

The Unwanted Girl

What is the issue?

\n\n

The 2018 economic survey has come up with a new metric called “Unwanted Girls” that seeks to highlight “Gender Bias” in the country.

\n\n

Who are the “Missing Women”?

\n\n

\n

- ‘Missing women’ are the number of girls and women below the age of 25, who would’ve been alive today if they weren’t aborted as fetuses.

\n

- Girls who happened to die early due to gender based neglect in terms of nutrition and healthcare are also added up to the “missing women index”.

\n

- The population census enumerates everyone in a country, and the missing women number is estimated based on the sex ratio.

\n

- India’s missing women numbers stands at a whopping 63 million.

\n

- This means that, if no gender bias existed in India, we would have recorded 63 million more women in our census.

\n

\n\n

Who are the “Unwanted Women”?

\n\n

\n

- The 2018 Economic Survey has tried to more accurately quantify gender bias through a new number called “Unwanted Girl Index”.

\n

- Unwanted girls account for “live females”, who haven’t received the deserving healthcare and schooling, due to the gender related partiality.

\n

- These are daughters that parents gave birth to when they were really hoping for a son, and were disappointed and dejected hence.
\n
- The 2018 economic survey notes that India has 21 million ‘unwanted (or) less wanted girls’ (who aren’t favoured by parents) in the less than 25 age group.
\n
- Notably, this index does not capture the number of parents would’ve preferred not having the baby at all if they knew it was girl.
\n

\n\n

How were the Unwanted (or) Less wanted girls detected?

\n\n

- The common pattern is that couples intend to have two children, which ideally is one son and one daughter – but having at least one son is mandatory.
\n
- This essentially implies that if both their 1st and 2nd child are girls, they’ll go for the 3rd kid or maybe even 4th to get a son.
\n
- Contrarily, if they have two sons in a row, they might regret having no daughter but yet they might not consider having more children.
\n
- Hence, if the matrix of families having more than 2 children looks like - “girl, girl, boy” or “girl, girl, girl, boy” (last kid is a boy), it is usually a case of gender biased attitudes.
\n
- Here, every girl born instead of the expected boy is counted as unwanted, which means the 2nd and all other successive girls are unwanted.
\n
- The aggregate data of all families in India when collated clearly captures that the “sex ratio of the last child” (SRLC) is male-skewed.
\n
- Hence, SRLC is thus quantifies the desire for having sons, and the number also seems lesser sensitive to economical status of the parents.
\n
- An important point to be noted is that this “boy oriented reproduction” does reduce the overall sex ratio as it contributes more girls (although unwanted).
\n
- Further pondering reveals that even Kerala and Assam (which look problem-free in the “missing women index”) have a male-skewed SRLC.
\n

\n\n

What does it mean to be an unwanted girl?

\n\n

\n

- If a girl is born instead of the expected boy and she nonetheless gets treated equally, then there is no problem, but unfortunately that's not the usual case.

\n

\n\n

\n

- Girls get fewer resources in comparison to boys in general and moreover, parents who passionately want sons, unsurprisingly, favour them once born.

\n

- Also, the previously discussed reproduction pattern would inherently imply that more girls grow up in larger families.

\n

- Here, even if parents treat all their children equally, girls are disadvantaged by being in families with fewer resources to spend per child.

\n

- Boys have been found to get better immunisation and nutrition, which is also reflected in India's stunting data that displays a visible gender gap.

\n

- More noticeably, when a corrective heart surgery is advocated, 70% of the recommended boys undergo surgery whereas the number is only 44% for girls.

\n

\n\n

What is the way forward?

\n\n

\n

- The Economic Survey has rung the alarm bells by bring out this crucial data point and it is imperative for us to chart a remedy soon.

\n

- While a decline in "unwanted girls" is necessary, it won't be progress if it leads to the increase in "missing girls" (girls aborted in fetuses or who died early).

\n

- Hence, focus should be on bringing both numbers down - which is not possible unless the preference for the male child is brought down.

\n

- The way forward is to improve earnings opportunities for women, as this would lower dowry and increase their say in family decision-making.
\n
- Better options for people to support themselves in old age, such as a good pension system, would also make having a son less paramount to couples.
\n
- Other generic and cultural aspects that reinforcing patriarchy also need to be targeted to achieve a gender neutral society.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Indian Express

\n

