

Son-Preference and Fertility Decline: Impact on the Sex-Ratio of Births to India-born Mothers in England and Wales.

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Male preference in many Asian cultures results in discriminatory practices against females, including child neglect, infanticide and more recently with the availability of pre-natal sex determination, sex-selective abortion. Sex selective abortion has resulted in a significant increase in sex ratios at birth (s.r.a.b) in China, India and South Korea. Cultural, religious, socio-economic reasons have been invoked to explain parent's preference for sons. We found a significant increase in s.r.a.b. for children born to India-born mothers living in the UK (from 1990), providing the first indirect quantitative evidence for sex-selective abortion among this immigrant group. In contrast, we found no significant increase in s.r.a.b. for mothers born in Pakistan and Bangladesh, even though those countries are known for strong son preference. Consistent with findings in India, we find particularly high s.r.a.b. at higher birth orders for the India-born mothers living in the UK (Dubuc and Coleman, 2007). High s.r.a.b. at higher birth rates is generally interpreted as the consequence of parents' family planning strategy to control for family size while assuring son(s), when only daughters were born previously. Therefore, a decrease in family size (fertility) would statistically increase the pressure on families with strong son preference to abort female foetuses. Analysis of the fertility rates in the UK show a less pronounced decline for the Bangladeshi and Pakistani immigrant groups compared to the Indian group and differences in fertility may thus contribute to the explanation of differences in the s.r.a.b. between those groups. On-going research on the demographic manifestation of son-preference in the main regions of origin of Indian migrants suggests that migration to the UK may impact on prenatal sex-selection and thus reflect the level of persistence of son preference among the Indian first generation Diaspora. The factors involved are further discussed.