



Sex Ratio at Birth

For Prelims: National Family Health Survey, Sex Determination, Government Initiative

For Mains: Issue of imbalance Sex Ratio, National Family Health Survey, Challenges in Ensuring Balances Sex Ratio, Government Initiative

Why in News?

A recent study has reported that “son bias” is on a decline in India as [Sex Ratio](#) at Birth normalised from **111 boys per 100 girls in 2011 to 108 boys per 100 girls in 2019-21**.

What are the Key Findings of the Report?

▪ National Figures:

- The **average annual number** of baby girls “missing” in India fell from about 4.8 lakh in 2010 to 4.1 lakh in 2019.
 - The “missing” here refers to **how many more female births would have occurred during this time** if there were **no female-selective abortions**.
- From 111 boys per 100 girls in India’s 2011 census, the sex ratio at birth have normalised slightly, narrowing to about **109 in the 2015-16** wave of the [National Family Health Survey \(NFHS\)](#) and to 108 boys in the NFHS 5 2019-21.
- Between 2000-2019, **nine crore female births** went “missing” because of [female-selective abortions](#).

▪ Religion Wise Sex Ratio:

- The report has also analysed **religion-wise sex selection**, pointing out that the **gap was the highest for Sikhs**.
 - In the 2001 census, Sikhs had a sex ratio at birth of **130 males per 100 females**, far exceeding that year’s national average of 110.
 - By the 2011 census, the Sikh ratio had **narrowed to 121 boys per 100 girls**.
 - It now hovers around 110, about the same as the ratio of males to females at birth among the country’s Hindu majority (109), according to the latest NFHS.
- Both **Christians** (105 boys to 100 girls) and **Muslims** (106 boys to 100 girls) have sex ratios close to the natural norm.

▪ Religion Wise Share in Missing Girls:

- **Share in Indian Population:**
 - Sikh: 2%
 - Hindu: 80%
 - Muslim: 14%
 - Christian: 2.3%
- **Share in Missing Girls due to Sex-Selective Abortion:**
 - Sikh: 5%
 - Hindu: 87%
 - Muslim: 7%
 - Christian: 0.6%

What has been the History of Sex Ratio in India?

- Globally, **boys modestly outnumber girls at birth**, at a ratio of approximately **105 male babies for every 100 female babies**.
 - This was the ratio in India in the 1950s and 1960s, **before prenatal sex tests became available across the country**.
- The problem began in the 1970s with the availability **prenatal diagnostic technology allowing for sex selective abortions**.
 - **India legalised abortion in 1971** but the trend of sex selection started picking up in the **1980s due to the introduction of [ultrasound technology](#)**.
- In the **1970s**, India's sex ratio **was at par with the global average of 105-100**, but this widened to **108 boys per 100 girls in the early 1980s**, and reached **110 boys per 100 girls in the 1990s**.

What are the Challenges in Ensuring Balanced Birth Sex Ratio?

- **Regressive Mindset:**
 - There is considerable **son preference** in all states, except possibly in Kerala and Chhattisgarh.
 - This son's preference is derived from a regressive mindset. E.g.: **People associate girls with [dowry](#)**.
- **Misuse of Technology:**
 - Cheaper technology like ultrasound helps in sex selection.
- **Failure in Implementation of Law:**
 - **[The Prenatal Conception and Prenatal Determination Act \(PC-PNDT\)](#)**, 1994 which punishes healthcare professionals for telling expectant parents the sex of a child with imprisonment and hefty fines, **has failed to control the sex selection**.
 - Reports found major gaps in the **training of personnel implementing PC-PNDT**.
 - Poor training meant that they were unable to prepare strong cases against violators to secure convictions.
- **Illiteracy:**
 - **Illiterate women** in the reproductive age group of 15-49 years have **higher fertility than literate women**.

Way Forward

- **Bringing Behavioural Change:**
 - Increasing **female education and economic prosperity** help to improve the ratio. In this pursuit, the government's **[Beti-Bachao Beti Padhao Campaign](#)** has achieved remarkable success in bringing behavioural change in the society.
- **Sensitizing Youth:**
 - There is an urgent need to reach young people for **reproductive health education** and services as well as to cultivate gender equity norms.
 - For this, the services of **[Accredited Social Health Activist \(ASHA\)](#)** can be leveraged, especially in rural areas.
- **Stringent Enforcement of Law:**
 - India **must implement the [Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques \(PCPNDT\) Act, 1994 more stringently](#)** and dedicate more resources to fighting the preference for boys.
 - In this context, the **[Drugs Technical Advisory Board](#)** decision to include ultrasound machines in the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 is a step in the right direction.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. How do you explain the statistics that show that the sex ratio in Tribes in India is more favourable to women than the sex ratio among Scheduled Castes? (2015)

Q. Why do some of the most prosperous regions of India have an adverse sex ratio for women? Give your

arguments. (2014)

[Source: TH](#)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/sex-ratio-at-birth-1>

