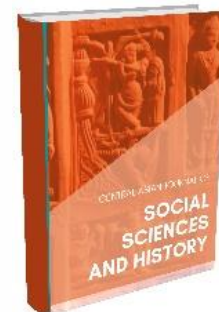




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## Gender Inequality in Children: A Study of Kharia Village (Hisar)

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### ABSTRACT

The present study is an attempt to show the trends and pattern of gender inequality among children on village level. The select village of Kharia located in the Hisar district of Haryana has exhibited improving and positive signs towards closing the gender gap. The evidences seem to be compelling but infact this is not real. In many cases during the survey, respondents were not very open about their opinions and also chose to be silent. This has been the case especially with women. The study area is mostly rural where age old customs and social stereotypes continue to have very strong hold. However, with time the awareness level has increased and today, the residents especially belonging to middle aged and young age groups are more open and encompassing of new ideas and a new way of life. The change has also been very prominent among males that are now willing to provide the best facilities and education to their children irrespective of gender. But, the limited financial resources are still a big friction and in many cases the result ends up in the girl child bearing the brunt.

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**Introduction:** Gender inequality is a world-wide phenomenon but with reference to India it is issue of great concern. The Constitution of India guarantees gender equality and no discrimination against anyone in any form whatsoever. In spite of all the policy support and legal frameworks laid down by the government, and the rapid transformation of the socio-economic conditions, the traditional patriarchal norms and customs continue to relegate women to a secondary status. In India, women start to face discrimination prior to their births and continue to fight discrimination throughout their lives. The way of life is very different for the girls from that of the boys. While the boys enjoy greater freedom and opportunities, girls have restrictions to move freely, and this affects their access to education, work and social lives. Women have to face discrimination in every age and stage of life that begins with their birth and continues through infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Status of a woman in India can be seen in four stages of life viz. in mother's womb, as an infant, as a child, as a

wife after marriage and as a widow if her husband dies.

Gender discrimination is prevalent even before a child is born into this world. Sex selective abortion is still practiced in many parts of India where the gender of the foetus is determined through Pre Natal Sex Determination Techniques. If the foetus is found to be a girl, pregnancy is terminated through abortion. Pre Natal Sex Determination has been strictly regulated by the Government of India through the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994 which prevented misuse of the technology and was further amended in the year 2003 to the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act that prohibited sex selective application of the technology. The amendment of 2003 strictly prohibited and brought the use of ultrasound for sex determination under regulation laying guidelines for strict punishments and empowered the central and state authorities to monitor and regulate the sales of ultrasound machines. In spite of the strict regulations in force, sex determination continues to be a widely practiced form of gender based discrimination even prior to birth and is the major cause of declining sex ratio.

The widespread prevalence of preference to a male child has been greatly responsible for the misuse of Pre-Natal Sex Determination Techniques that discriminates based on gender even prior to the birth of a child. Son preference exists in all communities. The birth of a son is warmly welcomed. Among various social reasons, old age protection and financial prospect in future are the major ones leading to the bias for a male child. The girl is seen as a future financial liability. It has been widely noticed in many cases that if the parents have their first child as a son, they are reluctant to have future kids because of the fear of a girl child. And in some cases, if the first child is a girl, the fear for a second girl child still boggles them and they are reluctant to have future kids. This antipathy for a girl child has been the prime reason underlying the practice of pre-natal sex determination on a large scale. Sex selective abortion has had very serious implications for the child sex ratio in the Indian society. In the past, prior to the availability of sex determination techniques, female infanticide and abandonment of female babies were the common practices.

The demographic manifestation of gender inequality is the main tool to know the status of females in any given society. The trends of demographic manifestation show that there is alarming situation within north-western states of India. The condition is more worst in Haryana where there is the lowest child sex ratio in the country (2011). In Haryana, Mewat has the highest child sex ratio and Jhajjar has the lowest. Hisar district lies among the lowest child sex ratio districts in the state.

### **Study Area:**

Kharia Village in Hisar district has been selected for primary survey for present study. This village occupies least child sex ratio according to 2011 census. It is a small village in context to total number of households (around 90 households in 2011). It comprises of all three social groups like general, OBC and SC. There is no household for ST in the village. Primarily village is dominated by open caste (Gen) followed by OBC and SC.

### **Objectives:**

- To know the trends and pattern of Child Sex Ratio in study area.
- To know the social, demographic, economic and religious reasons son or daughter preference in study area.
- To highlight the possible consequences of imbalanced sex ratio among children on society.

### Research Methodology:

The study is purely based on primary source of data. A filed survey was carved out of Kharia village in Hisar district. The survey covers 240 respondents comprising of 120 males and 120 females. All respondents belong to reproductive age group (15-44). Currently married couples or eligible couples were taken as main respondents. There were 70 percent of respondents who belong to general category followed by 16.66 and 13.34 percent of OBC and SC. There is majority of general category households in the villages that is why the selection of respondents belong to this category maximum in numbers. The selection of the village is done on the basis of data available by Census of India 2011.

### Socio-economic Profile of the Select village

Social inequality manifests itself like lack of access to decent education, suitable living conditions and political facilities, among other things. The majority of these inequities are caused by differences in gender and in the same way the structure of social inequality varies. Injustice and exploitation of the marginalised segment result from massive bias and unequal distribution of resources (Adjiwanou & LeGrand, 2014). In this section, we'll look at the many dimensions and dynamics of social inequality in terms of select demographic variables. Based on the sample size of primary respondent, there is gender balance in the selected village, with equal populations of male and female across caste/categories. (Table 1.1). These caste/categories are as notified by the government classified into General, Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Scheduled castes. If we look at the overall composition of different categories in the sample size, the majority of them belong to General category followed by OBC and Scheduled castes. This is a close representation of overall castes/category composition of the population.

**Table 1.1: Distribution of Respondents according to Caste/Categories**

Sr. No.	Caste/ Categories	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>General</b>	84	84	168	70
2.	<b>OBC</b>	20	20	40	16.66
3.	<b>Scheduled</b>	16	16	32	13.33
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.99</b>

Source:-Field Survey (2021-22)

Across different categories we note that the male and female populations are similar (Table 1.1). The highest female population is obvious in the general population given the larger population of general category as compared to other categories. Furthermore, we analyzed the population of children in each household. It is observed that the majority of households have one or two child which has pretty much become the standard in the region. This is not to be seen to be the case because of son preference, but it is more towards family planning where households now wish to be limited to maximum of two children and focus more towards proper raising of the child.

**Table 1.2: Distribution of Respondents According to Number of Children**

Sr. No.	Number of Children	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>No Child</b>	8	4	12	5
2.	<b>Up to 2</b>	64	72	136	56.66
3.	<b>3 to 4</b>	40	32	72	30
4.	<b>5 and more</b>	8	12	20	8.33
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.99</b>

Source:-Field Survey (2021-22)

The second largest portions of respondents were found to have three to four children. In this case, there have been persons who attempted more children with the objective to have a son which is seen as social and financial security to the family. Apart from this factor, the concern for an old age support is mostly expected from the son because daughters will be married and move to a different family. Consequently, there have also been incidents of households ending up with more than five children. However, it is to note that most of such families have parents who are quite old and in their young ages it was quite common to have more than five children. Back then, the measures of family planning were also not in place. People continued to have more children, and more the sons, the better. There have been also person who didn't have a children yet and were recently married. They were planning to have child but were holding up to be better in terms of financial so that they can raise their child with better facilities and education. Among the respondents the awareness towards education and properly raising their children has been an interesting trend in recent times as noted during the primary survey. People have now understood the importance of education and are also seriously concerned about negative effects of not being educated as they have been experiencing in their lives also. Especially worthy to state here is the more inclination of mother to have their child educated even if it is a daughter.

**Table 1.3: Distribution of Respondents According to Level of Educational Attainment**

Sr. No.	Categories	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>Illiterate</b>	40	32	72	30
2.	<b>Middle</b>	12	20	32	13.33
3.	<b>Metric</b>	12	28	40	16.67
4.	<b>10 +2</b>	32	28	60	25
5.	<b>Graduate</b>	20	8	28	11.67
6.	<b>Post Graduate/ Professional</b>	4	4	8	3.3
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.97</b>

Source:-Field Survey (2021-22)

The educational backwardness of girls has been a consequential cause of gender inequality in India. Educating a girl child is still seen as a bad investment because she is bound to get married and leave her paternal home one day. There are various barriers to girls' education that appear especially in

developing countries like India, ranging from supply-side constraints to negative social norms. Some of these include school fees; strong cultural norms favouring boys' education when a family has limited resources; inadequate sanitation facilities in schools such as lack of private and separate latrines; and negative classroom environments, where girls may face violence, exploitation or corporal punishment. Additionally, schools often lack sufficient numbers of female teachers.

**Table 1.4: Distribution of Respondents According to Monthly Family Income**

Sr. No.	Categories (Income in Rupees per month)	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>Up to 5000</b>	52	60	112	46.66
2.	<b>5001-10000</b>	48	44	92	38.33
3.	<b>10001-15000</b>	16	16	32	13.33
4.	<b>15001 and above</b>	4	0	4	1.66
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.98</b>

Source:-Field Survey

As observed during the primary survey that the income levels in the study area has been not very promising. However, there is comparable participation among the genders who are mostly employed in the agricultural sector. There are also few populations who are engaged as labourers in other agricultural farms. Majority of the respondents earn only around 5,000 Indian rupees per month and the second majority of the respondents earn from 5000 to 10,000 per month. If we look at the gender differential, the majority of females earn around 5,000 per month whereas in the higher income groups it is the male making more money. It is evident that the females are relatively lower paid than their male counterparts which are specifically seen in income groups higher than 15,000 where none of the female has this high income.

#### **Gender based Attitude of respondents from Select Village:**

The degree of gender differentiation in a society is related to the level of patriarchy and gender bias prevalent in the society. Aside from education, a number of intricate and often interconnected factors explain the current gender gap in India. The patriarchal system in Indian society is the root cause of gender inequality. The patriarchal system's gender bias values are an integral part of the family structure. A female child becomes subordinate, weak and introverted from a very young age. With a few exceptions, most of India has strong patriarchal and patrilineal customs in which men have authority over female family members and inherit family property and title. They are raised in a restricted environment that reaffirms patriarchal stigmas, and as a result, their perseverance and ability to retaliate against the established system is limited. In this way, culture, customs, rituals and traditional practises conspire to deny the girl child's identity, rights and privileges. As a result, their existence is restricted to the four walls of the house, and they are compelled to accept the traditional role of performing household tasks and caring for the children (Jaha, 2002). The preference for sons is so strong that it has a negative impact on the birth and survival of female children. Furthermore, unequal power relations and women's low status, as manifested by limited access to human, financial and economic assets, weaken women's ability to protect themselves both within and outside of marriage, increasing their vulnerability (World Bank 2012).

In order to have a proper understanding of causes and prevalence of gender inequality it is imperative

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to identify the mindset and attitude of people and how they perceive a girl child as compared to boy child. As per the discussion above, the continued imbalance between gender is considerably attributed to the social inhibitions that greatly put an importance on having a son which shapes the perception of people and it is manifested in the skewed sex ratios (Ashturkar, Fernandez and Pandve, 2010). Consequently, the urge to have a son child becomes so strong as a result of social pressure that it results in evil practices like female foeticide and infanticide. In the following table 5.5, we have enumerated the responses of the sampled village on the importance of having a son and what drives their decision of preferring a son over a girl child. A region's oral culture reflects the values and beliefs of that society. Oral popular culture not only provides a means of better understanding society, but it also exposes the emotions and beliefs that people hold close to their everyday life experiences and their relationship with the social order.

**Table 1.5: Distribution of Respondents based on their response to “Why is it important to have a Son?”**

Sr. No.	Response	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>For carrying forward the family name.</b>	56	68	124	51.66
2.	<b>To look after during old age</b>	24	8	32	13.33
3.	<b>To own family property</b>	16	4	20	8.33
4.	<b>To perform funeral rites</b>	20	40	60	25
5.	<b>Other reasons</b>	4	0	4	1.66
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.98</b>

Source:-Field Survey (2021-22)

The respondents were given four options that have been previously recorded as the prime reasons in many literatures. The four options included the priority for a son that would carry ahead the family name, age old security, inherit family property and perform the last funeral rites for the parents. It is found that the majority of residents prefer son because it is the son who is going to carry the family name forward whereas the daughter would be married to another family and as a result her responsibility shifts towards the her husband's family. The significance of this factor can be seen as more than half the respondents acknowledge this as a major factor for son preference. On the other hand, as per the Hindu customs, the son has to perform the last funeral rites of the parents and this is seen as the second most important factor to have a son as noted by 25 per cent of the respondents. Also, the concern for their old age when the son is expected to look after the parents has been affirmed by more than 13 per cent of the respondents. However, the importance of a son to secure and inherit the family property is not seen as a major factor in the study area. It is to note that not many individuals have a large land holding size in the study area. What we see here is that the age old customs are dominant that places more emphasis on a son within the family system.

However, with time the scenario seems to be evolving on the positive side with certain minor changes that have been result of years of awareness campaigns and government policies. During the primary

survey, the response from the residents has been positive towards a girl child (Table 1.6).

**Table 1.6: Distribution of Respondents based on their response to: How do you feel if the first child is a Girl? And, is it important for the second child to be a boy?**

Sr. No.	Response	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>Feel Sad</b>	0	4	4	1.66
2.	<b>Feel Happy</b>	112	92	204	85
3.	<b>Neither/Nor Necessary</b>	8	24	32	13.33
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.99</b>

Source:-Field Survey

As can be seen in Table 1.6, that 85 per cent of the respondents are happy about having a girl as a first child and less than 2 per cent feel sad about it. Now, there appears to be not much difference among the sampled villages, if the first child is a girl or a boy. Furthermore, the acknowledgement by few respondents also shows that the relative presence of son preference seems to be reducing over time. Also, there are more than 13 per cent of the respondents who feel that it is further not important to have a boy even if the first child is a girl. The residents seem to be much open with accepting the birth of a girl child. Furthermore, detailed responses on whether the birth of a girl child brings happiness in the family or not was collected. The data shows that majority of them are now happy about the birth of a girl child. In fact, the gender of the child is found to be not of much concern to a lot of people.

**Table 1.7: Distribution of Respondents based on their opinion on whether they are happy over the birth of a girl child in the family?**

Sr. No.	Response	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>Yes</b>	100	88	188	78.33
2.	<b>No</b>	0	8	8	3.33
3.	<b>Neither Yes/No</b>	20	24	44	18.33
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.99</b>

Source:-Field Survey

It is found in the study area that the majority responded affirmative about the birth of a girl child with only less than 4 per cent being negative on the birth of a girl child whereas 18 per cent didn't respond their feeling over the birth of a girl child. When we see the different opinions between male and female, the positive response is slightly higher in the males than females. Interestingly, two females were unhappy about the girl child. In this case, it is the pressure of a son child makes the female sad. In the event, a female is not able to borne son the blame is on her who failed to have a son child. It is an age old stigma women have to face and it is a failure that it continues till date. It can be understood much better where more females denied their feelings on the birth of a girl child. The pressure on females is so intense because of the social mindset prevailing that the women have to bear without

speaking a word. However, not to mention the majority of positive response is a sign of improving situation at least in terms of behavioral changes that would reflect in the near future gender relations. It can further be identified whether the use of sex identification has been prominent or diminishing over time through the use of sex identification techniques and its usage trends.

**Table 1.8: Distribution of Respondents based on their response to whether they had any information about identification of the sex of the baby before its birth?**

Sr. No.	Response	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>Yes</b>	32	8	40	16.66
2.	<b>No</b>	80	60	140	58.33
3.	<b>No Response</b>	8	52	60	25
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.99</b>

Source:-Field Survey

During the primary survey, it was found that the majority had no knowledge about any information about pre natal sex determination technologies. However, there were more than 16 per cent of the respondents who had knowledge about such technologies and practices whereas 25 per cent gave no response and seem hesitant. If we classify the response between males and females, it is seen that mostly the males denied knowing such technologies and also it was the males who accepted to knowing such misuse of technology. On the other hand, the majority of females did deny knowing about sex determination technology but a considerable proportion of females chose to remain silent which indeed speaks a lot. As we already noted that it has been a trend in many cases whereby female appear to be suppressed or even the family circumstances do not allow them to be free and we are speaking of a region where such male dominance are very common. The statistics somehow reveal that there is still presence of such pre natal sex determination technologies and the considerable faction either admitting or not responding shows that they are aware and ashamed of the misuse. But, it continues to being practiced which has been affecting the gender balance. Furthermore, it was imperative to find the trends in practice and it was observed through analyzing the responses when asked about anyone having knowledge of any abortion after identifying the foetus to be female (Table 1.9). The results aimed a positive trend where most of them denied of having known such incidence.

**Table 1.9: Distribution of Respondents based on their response to whether they knew if anyone who had undergone abortion if they found the foetus to be female?**

Sr. No.	Response	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>Yes</b>	8	0	8	3.33
2.	<b>No</b>	80	92	172	71.66
3.	<b>No Response</b>	32	28	60	25
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.99</b>

Source:-Field Survey

In the study area, more than 70 per cent respondents denied knowing of any incidence of abortion. However, there have been two males who accepted to having known such incidents where as



significant 25 per cent chose not to respond. If we look at males and females responses differently, we find that majority of females denied knowing incidents of awareness as compared to males. At the same time, similar proportions of males and females chose not to respond. Overall, it can be said that the majority of them not knowing is a positive change but a considerable proportion choosing to be silent is also an indication otherwise. Given, the sample size as well, there have been two males accepting to knowing at least one incident of abortion is not something to be ignored. Abortion of female foetus is a serious manifestation of complete bias against a particular gender. Given the severity of the situation and the extent of foeticide which has severely impacted the sex ratios and gender balance, the Indian government passed legislation prohibiting the use of ultrasound technologies for explicit sex selection in 1994 and 2003. In spite of the legislation, such practices of technology misuse leading to foeticide continue to be a harsh reality in many communities. In addition to the above mentioned question, the respondents were also asked about who they deemed to be held responsible to cases of pre natal sex determination leading to abortion of girl child. Interestingly, the responses find the blame equally over husband and the wife (table 1.10).

**Table 1.10: Distribution of Respondents based on their response on who must be punished for the act of Pre-natal Sex Determination and subsequent Abortion if the foetus is found to be girl?**

Sr. No.	Options	Distribution of Respondents			
		Male	Female	Total	Composition (Percentage)
1	<b>Doctor/Staff</b>	8	12	20	8.33
2.	<b>Family Members</b>	4	4	8	3.33
3.	<b>Husband</b>	40	36	76	31.66
4.	<b>Wife</b>	48	28	76	31.66
5.	<b>All</b>	20	40	60	25
Total		<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>99.98</b>

Source:-Field Survey

As per the findings of the primary survey, around 31 per cent of respondents blamed the husband and similar proportion blamed the female as well for the act of sex determination and subsequent abortion. This is interesting to note where the blame in reality cannot be singled out and limited to parents only as it is more a social phenomenon. It is also noted that 25 per cent of the respondents feel that anyone and everyone involved in the process including doctor/staff, family members, husband and wife should bear the blame. Also, few respondents feel that only the doctor should be held responsible whereas less than 4 per cent of the respondents blamed the family. Though, the blame for such practices varies from person to person but foeticide is something that needs serious attention. Anyone and everyone involved in the process are responsible. But what is more greatly responsible is the social expectations and age old customs that continue to place son at a dominant position and girl child being relegated to a secondary status with restricted freedom and very limited opportunities.

### Conclusion:

The select village of Kharia located in the Hisar district of Haryana has exhibited improving and positive signs towards closing the gender gap. The evidences seem to be compelling but in true sense are not. In many cases during the survey, respondents were not very open about their opinions and also chose to be silent. This has been the case especially with women. The study area is mostly rural where

age old customs and social stereotypes continue to have very strong hold. However, with time the awareness level has increased and today, the residents especially belonging to middle aged and young age groups are more open and encompassing of new ideas and a new way of life. The change has also been very prominent among males that are now willing to provide the best facilities and education to their children irrespective of gender. But, the limited financial resources are still a big friction and in many cases the result ends up in the girl child bearing the brunt.

During the course of the survey, the positive attitude towards a girl child has been very hopeful to note. The girl child is now relatively more welcomed than being completely a source of sadness. People are now willingly accepting girl as a first child without any sadness. The expectations in terms of gender are showing diminishing signs. However, the son preference hasn't vanished away completely. There are still incidents of sex identification and abortion of female foetus but the number seems to be low, but still the presence of such practices is concerning. The income is still low in the village and in the event of any financial hardship, the patriarchal system begins to manifest. The females are the first targets who are still seen as a source of future financial liability and any investment on them would bring no future financial and social security. Evidence suggests that the son is still seen as an age old security that would carry the family name and perform the last funeral rituals. Age old customs continue to have a strong hold and in adverse events the male dominance manifests. The silence of many is still concerning and speaks a lot. As a result, we cannot safely conclude that there is no gender discrimination, but the signs reveal towards an improving situation.

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