

# Declining Sex Ratio in India: Reasons of Gender Gap and Need for Policy Reforms

**Dr. Dajinder Kaur<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Rashmi Kohli\*<sup>2</sup>**

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration,  
Postgraduate Government College for Girls, Sector-42, Chandigarh.

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Zoology,  
Postgraduate Government College for Girls, Sector-42, Chandigarh.

## **Abstract:**

*The most important component of any census is gender composition which is a useful demographic characteristic. Sex ratio is the number of females per 1000 males. Indian sub continent has more males than females in the population. As per 2011 census the sex ratio was 914 per 1000 males under 6 years old compared to 927 per 1000 in 2001 and 945 per 1000 in 1991. India's population has been a low and declining sex ratio since the advent of census operations. This trend brings forth female's low status and causes a serious threat to the cultural, socio-economic and ethical structures and values of Indian society. The present study is based on secondary data which reviews the existing research and documentation about gender ratio, declining number of girl child in India, pre natal sex selection and other related issues about gender imbalances. This study also focuses on the reasons for the disparity and declining trend between male female ratios in the Indian population. We would also emphasize and highlight the needs for policy reforms and their effective implementation.*

**Key Words:** Census, gender gap, sex ratio, demography.

## **Introduction**

The wide spread disparities existing between the female and male is one of the criteria for analyzing female - male ratio (FMR). In India FMR averaged 933 in 2001 and it is 940 in 2011, which is one of the lowest in the world. After independence i.e. from 1951 to 1961 the position of most of states and UT's was good but from 1971 to 2001 the declining trend in sex ratio was shown except Kerala and Pondicherry. But in 2011 Census it is seen that in all states except Bihar, Gujarat and Jammu Kashmir the sex ratio has increased, it is also increased in UT's except Dadra & Haveli and Daman & Diu. In most parts of Northern India FMR is said to be very low as compared to Southern States of India.

The state of Kerala with 1084 females for every 1000 males has the best sex ratio in India. It has shown tremendous improvement in the last 10 years. Haryana has the lowest sex ratio of 877 females per 1000 males. Thus, sex ratio of India varies from region to region.

In India only Kerala and Pondicherry have high total female population than the male population. Other states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka are also showing an increase in their sex ratio. But in developed countries females outnumber males. India is also facing the problem with low sex ratio i.e. 943 in 2011 census.

### **There are various factors that contributed to its low level.**

1. **Patriarchal society** with more male centric thoughts force one family to have male child with old beliefs like family nomination.
2. **Lack of education** makes them unable to follow right attitude towards it.
3. **Prenatal sex selection:** ultrasonography has made it possible for antenatal sex detection. It led to lowering sex ratio.
4. **Social evils** like dowry daughters are considered as economic burden for family. So families prefer to have male child as earning source as well as reducing burden.
5. **Lack of awareness-** due to low contribution of female in economy the house female are not considered as important as male. That is lack of basic amenities.
6. **Security issues-** females are considered prone to harassment and weak sex needs protection.

### **Implications of Declining Female Sex Ratio:**

**Marriage squeeze:** ‘Marriage squeeze’ characterized by inability of men in marriageable age to find suitable partners. Marriage is universal in India and men typically marry younger women with age gap of normally not exceeding five years. Already declining child sex ratio plummets further; there is a probability that each successive cohort will contain lesser and lesser women relative to men. As (in and out) migration do not substantially alter the cohort sex composition, it is likely that more men compete for comparatively lesser number of women in the marriage market.

**Postponing the Marriages:** Postponing the marriage longer by marrying late, looking for brides who may be younger than usual or even older, etc. In any case these options are not desirable. The age at marriage, when involuntarily pushed upward as a result of inability in finding a match will result in longer spousal gaps.

**Re-emergence of “bride price”:** There are reports that scarcity of women in an environment of poverty and lack of development has led to re-emergence of “bride price”, the system of paying money to obtain a wife, and sharing of wives in some communities in Rajasthan, who are in the lower echelons of the society in terms of caste hierarchies and economic position. If this

continues in a wider scale, it is the rich and powerful who are better poised for matrimony than others.

**Crime against women:** Difficulties and inability in finding a female partner would lead to social tensions, particularly manifested in crime against women.

**Boy-Girl Tests:** The increasing and widespread incidence of “Boy-Girl tests” in urban centers will have serious consequences. In Mumbai and Delhi, the child sex ratio is far below the national average and the girl population has dropped in 23 cities.

**Deterioration of ethics:** If the situation of decline in sex ratio becomes serious, ethics will deteriorate in the society, as a consequence, for biological need prostitution will increase, and family taboos will also deteriorate.

### The major women related Acts are as under:

- The sexual harassment of women at workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 (No. 14 of, 2013)
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, (Come into Force on 26/10/2006)
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- Dowry Prohibition Rules 1985
- Indecent Representation of Women 1986
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act and rules 1987
- National Commission for Women Act
- Amendment Proposed in Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956
- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2006

### Welfare schemes for women in India

Under Article 15(3), the Constitution of India allows for positive discrimination in favor of women. The article, under right to equality, states: "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children."-In addition, the directive principles of State Policy 39(a) state that: "The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood."

**The Mother and Child Tracking System:** The Mother and Child Tracking System was launched in 2009, helps monitor the health care system to ensure that all mothers and their children have access to a range of services, including pregnancy care, medical care during delivery, and immunizations. The system consists of a database of all pregnancies registered at health care facilities and birth since 1 December 2009.

**Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY):** Conditional Maternity Benefit (CMB) is a scheme sponsored by the national government for pregnant and lactating women age 19 and over for their first two live births. The programme, which began in October 2010, provides money to help ensure the good health and nutrition of the recipients. As of March 2013 the programme is being offered in 53 districts around the country.<sup>[3]</sup>

**The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls – Sabla:** The Mother and Child Tracking System is an initiative launched in 2012 that targets adolescent girls. The scheme offers a package of benefits to at-risk girls between the ages of 10 and 19. It is being offered initially as a pilot programme in 200 districts. The programme offers a variety of services to help young women become self-reliant, including nutritional supplementation and education, health education and services, and life skills and vocational training.

**Rashtriya Mahila Kosh :** Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (The National Credit Fund for Women) was created by the Government of India in 1993. Its purpose is to provide lower income women with access to loans to begin small businesses.

**Priyadarshini:** Priyadarshini initiated in April 2011, is a programme that offers women in seven districts access to self-help groups.

**The Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY):** This is a small savings scheme backed by the Government of India exclusively for the girl child. As per this scheme, a parent or legal guardian can open an account in the name of a girl child until she attains the age of ten years. The scheme is aimed at encouraging the parents or guardians to build a fund for the future education and marriage expenses of their female child. It is part of the “Beti Bachao – Beti Padhao” initiative of the Government of India, also known as BBB.

## **NATIONAL LEVEL ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP AND SCHEMES FOR WELFARE OF WOMEN**

### **National Commission for Women**

The National Commission for Women (NCW) was constituted on 31st January 1992 as a statutory body at the national level, in pursuance of the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 to safeguard the interests of women. It has a wide mandate covering almost all aspects of women’s development.

### **The Ministry of Women and Child Development, GOI**

The Department of Women and Child Development was set up in the year 1985 as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to give the much needed impetus to the holistic development of women and children. With effect from 30.01.2006, the Department has been upgraded to a Ministry. The broad mandate of the Ministry is to have holistic development of Women and Children.

### Latest schemes for upliftment of women:

- Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, meant for uplifting women in the sphere of women's education
- Sukanya Samridhi Account, meant to help families' save for their daughters
- One Stop Center scheme meant to offer easy access for women suffering from domestic abuse or violence, and needing support
- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana meant to offer free LPG connections to women living below poverty line
- Mahila Haat meant to support women entrepreneurs and women self help groups
- Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers meant to provide affordable daycare services to working women
- Maternity Benefit Scheme meant for pregnant women and lactating mothers
- Women's Helpline 1091 meant to provide emergency assistance to women in trouble, especially those facing violence of any kind

**Village Facilitation & Convergence Service:** Village Facilitation & Convergence Service is a new initiative aimed to linking women in need with the schemes/programs being implemented by Central/State Government impacting the lives of women such as BBBP, Sabla, Jan Dhan Yojana, Swach Bharat etc. This is being implemented initially in 100 Gender critical districts listed under BBBP.

**One Stop Centres:** The Ministry has launched the Scheme for setting up One Stop Centres to facilitate access to an integrated range of services including medical, legal, and psychological support to women affected by violence to be funded through Nirbhaya Fund .

**Women Helpline:** A schematic proposal to enable the universalization of a Helpline specifically for women with a *common number 181* across the country has been approved. This Helpline will be linked with One Stop Centres being established by the Ministry of Women & Child Development. So far 21 states have been extended financial assistance & operationalised this Helpline.

**Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013:** The Ministry has released a Handbook on the Act for ready reference of all. It is also available on [www.wcd.nic.in](http://www.wcd.nic.in). The Handbook is meant for all workplaces, institutions, organisations to provide basic understanding of sexual harassment at places of work.

### 33% Reservation of Women in Police:

This initiative has been taken up to strengthen gender sensitivity in police force so as to improve the overall police responsiveness to gender sensitive cases. So far 7 states and all Union

Territories have joined this initiative and have started recruiting additional women police officers. Most of the other States have agreed to start working on this.

**Special Mahila Police Volunteer Programme:** Guidelines for operationalization of Mahila Police Volunteers have been developed by WCD Ministry and sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs for adoption. MPVs will act as a link between police and community and facilitate women in distress. The MPVs shall report the incidence of violence against women, domestic violence and dowry harassment.

**Engendering Young Boys and Girls in Educational Institutions through Gender Champions:** To sensitize young boys and girls on gender equality issues, the scheme of Gender Champions has been introduced from the school level itself.

**Recognition and Awards for Women Achievers:** The Ministry of Women & Child Development has placed at the forefront of its efforts to recognize and reward the achievements of women to make a difference of life, aspirations and opportunities available to women.

The Ministry has also collaborated with media to highlight women achievers. One such year long programme '*Abke Baras Mohey Bitiya hee Dijo*' is being telecast jointly by Focus TV, ETV and Doordarshan.

**Rashtriya Mahila Kosh:** For effective implementation of RMK, Rate of Interest (ROI) of RMK loans has been revised downward. ROI chargeable to end-beneficiaries by NGOs have been reduced to 10% from 14% this year.

**Women of India Exhibitions:** In order to link crafts-women directly to the market, a new initiative titled "Women of India" has been started. Two thematic exhibitions-cum-sale have already been organized successfully in Delhi. One such unique exhibition with the theme 'Women and organic Products' was organised this year at 'Dilli Haat, INA in New Delhi.

**Regulation of Matrimonial Websites:** Responding to a number of complaints of stalking and harassment of women who register on matrimonial websites, it has been decided to put in place a regulatory framework in order to check this menace. The matrimonial websites have come on board for this and have agreed to jointly develop a code of conduct which will be implemented through self-regulation.

**Mandatory Mention of Widows Name on Death Certificates:** In order to ensure that a widow is facilitated to get all her entitlements after the death of her husbands, the Ministry is working with the office of Registrar General of India as well as the State

Governments to ensure that the name of the widow is compulsorily mentioned in the death certificates of their husbands.

**National Policy on Women:** A new National Policy on Women is under formulation. The High Level Committee set up for this purpose has already submitted its Report after extensive national and regional stakeholder's consultations. The Policy will be notified by March 2016.

**Adoption Reforms:** In adoption reforms, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has notified the revised '*Guidelines Governing Adoption of Children 2015*' which have come into force *with effect from August, 1, 2015*. The revised guidelines coupled with the new IT enabled adoption system – CARINGS, provide a transparent process of adoption

**Suggestions and recommendations:**

In the light of the above findings and results of the study, following suggestions are made in order to solve the problem of declining sex ratio in India:

1. Parents have to play a key role in removing the existing problem. Parents have to change their mind set towards male child and female child by giving up various practices of gender discrimination and giving equal importance to both the sexes in all respects. The parents have to accept happily the birth of a child irrespective of its sex, treating both the sexes equally with regard to education, care, health, affection, love etc.
2. There is a need whereby women and girls should be accepted in society completely in such a manner that they don't consider themselves as inferior, subordinates or unequal to their male counterparts. This can only be achieved when women and girls are allowed to share responsibilities with their male counterparts.. This will definitely boost their confidence level and will make them self reliant and independent.
3. Areas, where sex ratio is the worst, should be identified and should be kept under vigilance along with various strategies and programmes so as to improve the sex ratio in such areas.
4. Different stakeholders like various health functionaries, NGOs, self-help groups etc. who are really concerned about the problem of declining sex ratio have to collectively initiate campaigns with positive commitment;
5. Stringent reimplementations of laws related to issues such as dowry, sex determination tests and female foeticide is required. Strict punishment should be given to the violators of such laws. Legislative laws will be more effective if every individual accepts them seriously with rationale mind set.
6. Government and other agencies should felicitate those parents and youths who set example for the society by not taking and not giving the dowry. Such recognition will definitely motivate others towards the abolition of dowry system.

7. Education for girls is already made free and compulsory by the government. What is required here is to motivate the girls for education by highlighting its advantages and opportunities. This is possible only when parents at large will allow and inspire their girl or female children to go for primary and higher education. This will make the girls more independent and self-reliant whereby to some extent they can change their negative gender bias image, which at present considers them as wasteful expenditure, economic liability, and low status for parents etc.
8. Central and state governments through various schemes should provide economic and other benefits and incentives to those parents and families, which are having at least one girl. Such incentives and benefits will encourage the other parents especially poor parents to have a girl or female child in their family.
9. All those clinics should be fined, banned and their registration should be cancelled which undertake sex determination tests and practice female feticide. Harsh punishments should be given to those health personnel who are directly or indirectly associated with such practices.
10. MTP and PNDT Acts should be implement strictly and only those abortions should be permitted which the concerned authority is approved. Violation of such laws should involve strict punishment to the violators.

### **References:**

1. *Census of India (1961- 2011)*
2. *Report of National Commission on Population, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi.*
3. *Swami Harshananda (2008), An Introduction to Hindu Culture. 1st Edition. Bangalore (India): Ramakrishna Math.*
4. *11th Five-Year Plan, GoI.*
5. *International Conference on Population and Development (1994); the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women; and the 2001 and 2006 United Nations*
6. *Bandyopadhyay S, Singh A., (2003). History of Son Preference and Sex Selection in India and in the West. Bull Indian Inst Hist Med Hyderabad;33:149-67.*
7. *Ghosh S., (1987). The Female Child in India: A Struggle for Survival. Bull Nutr Found India; 8:4.*
8. *Lives at Risk: Declining Child Sex Ratios in India - seminal article in 1990, Amartya Sen.*
9. *Prabhat Jha and his Colleagues and Rajesh Kumar Research Study: The Hindu: 10-*
10. *Institutions, Organizations and Gender Equality in an Era of Globalization – Arun Rao and David Kelleher.*