

Child sex ratio - declining trend: Reasons and consequences

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ABSTRACT

Child sex ratio (CSR) and over all sex ratio have found to be the important indicator to examine the social commitment against female child. According to census 2011, CSR has been decreased from 927 to 919 in 2011. Many researchers have reported that the sex ratio at birth is in favor of males and the low sex ratio is found to be due to the sex selection strategies of the parents. Despite the higher mortality preponderance for male child, the females were having a decreased ratio during childhood years. Gender discrimination and female infanticide have found to be the important factor responsible for the low CSR. This article tries to shed light into the issue among the states of India, giving a special attention to the state of Tamil Nadu and proposes few remedial measures.

Key words: Child sex ratio, Consequences, Declining trend, Reasons

Sex ratio is described as quantity of women per thousand men. It is a critical indicator to identify the quantity of winning equality among adult males and females. Child sex ratio (CSR) is defined as the number of women consistent with thousand adult males in the age group of zero to six years. It is an effective index to look at the social responsibility against female children. It also serves as an effective indicator for the socio-economic development in a particular region [1].

The primary additives of imbalances in overall and CSR include (a) sex ratio at birth, (b) sex differentials in mortality, (c) sex differential in migration, and (d) under enumeration of girls and women. CSR varies by means of region, through social organization, age organization, and stage of prosperity. The modern census in 2011 has recorded a significant decrease in sex ratio of children aged 0–6 years at the same time as registering a marginal upward push in adult female to male ratio as compared to the census in 1991. Many researchers attributed the decline in the CSR to a likely upward thrust in the sex ratio at birth indicating the growing incidence of sex selective abortion and female neglect [2].

Biologically CSR at birth is usually in favor of males, with approximately 105 boys consistent with hundred girls. Sex ratio at birth more than 107 can also additionally endorse proof of sex selective abortion. So ideally, the CSR should not be more than 107 (993 females per 1000 males) in comparison to sex ratio at birth. The current situation shows that the CSR declines further

down in a rapid manner compared to the sex ratio at birth. The decrease shows that some untoward occurrences are happening in the first 5 years in the child's life to decline the CSR this much. In nearly every country, boys are more likely to die in childhood than girls. The biological reasons for this include that boys are more vulnerable to birth complications and infectious diseases. In countries, where there are strong preferences for male child, mortality rates for girls are elevated than expected. This can happen either through direct infanticide, but also through neglect and unequal treatment. Female childhood mortality observed at a rate higher than expected is usually due to the negligence of the girl child, called the "post-natal discrimination" which is another factor that causes deficit in female child. Sex differentials for infant mortality in long term, imply a huge extra mortality for females that results in discriminations in terms of food, nutrients, education, and fitness care. The sex ratio tends to decrease over the life course (from becoming male-biased to female-biased), since women tend to live longer than men [3-5].

CSR IN INDIA AND THE FACTORS AFFECTING THEREOF

According to Census of India, the CSR (0–6 years) in India is one of the poorest, last recorded at 918 girls for every 1000 boys in 2011. The states in India, divided based on the CSR showed 9 states and Union Territories (Mizoram, Meghalaya, Andaman and Nicobar island, Puducherry, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Kerala, Assam, and Tripura) that have CSR

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from 1000-951, 16 (West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Nagaland, Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Manipur, Odisha, Bihar, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Goa, India, Madhya Pradesh, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep, and Himachal Pradesh) from 950 to 901, 8 (Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Jammu and Kashmir) between 851 and 900 and 2 (Punjab and Haryana) having <850. As compared to the rest of the country it is shown that women from the northeast, experience more freedom and their voice has been amplified due to better support from their families [6]. The CSR improved from 16 base points from 919 in 2011, to 934 in 2019 to 2020. According to the recent evaluations of Haryana, the state's CSR (0-6 age group) crossed 900 marks for the first time in December, 2015, in the past 15 years. In general, sex ratio in various states of India has begun to observe a descent growth in the last 4-5 years starting from Indian Census in 2011. Uttarakhand is the worst-performing state in the country in terms of CSR at birth, according to the NITI Aayog's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index 2020-2021. As per the NITI Aayog SDG data, the hill state's CSR is 840 as compared to the national average of 899. Chhattisgarh (958) and Kerala (957) emerged as the topmost performers in terms of sex ratio at birth [7]. CSR has dropped by 1.40% during the past decade, while overall sex ratio rose to 0.75% in India.

The CSR in Tamil Nadu improved from 942 females in 2001 to 946 females per thousand males in 2011 and ranked 11th in terms of its CSR. Of the 14 districts where the CSR has gone down from 2001 levels, the most dramatic reverses have been recorded in Ariyalur and Cuddalore. While Cuddalore recorded a dip in CSR from 957 to 895 (a negative growth of 62 points), the ratio in Ariyalur fell from 949 to 892 (a negative growth of 57). The districts where CSR recorded negative growth are Chennai, Tiruvallur, Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram, Coimbatore, Tirupur, Trichy, Perambalur, Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Thanjavur, and Kanyakumari. Of these districts, Villupuram (-23) and Perambalur (-24) have recorded CSR that are much worse than the national mean of minus 13 [6].

The international perspective showed that world has CSR 0.95 in 2012 with high income regions showed 1.23, African regions showing 1.13 and Asian regions showing the lowest of 0.79 [8].

The factors responsible for female discrimination can be compiled under the following headings. The cultural factors include the burden of marriage, unwanted expenses, and taboos related to menstruation. The defense factors include safety issue for the females and the lack of proper laws for female defense. The economic factors include females not being considered as the secured source of earning and thus considered of low economic value. The educational factors include illiteracy among the people, gender discrimination in holy books to advanced videos and the unawareness regarding the required upliftment. There are also some social factors behind the declined CSR that include the Patriarchal society and being second places in occupation. In a study done in Haryana, India showed that CSR goes on falling with rising educational status of parents and with rising birth order. Most common factor liable for girl child negligence as told

by subjects is domestic violence and ill treatment by the husband and in laws. The most common motive for male child fondness as told by the subject is to run the family name, followed by security in old age and to perform the last rites [9]. The decline reasons are depicted in Fig. 1 below which shows an addition of these factors made the decline compared to the sex ratio at birth. Furthermore, Fig. 2 showed the implications of declining CSR [4,10].

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following legal measures can help to improve the situation. The policies which provide benefits for female child should be reinforced and revamped. Examples include Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign, Bhagyalakshmi scheme, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana etc. Abolishment of dowry and giving equal share in land and commodities for female child. Policies should be reframed to give equal opportunities in politics, management and organizations and occupations should be given. The problem web of females which make them act against females should be identified and corrected.

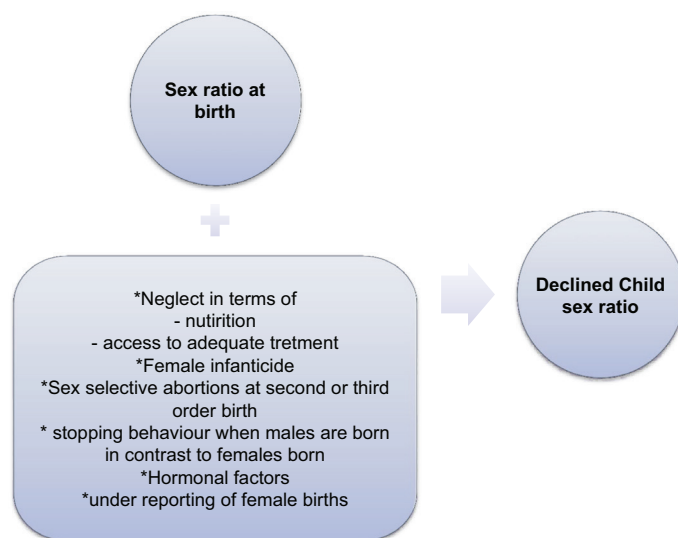


Figure 1: Reasons for declined child sex ratio

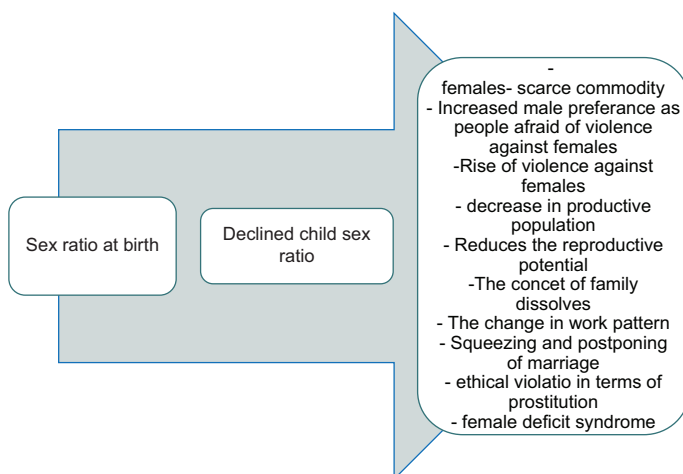


Figure 2: Implication of low child sex ratio

The educational measures include changing the attitude of both men and women for not viewing women as commodity. Instead of spreading propaganda on gender equality, the idea of importance and need for each gender in each field should be emphasized. The culture of respect should be taught against both genders in schools. The advocacy measures include audits to track the prenatal abortions, tracking of female education, nutrition and health-care access, involvement of media, and other NGOs to enlighten the dark areas and rectify the odds. Aiding in setting up own enterprises for the women can also help in the improvement of the current situation. Promoting cultural good practices for females including bride price (role of women in economic sphere), the retrieval of matrilineal system, the conversion of virginity decisions to own choice, and role reversal in chores are some of the common practices that can help to raise the CSR.

CONCLUSION

India has yet a long way to go in her fight against declining CSR and pre-birth eliminations of females. A shortage of girls would lead to a shortage of eligible brides thus making the girl child a “scarce commodity.” A concrete combined effort by the medical fraternity, the law years, the political leaders, NGOs, media, teachers, and the community itself will be required to win this battle. The warning signal has already been raised, the time to act has been tickling fast and therefore, prompt actions should be taken to prevent the dis-functioning of natural way of nature. In the long run, this skewed ratio can disrupt the normal biological equations in terms of marriage, employment, and social issues. More qualitative and quantitative research in these areas should

be done to identify more facts and reasons behind the people’s attitude.

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