

## ABSTRACT

The paper studies the impact of prenatal sex selection on the well-being of girls by analyzing changes in children's nutritional status and mortality during the years since the diffusion of sex-selective abortion in India. We use the ratio of male to female births in the year and state in which a child was born as a proxy for parental access to prenatal sex-selection. Using repeated cross-sections from a rich survey dataset, we show that high sex ratios at birth reflect the practice of sex-selective abortion. We then exploit the large regional and time variations in the incidence of sex-selective abortion to analyze whether changes in girls' outcomes relative to boys within states and over time are associated with changes in sex-ratios at birth. We find that an increase in the practice of sex-selective abortion appears to be associated with a reduction in the incidence of malnutrition among girls. The negative association is stronger for girls born in rural households and at higher birth parities. We find no evidence that sex-selective abortion leads to a selection of girls into families of higher SES, however we do find some evidence of a larger reduction in family size for girls relative to boys. We also find some suggestive evidence of better treatment of girls as reflected in breastfeeding duration. On the other hand, sex-selective abortion does not appear to be associated with a reduction in excess female child mortality.

Keywords: Son preference, pre-natal sex selection, sex ratio at birth, gender discrimination, child health.

JEL codes: J13, J16, I1