

## **Prenatal sex-selection against females in England and Wales**

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Son-preference resulting in prenatal sex selection has been well documented in China, India and South Korea over the last two decades (e.g. Zeng *et al.*, 1993 ; Das Gupta and Bhat, 1997; Hesketh and Xing, 2006) and more recently in Vietnam (Guilmoto *et al.*, 2009) and Central Asian Countries (Mesle *et al.*, 2007).. Previous study based on births registration in England and Wales (Dubuc and Coleman, 2007) has evidenced a strong increase in the sex-ratio at birth to India born women in England and Wales since the late eighties, especially occurring at higher birth orders and mirroring findings in India. In recent years, accumulating evidence of gender imbalances at birth among Asian diasporas in the USA, Canada and Greece indicates more widespread PNSS within Asian diasporas (Almond and Edlund, 2008; Abrevaya, 2009; Almond *et al.*, 2009; Verropoulou and Tsimbos, 2010). The persistence of pressure on women to bear a son is supported by qualitative research in the UK and the USA (Purewal, 2003; Puri and Nachtigall, 2009). Results from the previous study in England and Wales (Dubuc and Coleman, 2007) are updated up to 2008 to analyze the most recent trends and will test for potential significant change (e.g. stabilization, reversal trend). Results are discussed in the context of the ethical debate (e.g. Moazam, 2004 ; Zilberberg, 2007 ; Dickens *et al.*, 2005; Shakespeare, 2005). Underlying factors of son-preference are discussed, including patrilineal rules and women's autonomy of choice.

Son preference is rooted in a lower valuation of women and girls. In traditional patriarchal societies such as India and China, a son is viewed as paramount to fulfil exclusively male family roles, including patrilinear inheritance practices and providing economic support and care (through his wife) to parents in old age – whereas a daughter is viewed as an economic burden for her parents (e.g. Agarwal, 1994; Bossen, 2005). Bearing a son is the primary role of the young wife and a way to raise her status in her husband's family household (e.g. Das Gupta *et al.*, 2003; Unnithan-Kumar, 2009; Dubuc, 2009a). Women often resort to PNSS to escape abuse and multiple pregnancies, and to avoid having unwanted girls who are then at risk of being neglected (Goodkind, 1996; Dickens *et al.*, 2005). This strategy to improve their well-being and potentially that of their (wanted) children (Unnithan-Kumar, 2009) is, however, seen as a route to perpetuating female discrimination and the devaluation of girls (Das Gupta *et al.*, 2003). These factors underline the complexity of the ethical implications of PNSS as well as the political challenge in addressing this issue. Policy measures to curb PNSS are further hampered by parents' desire to have *at least* one son while also controlling family size. The probability of having at least one son decreases exponentially with fewer children (Dubuc, 2008). Thus, the decreasing fertility (number of children) of the emerging middle classes in India, China and their diasporas places more parents in a situation where PNSS is viewed as a means of ensuring male offspring (Das Gupta and Bhat, 1997).

### **Methodology and results**

The same methodology as defined in Dubuc and Coleman (2007) is used here. The new data for the years 2006 to 2008 have been collected and statistical analyses including recent years are in process.

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