirectly (i.e. the sum of the combinations equals the total number of children) and thus a separate family size variable is not included in the reported analyses. (Equivalent models run with a separate measure of family size, although over-specified, produced similar results.)

The potential reproductive behaviours of women of parity two and three are modelled, with the help of binary logistic regression given women's family size and sex composition at the start of that interval. The following hypotheses are tested. First, those composition preferences will reflect a desire for children of both sexes, while emphasizing boys; second, that existing sex composition will influence both fertility desires and all two behaviours: temporary contraception and sterilization. In the first Model the analysis start by estimating the likelihood of a woman reporting that she desired a next child. Though not as desirable as a true prospective measure, a measure based specifically on pregnancy desires prior to conception is less susceptible to ex post rationalization bias than one based on desires once a pregnancy or birth has occurred.

These preferences have significant implications for reproductive actions. While sex composition has no statistically significant effect on the use of temporary contraception and thirteen times more likely to be sterilized relative to those with three girls only. These preferences have significant implications for reproductive actions.

Determinants of reproductive desires and behavior among married women in Uttar Pradesh, India: odds ratios (OR) from logistic regressions

MODEL1: Desire for more children

	Parity 2	Parity3
Independent Variables	OR[95% CI]	OR[95% CI]
*Sex composition**		
2sons	0.134[0.098-0.184]	-
1daughter 1son	0.138[0.104-0.184]	-
Two daughters one son	-	0.162[0.105-0.252]
One daughter two sons	-	0.042[0.026-0.070]
Three sons	-	0.064[0.033-0.123]
Women's Characteristics		
literate	0.539[0.389-0.749]	0.237[0.162-0.346]
Rural residence	1.864[1.345-2.583]	3.310[2.263-4.840]
Religion(ref Hindu)		
Muslim	3.099[1.106-8.687]	2.400[1.695-3.300]
Others	7.720[2.698-22.094]	-
Caste(ref general)		
OBC	3.903[2.863-5.320]	1.838[1.239-2.727]
SC	4.265[1.182-15.386]	2.278[1.459-3.558]
ST	2.615[2.010-3.402]	4.721[1.226-18.183]
Standard of living index(ref High)		
Low	4.149[3.038-5.667]	4.138[2.707-6.325]
Medium	3.500[2.689-4.555]	3.831[2.616-5.611]
Family structure		
Nuclear	0.914[0.729-1.147]	0.980[0.725-1.324]
Husband Education		
literate	0.604[0.445-0.819]	0.328[0.241-0.448]
Experienced restricted mobility	0.358[0.238-0.539]	2.480[1.823-3.374]
Age at marriage<=18	1.949[1.081-3.511]	1.346[0.916-1.978]

*Parity 2 reference category two girls only

Parity 3 reference category three girls only