Desh Deshantar – Sex Ratio & Challenges
Recently, a report titled ‘Status of Sex Ratio at Birth in India’ was released by the Vice – President of India.

**Brought out by:** The Indian Association of Parliamentarians for Population and Development (IAPPD).

### Key findings of the report

- There has not been any change in the sex ratio at birth in India from 2001-2017.
- The number of girl children born is much less than the natural norm.

**Suggestions:** Rigorous implementation of Pre-conception & Pre-natal Diagnostics Techniques law to bring about a balance in the sex ratio.

- The sex ratio at birth is an important indicator and reflects the extent to which there is a reduction in the number of girl children born by sex-selective abortions.

### What are the causes of falling child sex ratio in India?

- **Female Foeticide:** The rapid spread and use of ultrasound as well as amniocentesis for sex determination are playing vital role in female foetus-induced abortions which is called as *High-tech sexism* by Amartya Sen.

- **Female Infanticide:** In India there is still preference for male child and in some areas of the country the female infanticide is still common. At least 117 million girls around the world demographically go “missing” due to sex-selective abortions according to United Nations Populations fund.

- **Education** – Due to illiteracy, people are unaware about the power and role of women in today’s era. The role of education has a great influence on the sex ratio scenario of India. Child marriages are a common part of the Indian society. Most of the girls are prone to the issue of child marriage at a very early age. This makes them to stay away from the education and are compelled to take the responsibilities of the household.

- **Poverty** – Poverty is one of the factors which is responsible for the declining sex ratio. States like Tamil Nadu have a high sex ratio but the poverty rate is low. There are states wherein due to poverty, a lot of girls are denied of nutritious food. This deprives the women and girl child from a living a healthy life.

- **Social status of women** – In most parts of India, women are merely considered as an object. People are worried about the dowry issue with the birth of a girl child. Due to financial problem, most of the families in rural areas prefer male child over female.

- **Lack of empowerment of women** – There is a lack of empowerment of women especially in the rural areas. Women do not enjoy opportunities as men do. Due to lack of education, women are unable to establish their roles in many places. The state of Uttar Pradesh has become like a grave for girls.

- **Male domination** – Majority of the places in India follow the patriarchal system. In India, males are considered to be the only bread earners. The methods of sex determination and female foeticide are adopted which is main reason of declining number of females especially in North India.

- **Infant and Maternal Mortality** – Infant mortality rate is the number of death of babies before the age of one. Due to female foeticide, the sex ratio declines terribly. Maternal mortality also contributes to the declining sex ratio as most of the women die during the childbirth due to improper care and less facilities.

- **Impact of Population Policies:** Under family planning policies, families want one or two children and generally prefer male child over female child. It is also true in case of China which had adopted one-child policy for long and has huge male population now.

### Why the declining child sex ratio in India is a cause for worry?

- It will bring down country’s reproductive potential by lowering net reproduction rate.
- The rapidly declining sex-ratios are turning into a *demographic nightmare of frightening proportions.*
Low sex ratio at birth (SRBs) starting from the Seventies have led to large numbers of “surplus men” today in countries like India and China.

There are concerns that skewed sex ratios lead to more violence against men and women, as well as human-trafficking.

Marriage becomes problem for some males: In India, some villages in Haryana and Punjab have such poor sex ratios that men marrying brides from other States. This is often accompanied by the exploitation of these brides.

Household chores of females such as child rearing, housekeeping and other works remain as serious problems.

**Steps taken by Government**

Due to the declining sex ratio, the government has introduced certain schemes to tackle the issue.

- **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao**: It celebrates the girl child and enables her education with 100% assistance from the central government at the district level. It aims to improve the sex ratio at birth in select gender-critical districts by two points in a year, among other targets.

- **Sukanya Samriddhi Account**: The initiative aims at opening a new account for the girl child. The account can be operated by her after the age of 10. The account can be opened in a post office or a public sector bank.

- **The Girl Child Protection Scheme**: The scheme is aimed at preventing the gender discrimination by protecting the rights of the girl child. It also tries to eliminate the negative attitudes and practices against the girl child.

- **Aapki Beti, Humari Beti**: Haryana has the lowest sex ratio in India. To cope up with this issue, the Haryana government launched this scheme. A sum of Rs 21,000 would be deposited by the state government in the account of every new born girl. The scheme would be implemented in both rural and urban areas. It would target the girl child of Scheduled Caste and Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.

- **PCPNDT Act**: The Indian government has passed Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) (PCPNDT) Act in 2004 to ban and punish prenatal sex screening and female foeticide. It is currently illegal in India to determine or disclose sex of the foetus to anyone. However, there are concerns that PCPNDT Act has been poorly enforced by authorities.

**How to Address the Declining Child Sex ratio?**

- **Ensure effective implementation of the law**: Proper registration of ultrasound centers is the need of an hour. In clinics with multiple machines (some of which are sealed), the numbers on registration certificates do not match the numbers on the machines. It is this kind of sloppy implementation of the law that allows medical practitioners to continue their malpractice.

- **Stringent punishments for doctors who disclose the sex of a foetus**: Current punishment under the legislation is sealing the machine and a fine of a few thousand rupees. However, if this occurs, the licence of the doctor should be revoked and together with other aspects of the punishment will serve as a deterrent to others.

- **Control over MNCS that sell machines to doctors**: There is an urgent requirement to monitor the way ultrasound machines are sold. The company must be made accountable for whom they sell the machines to and how many are being purchased. Such records be maintained in the public domain.

- **Promoting two-girl families**: It is one of the immediate ways in which the issue of second-child sex-selection can be addressed. The government should fund the education (including higher education) and other expenses of children in families where both children are girls.

- **Locating gender as a human rights issue**: There is need to present girls as more loving, kinder, more capable, a safer investment, etc. and the campaign on promoting girl-children needs to be avoided because it creates unnecessary pressure on women and girls to cater to an increasingly impossible model of girlhood/womanhood. The argument could instead be located in the principle of fairness and justice -- two values that the middle class is increasingly standing up for in the country.
- **Civil society action**: Gender activists argue that the very foundation on which we understand gender is flawed. The gender inequality structures and frames all aspects of life is something that must be recognised, accepted and worked on consciously by all social activists, no matter what their core area of focus is.

- **Monitoring mechanisms**: Regular and systematic monitoring of doctors and activities in clinics must be undertaken. Reports must be shared in the public domain. There is no excuse for aborting a foetus because it is female.