

Letter to Editor

What we predict for the sex ratio in India for the next census 2021?

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Sex ratio is always the issue of a discussion in public health forums and journals. With the release of provisional figures of the census of the second decade of the 21st century once again it again becomes the talk of the town specially in public health corners. So we took this opportunity to discuss it and also tried to predict the future sex ratio.

The Indian sex ratio has shown a secular decline since the beginning of the twentieth century excepting some reverse trend of improvement during 1951, 1981 and 2001.¹

Although the masculinity of sex ratio is a reality from the very beginning and more so in case of child population in India the concern regarding this phenomenon with the onset of this century is because of the startling figures exposed by the 2001 Census. The loss of female children will create an unbalanced sex structure of the population in country and will have serious demographic and social consequences. They also do not conform to the principle of gender equality in a modern civilized society.

Table: Trend of sex ratio in India (1961-2011)

Year		Females per 1000 males	Trend	Females per 1000 males in age group 0-6 years		Trend
1961		941	Declining	976		
1971	14 points	930	Declining	964	14 points	Declining
1981		934	Rising	962		Declining
1991		927	Declining	945		Declining
2001		933	Rising	927	31 points	Declining
2011		940	Rising	914		Declining
		(?)				
2021	(?)	Expecting a sharp decline		?		
		(?)				
2031		Expecting a sharp decline		?		
		(?)				

The above table showed that in the year 1971 the sex ratio was 930 which was turned to 934 with marginal increase of 4 point in year 1981 with the declining child sex ratio of 962 from 964. While in census year 1991 the sex ratio dropped down to 927 with the drop of 7 point of that of previous census. The one possible reason behind the decline of sex ratio in year 1991 may be the low child sex ratio in previous three decadal censuses. Consistent decline of child sex ratio from 1961 to year 1981(14 points) reflected as a low sex ratio in 1991 which was 927 with 14 points dropped to that of 1961 when it was 941. As the same cohort of children (0-6) had comprised the adult cohort in successive decades, the overall sex ratio has suddenly dropped in year 1991.

The child sex ratio was still declined in 1991 and 2001 census. It was dropped down from 945 in year 1991 to 927 in 2001 and further to 914 in 2011(31 points). The same cohort (0-6 year) which comprised the 0-6 in year 1991 and 2001 is now the part of adult in year 2011, so it should be ideally reflected in overall sex ratio as a decline or only marginal increase in 2011. But in year 2011 as per the provisional data of census the sex ratio increases to 940 from 933 in 2001.² Based on this hypothetical calculation we presume that there may be a sharp decline in overall sex ratio in future census of 2021. A skewed sex ratio may be making the lot of women worse. Robbery, rape and bride trafficking tend to increase in any society with large groups of young single men.

The only means to show better off in respect to sex ratio is only through improving the child sex ratio in next few years so it will again reflect in future censuses in terms of better overall sex ratio. In spite of this, if the child sex ratio will also remain decline in next census, we have to bare its effects till mid 21st century as it is definitely going to reflect in long term future in till next three or four censuses. The only means to get satisfaction in next census in terms of sex ratio intensive measures should be directed to improve the child (0-6) sex ratio. Thorough understanding of social factors is required before initiating such measures. The states with the worst sex ratio are among the richest, which suggests distorted sex selection will not be corrected just by wealth or government policy. In fact sex selection therefore tends to increase with education and income: wealthier, better educated people are more likely to want fewer children and can more easily afford the ultra sound scans. According to a study

conducted by Bardia et al there is a 'demand' for sex determination technology and, therefore, this would continue to be 'supplied'. At most the 'supply' can be regulated. Social engineering efforts need to be targeted at reducing the demand if the sex ratio is to be improved.³

REFERENCE

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2. Available from
[URL:http://www.censusindia.gov.in](http://www.censusindia.gov.in)
3. Bardi A, Paul E, Kapoor SK, Anand K. Declining Sex Ratio: Role of Society, Technology and Government Regulation in Faridabad district, Haryana, Natl Med J India.2004 Jul- Aug: 17(4): 207-11

Health
is a state of complete
physical, mental and social
well-being and not merely
the absence of disease or
infirmity.
The enjoyment of the
highest attainable standard
of health is one of the
fundamental rights of every
human being without
distinction of race, religion,
political belief, economic or
social condition.
World Health Organization
(1946), Constitution. Geneva
(WHO)