

NEWS

India must urgently tackle child gender ratio “emergency,” UN report warns

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The child gender ratio in India has reached crisis point and requires immediate action, a United Nations report has warned. The study, *Sex Ratios and Gender Biased Sex Selection: History, Debates and Future Directions*,¹ found that, despite India’s social and economic progress, the country faced a serious deteriorating trend in the gender ratio among children. This had fallen from 976 girls for every 1000 boys in 1961, to 927 in 2001 and to 918 in 2011.

The report, which focused solely on India, said that the current trend was “akin to a national emergency” and aimed to promote research and understanding on the subject. It examined families and households, education, labour and employment, and institutions that directly or indirectly helped or opposed the practice of sex selection. The research was conducted by UN Women, a subset of the United Nations dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The study noted, “Unequal inheritance rights, dowry, unequal socio-religious status, unpaid work, unequal pay, lack of economic opportunities for women, focus on male lineage, a culture of honour that places a greater burden of safety and protection on the parents of girls—all contribute to building a society that favours sons and men, and neglects daughters and women.”

Lakshmi Puri, deputy executive director of UN Women and assistant secretary general of the UN, said, “[The deteriorating ratio] demonstrates that the economic and social progress in the

country has had minimum bearing on the status of women and daughters in our society. Gender biased sex selection is first and foremost a reflection of how little our society values girls and women.”

Rebecca Tavares, representative of UN Women’s multi-country office for India, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, said, “This report provides a roadmap for a widely researched topic and includes study on several pertinent topics such as the emergence of female infanticide from the mid-19th century, the discovery of declining sex ratios in the 1960s and 1970s through the use of census data, history of relevant legislation and policy and a critique of its implementation, an interesting viewpoint on the extent to which dowry is a cause for the practice of sex selection and, finally, a look at different perspectives for research, namely culture, violence and political economy.”

Lise Grande, UN resident coordinator and the UN Development Programme’s resident representative in India, said, “When it comes to gender biased sex selection, [the] entire social structures including those linked to work, marriage and community need to change and the root causes of son preference, acknowledged and fought.”

1 UN Women. Sex ratios and gender biased sex selection: history, debates and future directions. 2014. www.unwomensouthasia.org/assets/Sex-Ratios-and-Gender-Biased-Sex-Selection.pdf.

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