



Preface

The Census 2001 figures show a decline of male: female sex ratio in urban Rajasthan from 909 (909 females against 1000 males) in 1991 to 886 in 2001. In urban Ganganagar adjoining Punjab it plummeted to below 800. "There had been a drastic drop in child sex ratios (0 to 6 years) in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, Chandigarh and Maharashtra as compared to the 1991 Census and the role of machines is too conspicuous.

The fairly large body of research carried out in recent years and the efforts of the NGOs have brought out clearly the low sex ratio can be attributed to the age-old son preferential behaviour on the part of the parents.

A recently emerged factor that has a strong influence on the sex ratio at birth is the use of sex determination tests during pregnancy followed by abortion of foetuses of unwanted sex. Although conducting abortion became legal in India in 1971, it is only recently that pre-natal diagnostic techniques became widely available.

While in the rest of the world, women outnumber men by 3 to 5%, in India there are seven per cent more men than women and the number of females continues to decline. Neither education nor affluence has brought any significant change in the attitudes towards women. In fact, the increase in the deficit of young girls noticed in the 1981, 1991 and 2001 censuses was indicative of a strong possibility that the traditional methods of neglect of female children were being increasingly replaced by not allowing female children to be born. "It was a surprise because there is so much awareness being generated about the need to cherish the girl child," said Deepa Jain Singh, secretary to the Ministry of Women and Child Development. "We have to address this in a big way. We have no option."

"Squeeze on family size is fuelling the trend of 'disappearing' daughters. For households expressing preference for one child only, they want to make sure this is a son," Several studies suggest that cultural factors have played an important role in determining fertility trends. (Basu, 1992; Jeffery and Jeffery 1997; Das Gupta, 1987).

One important cultural (and economic) feature is the value attached to sons. Many social scientists have argued that with increasing welfare and economic development the importance of



factors such as son preference would decline. However, some recent studies have shown that son preference has, in fact, increased alongside lower fertility and rising economic and social welfare.

Findings from NFHS-3 suggest that 56% of women and 59% of men consider the ideal family size to be two children or less. There is a strong preference for sons in Rajasthan. About one-third of women and one-quarter of men wants more sons than daughters, but only 2% want more daughters than sons. However, most men and women would like to have at least one son and at least one daughter.

Findings from DLHS-RCH 2 (2002-04), suggest that among the women who had no living children, 46% wanted a boy as the first child and only 2% desired for girl whereas overall around 57% desired son and only 7% desired for daughter. With increasing number of living children, male is dominating preferred sex of the next child (57%).

Now is the time that the sanguinity of the system is no more punctuated and the efforts get translated into palpable dents to see that the adverse sex ratio is restored at its earliest and therefore this study to empirically document some of the underlined social determinants and professional practices detrimental to the survival of girl child.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chhish', is written over a horizontal line.

Director-SIHFW