

**International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047****Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025****Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi**

Changing Family Size and its Demographic Implications with Special Reference to Jharkhand

Ambika Priya Tirkey

Assistant Professor, B. S. College, Lohardaga, Ranchi University, Ranchi.

Abstract

Family is considered as fundamental unit of society. A family consists parents and their children. Size of family depends upon the number of children. With growing economies and increasing cost of upbringing a child, married couples want to have a smaller number of children. Many socio-economic factors also affect the desire to have children. Lesser number of children reduces the family size. Moreover, in contemporary times, shrinking family size give an opportune to couples to have choice of specific gender of children. In India patriarchal ideas influences the gender preferences of children. Recent data from NFHS 5 shows that around 80 percent of surveyed individuals want to have at least one son in their life time. This preference for son contributes to skewed child sex ratio, with fewer number of female children than male children. If this scenario persists then demographic composition of economy may change over the years. The objective of this paper is to depict the changing pattern of family size and its demographic impact in the economy.

Keywords: *Family Size, Gender Preference of Children, Skewed Child Sex Ratio, Demographic Composition, Jharkhand.*

Introduction

Family is unit of society and society is made up of numbers of families. Marriage and birth are essential conditions to form a family. Generally, a family consists of husband, wife and their children. In joint family system, grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles and cousins all resides under one roof. Today, there are many social, economic, cultural and financial factors which influence the changes in size of the family. According to Global Data, average household size ¹ is decreasing over the years; in 2021 it was 4.44 people. Between 2010 -2021 the average household size in India has decreased by 8.6%. Increasing nuclear family system is primarily attribute to this trend. People find greater privacy in a smaller family units and it is easier to manage finance when size of the family is small. Another reason for falling average household size is decreasing rate of fertility. According to Global Burden of Disease Study 2021 (GBD, 2021) fertility rate has decreased

¹ Average household size is defined as the average number of persons per housing units.

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across all the countries since 1950. More than half of countries including India have total fertility rate ² below the replacement fertility level ³ of 2.1 children.

Low fertility rates could lead to many social and economic consequences, like shrinking working population, ageing societies, increased dependency ratio, reduced tax revenue and potential economic stagnation. There are also some indirect consequences of falling fertility rate, which ultimately results in imbalance in sex composition of society.

Low fertility may exacerbate gender preferences of children. As married couples have limited opportunities to achieve their preferred sex composition with fewer children; this can result in further gender imbalance in the population. Gender preference for children is desire for a specific sex of child based on cultural, social and personal norms. It can be preference of son or preference of daughter.

Son preference ⁴ is most prominent in band of countries stretching from North Africa through the Near East to South Asia (Arnold, 1985). In less developed countries son preference is stronger than the more developed countries. However, in developed countries balanced preference is common, but most of the married couples have desire to have son as their first child. Moreover, it is found that if a family size of one child, then parents prefer child should be son, but if there would be two children then they prefer one son and one daughter rather than having two sons.

There are some utilities of son which are associated with the son preference in India. First is economic utility of son. Son is considered as future earning hand of the family due to which economic value of son became greater than daughter. Second is socio-cultural utility of son which means a son is seen as one who carries forward the family lineage. Third is religious utility of son. It is believed that if son will perform funeral rituals of their parents, then only parents will attain salvation.

Many studies have revealed that a strong son preference affects the fertility and reproductive behavior which ultimately affects the family building process. If son-preference is persistent then lower fertility will lead more discrimination towards daughters and make sex ratio ⁵ more male-biased. (Anukriti; 2014, Croll; 2002). In Indian context, fall in fertility explain roughly a third to a half of sex ratio decrease over the last 30 years. (Jayachandran, 2017). When desire for smaller family is high and society prefer sons over daughter then ultimately it will result in falling child sex ratio ⁶.

² Total fertility rate is the average number of women has in her lifetime.

³ Replacement level fertility is the average number of children a woman needs to have to replace herself and maintain population level. It is usually around 2.1

⁴ Son preference is preference for male children over female children.

⁵ sex ratio is defined as total number of females per 1000 male.

⁶ Child sex ratio is number of female children (0-6 age) per 1000 male children (0-6 age).



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Table 1: Child Sex Ratio of India

Year	Child Sex Ratio
1961	976
1971	964
1981	962
1991	945
2001	927
2011	919

Source: Census of India

Child sex ratio is crucial indicator of gender equality and the well being of girls, reflecting the attitudes of society towards different sexes. Moreover, it also reflects the future composition of population structure and potential marriage and family structure.

Census data reveals that since 1961 to 2011 child sex ratio of India has declined by 57 points (976 to 919). (Table 1) This huge decline is result of daughter negligence and son preference.

Review of Literature

There is large number of literature available regarding lower fertility, son preference and declining scenario of child sex ratio. Till the year 1965 global fertility rate was 5 children per women, today the number has halved to below 2.5 children per women. (Roser; 2014). Many socio-economic and technical reasons like rapidly growing family planning methods, contraceptive use, widespread literacy and awareness are some of factors responsible for fall in fertility rate around the world. Modern fertility control methods and changing patterns of family formation and structure are most obvious reason of declining fertility. Some of scholars highlights that in many areas' fertility declined due to widespread education and awareness about family planning. Educated and financially independent women don't want the burden of repeated pregnancies; which ultimately reduces fertility. (Murthi, Guio and Dreze, 1995).

Many countries are witnessing falling fertility scenario, side by side some parts of the world are still following traditional patriarchal⁷ ideologies, where son preference is very common phenomena. A cultural bias favoring male children over female children is mostly observed in South Eastern Asian countries like India, China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Nepal and South Korea. In such societies, sons are considered as having greater economic and social values whereas daughters are seen as economic burden for families. In India son preference is very high in North and North-Western regions, on the contrary in Southern region the existence of son preference is less. (Sinha, Bhat and Gulati; 2003).

⁷ Patriarchal system in which positions of authority are primarily held by men.

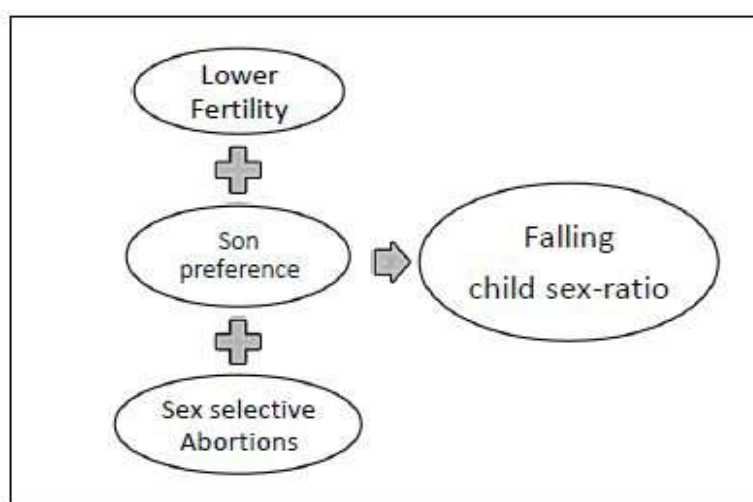


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Dowry system and ancestor worship practices make son more desirable and daughter less desirable by couples. And due to fertility transition married couples develop son targeting childbearing behavior. (Dubuc; 2018). Families with strong son preference are likely to obtain him by chance at low fertility which could increase their use of sex selective abortions⁸. And declining fertility and desire for smaller family size along with easy availability of sex determination and abortions in a son preference society may cause in decline in sex ratio. According to Anukriti, 2014; decline in fertility can transform into more male biased sex ratio if son preference is persistent and technology for sex selection is easily accessible.



In patriarchal societies with high preferences for son government initiatives also would not be able to change the attitude towards girls' children. In September, 2002 Haryana government has announced 'Devirupak yojana' in order to promote family planning methods. In which eligible parents who opt for terminal method for family planning will receive monthly payment of 500 if they have daughter and 200 if they have son, for a period of 20 years. Scholars have found that despite higher incentive for a girl relative to a boy, this scheme decreases fertility but also decreases sex ratio. A couple has choice between a son and only daughters they choose a son despite lower monetary benefits which ultimately reduces sex ratio.

Data have shown that India with high son preference, is facing the problem of skewed sex ratio and declining fertility is one of the underlying reasons. Jayachandran (2017) found that desire for smaller families is one of the reasons for declined sex ratio with growing economic development in many countries especially those having greater preferences for son. In India smaller families have greater number of sons than the larger families (Clark, 2000) which indicates that with the goal of smaller family couples prefer and plan to have son. On the other hand, in desire to have son the female birth in the family increases where, couple does not aim for smaller family size.

⁸ Sex selective abortions is practice of terminating a pregnancy based on the predicted sex of the fetus



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Material and Method

Jharkhand being a young state of India, is very rich in minerals as well as in human population. It has a population of 32.96 million consisting 16.93 million males and 16.03 million females (Census of India, 2011). It is the eastern state of country and formed after carving out the southern area of Bihar. It has 24 districts and district Ranchi is capital of the state. In terms of son preference and skewed sex ratio it neither comes in two extreme zones of north or south.

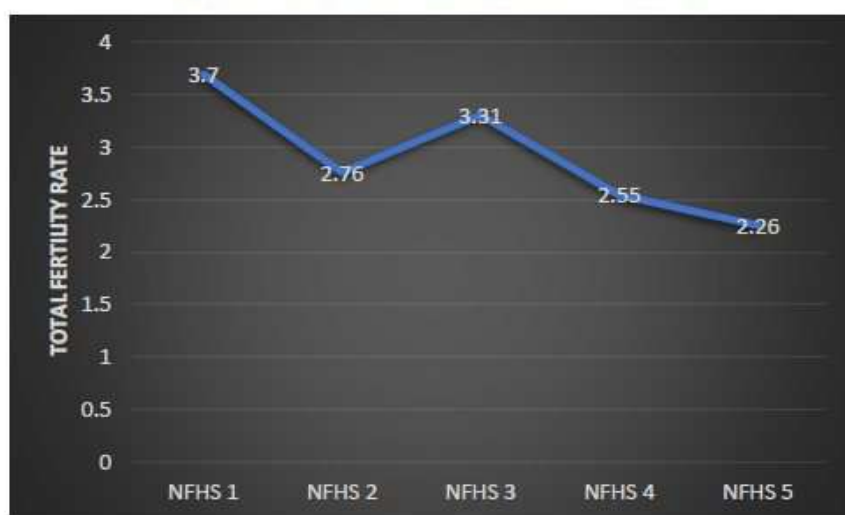
This paper aims to highlight the extent of son preference in Jharkhand and also to analyze the effect of falling fertility on gender preferences and sex composition of the state. To accomplish this objective relevant data are gathered from NFHS (National Family Health Survey). NFHS is an India - wide survey conducted by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Five rounds of survey have been conducted since first survey in 1992-93. NFHS provides variety of demographic data related to fertility rate, mortality rate, sex ratio, nutritional status of children and women, family planning methods and fertility preferences etc.

Discussion

Declining Fertility:

Secondary data of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) reveal that over the years fertility rate is declining for India as whole as well as for the state of Jharkhand. Figure 1 depicts the declining trend of total fertility rate of Jharkhand. It is 2.26 children per women, implying that the state is very close to reach the replacement fertility level. Since 1992-93 it has declined by 1.44 children. Female education, urbanization, non-agricultural employment and increased family planning programs are main reason for fertility decline.

Figure 1: Total Fertility Rate of Jharkhand.



Source: National Family Health Survey, Various rounds.



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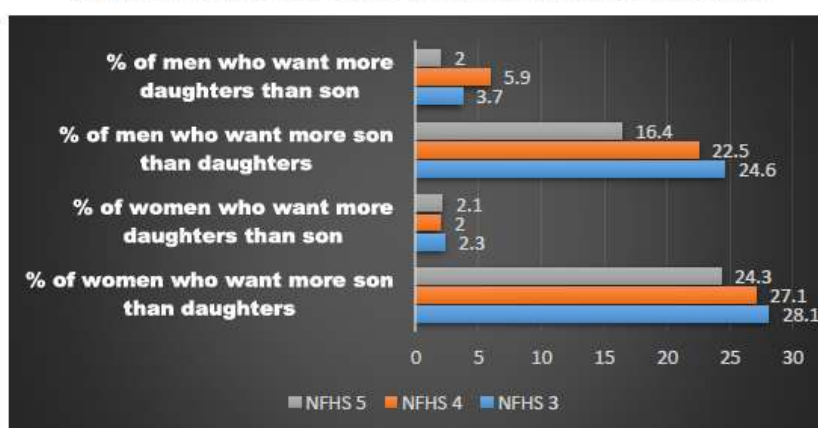
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Son Preference:

Along with fertility level, National Family Health Survey (NFHS) also provides data on indicators of sex preference by men and women. Latest round of NFHS shows that around 25% men and 28% women want more son than daughters, whereas only 4% men and 2.3% women want more daughters than men. Figure 2 shows the gender preference behavior of men and women of Jharkhand. And with increasing round of NFHS percentage of men and women who want more son than daughters have raised. Data shows that, relative to men, greater percentage of women prefers son over daughters. However, preference for son over daughters has jumped up by 8% among men, comparative to 4% among women.

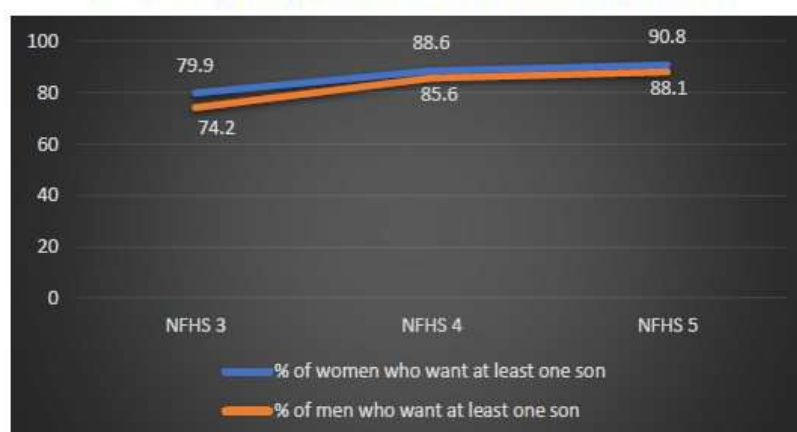
Moreover, figure 3 suggest that preference for son is increasing over time for Jharkhand. Percentage of women who want at least one son has increased by 16.6% from NFHS 3 to NFHS 5. And among men it has increased by 13.9% for the same period. Although men's preference for having a son is strong, it is slightly lower than women's preference.

Figure 2: Gender Preference by men and women of Jharkhand



Source: National Family Health Survey, various round

Figure 3: Son preference by men and women in Jharkhand.



Source: National Family Health Survey, Various round



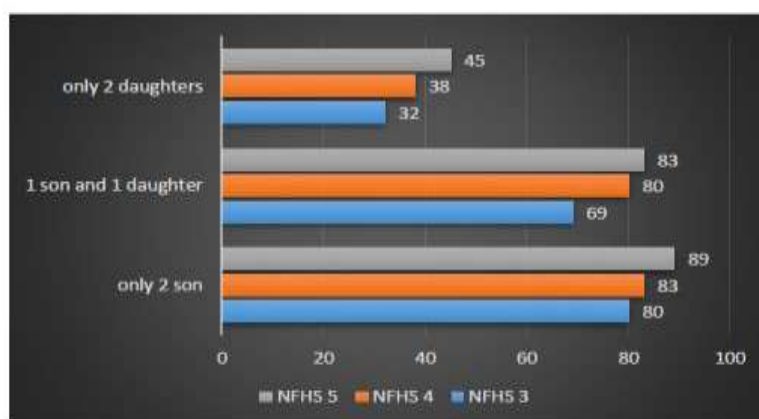
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In this way with decline in fertility, son preference has shown increasing trend for the state of Jharkhand. When it comes to family planning decision, desire for son plays an important role. Families which have only daughters does not want to fertility control methods, but those families which have two or more sons easily adopts family planning methods and control fertility.

Figure 4: Percentage of women with two children who don't want another child: Jharkhand

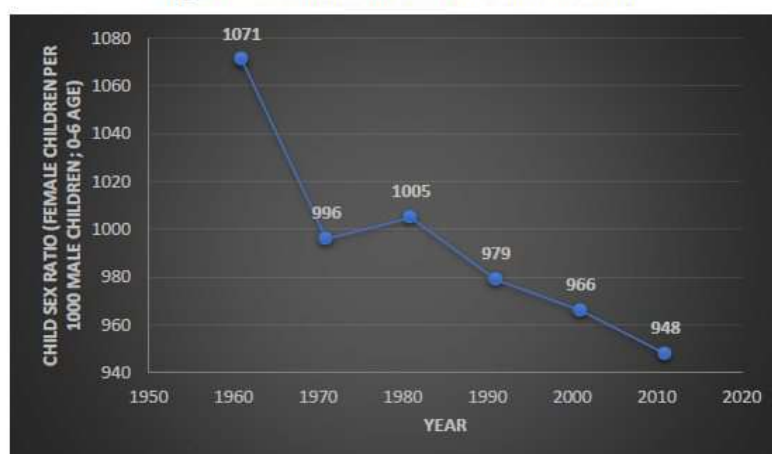


Source: National Family Health Survey, Various rounds

NFHS -5 report reveals that family planning desire depends on the gender of their existing children. Women who already have two sons are more likely to say they don't want another child and 89% of such women express this sentiment. On the other hand, women who have two daughters are less likely to feel this way, with only 45% saying they don't want another child. (figure 4). This disparity shows that preference for son is significant factor in family planning decision in Jharkhand.

In this way, changing family size and declining fertility in Jharkhand along with existence of son preference is responsible for declining trend of child sex ratio of the state.

Figure 5: Trend of child sex ratio of Jharkhand



Source: Singh & Ram (2006); Jharkhand since Independence: A demographic Analysis



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Figure 5 shows that since the last 6 decades, child sex ratio has declined by 123 points which is a great matter of concern. Presently, child sex ratio of Jharkhand is much higher than the national average (919 female per 1000 male children) then also its acute decline is accountable for changing demographic composition of the state. In near future, when these children will become adult then overall sex ratio will definitely decline and eventually female will be lessened.

Conclusion

Son preference along with changing family structure specially growing popularity of small family size out turn the decline in fertility level at macro as well as micro regions. Jharkhand is not the exception of this trend. Fertility is declining, son preference is increasing and both lead to decline in child sex ratio.

If this plot continues then soon, Jharkhand will become female deficit state of the country. Necessary measures by government, specifically regarding awareness in order to break the ideology of son preference associated with patriarchal societies. Now a days, much can be done to reduce son preference through social media movement, legislations and mass media. But education and awareness are not enough to change the society's preference for son. It will need actions to make daughters socially and economically equal to son. What is required is to start from family level and parents should treat son and daughters indifferent.

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