Himachal Journal of Agricultural Research 41(1): 97-99 (2015)

Short Note

Studies on causes and consequences of skewed child sex ratio

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Received: 20.03. 2015; Accepted: 05.06.2015

Abstract

The present study was conducted to identify the causes and consequences of skewed child sex ratio in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. A total sample of 100 respondents (married women i.e. 50 rural and 50 urban, aged 18 to 45 years) was taken from Kangra tehsil of Kangra district. The respondents were selected on the basis of simple random sampling from two villages (Birta and Kholi) and two wards (4 and 8) from the area. They were interviewed through an interview schedule containing both open and close ended questions. The data were coded, tabulated and analyzed through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The results revealed that 86% respondents were well aware of the skewed child sex ratio in the State. Most of them (58.08%) blamed foeticide as the major cause behind it. Respondents felt that it could lead to various consequences but the worst one was stoppage of family lineage (33.97%).

Key words: Skewed child sex ratio, causes, consequences, foeticide

Two decades have passed since Sen (1990) mooted the notion of 'missing women' in his seminal article, wherein he noted that more than 100 million women were missing across South Asia, West Asia, North Africa and China. In India, the widening gap in the male to female ratio is highlighted by census after census. This is particularly pronounced in the age group of 0-6 years. The 2011 Census of India sparked off a bigger debate on the issue by highlighting the changes in the child sex ratio across the nation. A drastic decline in child sex ratio was recorded in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Arunachal Pradesh and Uttrakhand and Union Territories of Chandigarh and Delhi during 1981-2001.

There has been consistent decline in child sex ratio ever since Himachal Pradesh attained Statehood in 1971. In Himachal Pradesh, from 981 in 1971, the child sex ratio fell to 896 in 2001. Although, the Census of 2011 has shown a marginal improvement of 13 points but is not sufficient to meet the drastic decline of 55 points in 2001 Census. This decline, in itself, is not very momentous and could be ascribed to various extraneous factors. However, when it is accompanied by a sudden drastic decline in the child sex ratio, one is forced to pause and think about the causes and consequences for the State as a whole.

The purpose of the present study was to identify the major causes for the skewed child sex ratio (0-6 years) in Kangra district (which has the child sex ratio of 876 and among one of the very low child sex ratio districts in the country) of Himachal Pradesh and to identify its consequences and to arrive at logical conclusions on the basis of this study.

The study was conducted in Kangra tehsil of Kangra district which has the child sex ratio of 859. Two villages namely Birta and Kholi having child sex ratio 777 and 735, respectively, and two wards namely ward 4 and ward 8 having child sex ratio 750 and 538 were selected. A sample of 100 married women (50 rural and 50 urban) aged between 18 to 45 years was taken. The respondents were selected on the basis of simple random sampling. The data were collected by using an interview schedule containing

both open and close ended questions specially designed for the purpose. The coded data were processed through computerized statistical package for the social sciences and tabulated. The tabulated data have been interpreted and the analysis has been done to meet the objectives of the study and to reach at logical conclusions.

It is evident from the data (Table 1) that 86% of the respondents were aware of the fact that the number of girls (0-6 years) in Himachal Pradesh was less than that of boys. They stated that they got this information through newspapers, TV/radio and from relatives and friends. On the other hand, 14% of them were not aware of the fact. The present study agrees with Prasad (2012) who observed that the Census of 2011 has recorded the lowest decline in sex ratio of 914 in 0-6 years with 3 million missing girls from 78.8 million in 2001 to 75.8 million in 2011.

Table 2 depicts the causes of skewed child sex ratio. Most (58.08%) of the respondents (both rural and urban) said that foeticide was one of the major causes of skewed child sex ratio. They stated that when God did not bless some parents with a son, they, at the time of next pregnancy, adopted sex-determination techniques to check the sex of the unborn foetus. On the other hand, 16.91% blamed one male child norm for it. A similar finding was revealed by John *et al.* (2009) who highlighted that the practice of sex selective abortions was the major cause of decline in sex ratio in Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab. Their study observed that most of the people prefer small families which result in selective elimination of female foetuses.

Although, 12.5% respondents said that poor medical care was the cause of declining child sex ratio, they stated that some parents neglected the health of girl children from early childhood during their illness because they believed that girls were genetically stronger and got cured naturally. Malnutrition was held to be the cause of skewed child sex ratio by 7.36% respondents. They said that some parents neglected their girl children right from birth. They were less breastfed (for less than 3 months) with wider gaps between daily feeds and given poor quality, left over and lesser food to eat. They added that malnutrition badly affected their physical and mental development. Table 3 indicates the perception of the respondents regarding the possible consequences of the skewed child sex ratio. An adverse sex ratio can have devastating consequences for society. Such consequences are clearly revealed by many scholars in their studies. Ghosh *et al*. (2005), in their study, disclose that increased female foeticide and decline in sex ratio would lead to non-availability of brides, stoppage of family lineage, rise in sexual violence against women, lack of female workforce and polyandry. In India, the absolute numbers of missing females is likely to grow in future, which is likely to impact the marital status of males. The present study also reaches the same conclusion that most of the respondents (33.97%) believed that it could lead to stoppage of family lineage because many boys would remain unmarried and childless so the family lineage would automatically end. On the other hand, 21.69% of the respondents believed that it could increase crimes against women. Moreover, 17.46% believed that it would result in the handicapping of household work and cooking because females could handle these tasks perfectly. However, 16.03% of the respondents believed that it could lead to polyandry. Some respondents cited the case of *Draupadi* of *Mahabharat* who was married to five *Pandavas*. Another 8.43% stated that decline in child sex ratio would eliminate the socio-cultural festivals such as *Rakhi* and *Bhai Dooj* because when parents will stop giving birth to daughters, the festivals related to brothers and sisters will also end.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to knowledge regarding the skewed child sex ratio in HP

Response	Kangra Tehsil		Total
	Rural N=50	Urban N= 50	Rural + Urban N= 100
Yes	41 (82.0)	45 (90.0)	86 (86.0)
No	9 (18.0)	5 (10.0)	14 (14.0)

Figures in parenthesis denote percentages

Table 2. Opinion of respondents regarding the causes of skewed child sex ratio

Causes	Kangra Tehsil		Total
	Rural N=61	Urban N= 75	Rural + Urban N= 136
Foeticide	34 (55.74)	45 (60.0)	79 (58.08)
One male child norm	8 (13.11)	15 (20.0)	23 (16.91)
Poor medical care	9 (14.76)	8 (10.67)	17 (12.5)
Malnutrition	4 (6.55)	6 (8.0)	10 (7.36)
Do not know	6 (9.84)	1 (1.33)	7 (5.15)

Figures in parenthesis denote percentages

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to opinion about possible consequences of skewed child sex ratio in Kangra tehsil

Opinion	Rural N=108	Urban N=104	Rural+Urban N=212
Stoppage of family lineage	40 (37.03)	32 (30.77)	72 (33.97)
Crimes against women will increase	15 (13.89)	31 (29.80)	46 (21.69)
Impact household work and cooking	24 (22.23)	13 (12.5)	37 (17.46)
Polyandry	13 (12.03)	21 (20.19)	34 (16.03)
Negative impact on socio-cultural festivals	10 (9.26)	6 (5.77)	16 (7.55)
Do not know	6 (5.56)	1 (0.97)	7 (3.30)

Figures in parenthesis denote percentages

In conclusion, it can be said that skewed child sex ratio would lead to an enormous economic and social loss for the nation. The road is difficult and cannot be traversed by women alone. Equal male participation is a must to break the shackles of patriarchy and lead to the emergence of a society in which true equality prevails and in which girls are valued and regarded as equal partners in development.

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