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Original Article

Perception regarding skewed sex ratio among reproductive age group females in an urban slum of Haryana

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ABSTRACT: Objective: The steep downfall in the child sex ratio is a prime indicator of lack of women empowerment, respect and esteem or worth in the society. Women make up for almost half of the total population of India, but they still lag behind men in a lot of areas. The present study assessed the perception of reproductive mothers about declining sex ratio.

Methods: The study was a community based epidemiological study with cross-sectional design and carried out by house to house visit in an urban slum of district Rohtak and duration was January to June 2017. The study recruited 500 reproductive age group female having age 15-49 years.

Results: The present study found that that most of the participants (49%) were in the age group of 25–35 years, 35% of subjects were either illiterate or literate up to primary class and nearly half (55%) of study subjects were belonged to upper caste and 31% of individuals from backward class.

Conclusion: The study concluded that factors mainly responsible for down sex ratio are dowry culture and son preference. Besides, poor female literacy and sharp increase in number of ultrasound machines have also contributed to the skewed sex ratio.

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INTRODUCTION

India is a secular, democratic and republic country having population of 1.3 billion. Recently, India has made tremendous advancements in scientific, medical, social and economic fields, yet certain social evils like female feticide, sex discrimination etc continues to be a problem in our country. The census 2011 showed a significant declining trend in child sexratio (0-6 years) from 945 girls /1000 boys in 1991 to 927 in 2001 and further to 919 in 2011 and Haryana has sex ratio of 934 [1]. The steep downfall in the child sex ratio is a prime indicator of lack of women empowerment, respect and esteem or worth in the society. Women make up for almost half of the total population of India, but they still lag behind men in a lot of areas. Over the last few years, a significant fraction of women have been at the receiving end of discrimination and exploitation. One of the significant contributors to the adverse child sex ratio in India is the practice of elimination of female fetus [2].

It is harrowing that a lot of females are not even allowed to be born. In Haryana, the dowry demand has negative influence on the desire for daughters that leads to termination of female foetus resulting in unfavorable sex ratio.

The female population has been declining sharply in India, Haryana is one of the state which adversely affected by this problem. Skewed sex ratio will also increase crimes against female and going to create a lot of social, political and economic problems [3].

No studies ever carried out especially in urban slum of Haryana about the perception of declining sex ratio in reproductive age group women, hence the study was undertaken with objectives, to assess the perception of reproductive mothers (age 15-49 years) about declining sex ratio and to assess the relationship between the demographic characteristics of mothers with perception of skewed sex ratio.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was conducted in an urban slum (Gandhi camp) of district Rohtak which is field practice area of the department of Community Medicine, Pt. B.D. Sharma PGIMS, Rohtak, Haryana. The urban field practice area is regularly used for teaching, training, and research activities for undergraduate and postgraduate medical students. The study was a community based epidemiological study with cross-sectional design and carried out over 6 months i.e. January to June 2017. The study recruited 500 subjects if 50 % of the mothers will have the preference for female child and 50 % for the male child. Considering the 20% non-response rate and 10% allowable error, the sample size comes out to be 480, but the study enrolled 500 study subjects. The study recruited all reproductive age group mothers (15-49 years) of six anganwaris of an urban slum (Gandhi camp) of district Rohtak (Haryana)

The investigators visited house to house, contacted the mothers of age 15-49 years and collected all information in their vernacular language on a semi-structured interview schedule. All the study participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study. Informed verbal consent was taken from the each mother before conducting the interview. The questionnaire schedule included age, education, caste, occupation, socioeconomic status, reason for down sex ratio, reasons for son preference and reasons of not preference girl child and repercussion of down sex ratio. After collection, the whole data was compiled, analyzed and appropriate statistical tests were applied using SPSS software (Version 13).

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of study subjects (n=500)

Demographic features	Variables (%)
Age (Years)	
15-25	195 (39)
25-35	245(49)
35-49	60 (12)
Education	
Illiterate	35 (7)
Primary	140 (28)
Secondary	155(31)
Matric	95 (19)
Higher education	55 (11)
Graduation	20 (4)
Caste	
Upper caste	275 (55)
Backward caste	155 (31)
Schedule caste	70 (14)
Occupation	
Homemaker/housewife	385 (77)
Govt. and Private Jobs	70 (14)
Housemaid	45 (9)
Modified Kuppus wami's scale for socio-economic status	
Upper class	15 (3)
Upper Middle class	35 (7)
Lower Middle class	110 (22)
Upper Lower class	225 (45)
Lower class	115 (23)

Table 1 show that most of the participants (49%) were in the age group of 25-35 years followed by in 15-25 years (39%). The study found that 35% of subjects were either illiterate or literate up to primary class while 31% and 19% individuals were educated up to middle and matric class respectively. Nearly half (55%) of study subjects were belonged to upper caste and 31% of individuals from backward class. Occupation wise distribution of mothers depicts that 77% were homemaker, 14% were doing jobs in private and government and private sectors while 9% mothers were housemaid. Socio-economic wise, 68% subjects lived with upper lower and lower socioeconomic status while 22% had lower middle socioeconomic status.

Table 2: Perception of mothers about down sex ratio (n=500)

Reason	Yes (%)	No (%)	Can't say (%)
Preference of son	445 (89)	48 (9.6)	7 (1.4)
Poor or no implementation of laws for preventing crime against women	356 (71.2)	125 (25)	19 (3.8)
Increases number of ultrasound clinics	385 (77)	105 (21)	10 (2)
Poor female literacy	395 (79)	98 (19.6)	07 (1.4)
Lack of women empowerment	310 (62)	120 (24)	70 (16)
Dowry culture	484 (96.8)	13 (2.6)	03 (0.6)

P < 0.05

Table 2 depicts the perception of mothers about down sex ratio and 96.8% mothers perceived that dowry culture as the reason of down sex ratio in Haryana. However, 79%, and 77% mothers said that poor female literacy and increased number of ultrasound machine respectively are responsible for low sex ratio. Also, 89% and 71.2% of mothers believed that preference of son and poor or no implementation of laws for preventing crime against women respectively are the reason of down sex ratio. Statically, the perception about skewed ratio found to be significant (<0.05).

The present study found that 93% and 85% mothers said that they preferred son because they do cremation and other Hindu rituals and carries family name and fame respectively while 79% and 72% mothers quoted the reason of son preference was money/land remains in family and take care and support in old age respectively. Findings were found to be statistically significant (P<0.05). Furthermore, the study evaluated the reason for not preferring girl child and revealed that 92% and 82% mothers attributed girl child going to other family after marriage or Paraya Dhan and fear of harming family honor respectively while 78% and 70% mothers stated that responsibility of protecting girl is more as compared to boy and give lot of dowry during and after marriage respectively, which again is statistically significant finding with p value <0.05 (Table 3).

Table 3: Reasons for son preference and not preferring girl child (n=500)

S. No.	Reason of son preference	Yes (%)	No (%)	Can't say (%)
1.	Propagation of family name and fame	425 (85)	60 (12)	15 (3)
2.	Money/land remains in family	395 (79)	100 (20)	05 (1)
3.	Do cremation and other Hindu rituals	465 (93)	30 (6)	05 (1)
4.	Take care and support in old age	360 (72)	130 (26)	10 (2)

P<0.05

Reason for not preferring girl child				
1.	Going to other family after marriage (Paraya Dhan)	460 (92)	35 (7)	05 (1)
2.	Give lot of dowry during and after marriage	390 (78)	95 (19)	15 (3)
3.	Fear of getting good bridegroom	325 (65)	150 (30)	25 (5)
4.	Investing on girls is waste with no return	310 (62)	185 (37)	05 (1)
5.	Responsibility of protecting girl	350 (70)	125 (25)	25 (5)
6.	Fear of harming family honour	410 (82)	80 (16)	10 (2)

P<0.05**Table 4: Perception about repercussions of down child sex ratio (n=500)**

Sr. No.	Repercussions of adverse child sex ratio	Yes (%)	No (%)	Can't say (%)
1.	Increased crime against women	425 (85)	70 (12)	05 (1)
2.	Increased sexual violence/rape	410 (82)	65 (13)	25 (5)
3.	Lack of female work force	320 (64)	60 (12)	20 (10)
4.	Increased women trafficking to the areas having deficit of brides	310 (62)	160 (32)	30 (6)
5.	More than one Husband (Polyandry)	255 (51)	210 (42)	35 (7)

P< 0.05

The present study sought their perception about repercussion of down sex ratio in Haryana and revealed that 85% and 82% mothers perceived that crime against women and sexual violence/rape increased respectively while nearly two third subjects said that female work force would get decreased and young girl trafficking to the areas having deficit of brides would get increased. However, half of mothers (51%) mothers said that one of repercussion of down sex ratio would be that one woman has more than one Husband i.e. Polyandry and it is found statistically significant (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

In India, down sex-ratio is one of the major problems in present time and sex ratio is an important demographic component too. In Indian culture, almost everyone wants atleast one male child, not even in poor families but in highly educated or high socio-economic status families and this mentality leads to female feticide. Haryana is amongst the most affected states regarding declining sex ratio because of low status of women, male dominancy, no involvement in family's decisions and desire for male child for agricultural labourers especially in scheduled castes, below poverty line and poor families.

The present study found that that most of the participants (49%) were in the age group of 25–35 years, 35% of subjects were either illiterate or literate up to primary class and nearly half (55%) of study subjects were belonged to upper caste and 31% of individuals from backward class. Occupation wise and socio-economic wise distribution of mothers was that 77% of mothers were homemaker and 68% subjects lived with upper lower and lower socioeconomic status respectively.

K S Sanjay *et al* [4] and Khandelwal V *et al* [5] reported that half (50%) of subjects and majority of subjects were in 25-35 years age group respectively.

Puri *et al* stated that education of women directly or indirectly impacts the mindset of Indian female, because less educated parents think that money spend on female is useless and discrimination against women and male dominance are in-built system of Indian society [6]. Lower socioeconomic status family had male bias in various aspects of life, providing boys with privilege of good food, education whereas girls were entitled for household chores. Almost all mothers (96.8%) in the study perceived that dowry culture is the reason of down sex ratio in Haryana. In India, dowry is one of the socio-cultural factors contributing to declining sex ratio. Dowry may be given in form of cash, jewelry, or goods. It is evil social system prevalent in society and the women are burnt daily for dowry and many cases are never reported. It is well known fact that legislations by itself can't solve this deep-rooted social problem. It is essential to end the dowry system in India to save girl child.

However, 79%, and 77% mothers said that poor female literacy and increased number of ultrasound machine respectively are the responsible for low sex ratio. Lack of education means the lack of awareness about their rights. Illiterate women keep on struggling hard and bear harshness from her family and their husbands that have impact on the sex ratio of child. Ultrasound machine became available in the 1980s in the cities and later became available in small towns and villages. There are villages with no electricity or water but have access to ultrasound machines for sex determination; here machines are loaded into vans and powered by generators.

Jeffrey Hays [7] reported that since ultrasound machines were introduced, 6 to 15 more boys were born than girls and they have performed 8000 abortions, 7999 of them were girls

Also, 71.2% and nearly half (49%) of mothers believed that poor or no implementation of laws for preventing crime against women and preference of son respectively are the reason of down sex ratio. Puri *et al* also concluded that majority of females had preference to male child. The preference to male child was significantly associated with literacy status of women [6]. At the policy level, the emphasis has been laid on gender equality, but nothing has been done to alter the fundamentals of the family system to make daughters and sons equally valuable to their parents. Crimes against women are very common in some of the Indian states. Female more often become victims of high degree of eve-teasing, rape, acid burn, gang-rape, domestic violence and dowry related killings. These also discourage parents to have a girl child in family.

The present study found that 93% and 85% mothers preferred son because do cremation and other Hindu rituals and carries family name and fame respectively while 79% and 72% mothers preferred son because money/land remains in family and son take care and support in old age respectively. K Ravinder [8] and Garg *et al* [9] reported similar observation in their studies. According to Hindu mythology, only a son can perform the rituals of funeral of his parents. Doing so, it is believed that they acquire Moksha (relieve from the pain of reincarnation).

Furthermore, regarding not preferring girl child, the study revealed that 92% and 82% mothers stated girl going to other family after marriage or Paraya Dhan and fear of harming family honour respectively as the reason while 78% and 70% mothers thought that responsibility of protecting girl is more as compared to boy and extravagant dowry demand during and after marriage respectively. Similar findings were reported by Srivastava *et al* [10].

Pande *et al* [11] stated that women's education is the single most significant factor in reducing son preference. Educated women are less likely to prefer sons over daughters, and highly educated women are especially less likely to do so if girls continue to be a totally engrossed in their husband's home and cannot contribute to their parent's economy and welfare, son preference will continue to prevail even though adult women are integrated into education and formal occupations.

The study also sought their perception about repercussion of down sex ratio in Haryana and revealed that 85% and 82% mothers perceived that crime against women increased and sexual violence/rape increased respectively while nearly two third subjects said that female work force would get decreased and young girl trafficking to the areas having deficit of brides would get increased. However, 51% subjects said that one of repercussion of down sex ratio would be that one woman has more than one Husband i.e Polyandry. Srivastav S *et al* [12] quoted that the common implications of down sex ratio was increase in crime, molestations, and increases the women trafficking because of non-availability of brides. Vadera *et al* [13] and Walia A [14] in their studies reported the similar repercussions of down sex ratio.

Repercussions of down sex ratio raises the implications like non-availability of bride, sexual violence against women, lack of women workforce, polyandry etc. Some of the effective strategies as solution to increased sex ratio could be;

- 1) Provide higher educational opportunities for girls.
- 2) Strict implementation of laws like PC & PNDT Act.
- 3) Create public awareness.
- 4) Economic empowerment of women and;
- 5) Change old traditions and norms of patriarchal society.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the factors mainly responsible for down sex ratio are dowry culture and son preference. Besides, poor female literacy and sharp increase in number of ultrasound machines have also contributed to the existing problem as opined by large number of mothers. The study suggested that creating awareness about the value of the girl child in the society, impose a ban on the use of sex determination in government hospitals and private hospitals/ clinics and strict implementation of Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Test (PC & PNDT) Act might balance the sex ratio in India.

DECLARATIONS

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