



## 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](#)

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