

Son Preference in Afghanistan and Its Impact on Fertility Outcomes

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Abstract : Introduction/Objective: Son preference, a preference for sons over daughters, is a practice deeply-rooted in gender inequality that is widespread in many societies and across different religions and cultures. In this study, we are aiming to study the effects of son preference on fertility outcomes (birth interval and current contraceptive use) in Afghanistan, where have been perceived with high rates of son preference. The objectives of the study are to examine the association between the sex of the previous child and the duration of the subsequent birth interval and to evaluate the effect of son preference on current contraceptive use. Methodology: Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (2015) was used to study the impact of son preference on fertility outcomes among married women. The data collected from 28,661 on currently-married women, aged between 15 and 49 years who have at least one child, have used to conduct this quantitative study. Outcomes of interest are birth interval and current contraceptive use. Simple and multiple regression analysis have been conducted to assess the effect of son preference on these fertility outcomes. Results: The present study has highlighted that son preference somehow exists among married women in Afghanistan. It is indicated that the sex of the first birth is significantly associated with the succeeding birth interval. Having a female child as the first baby was associated with a shorter average succeeding birth interval by 1.8 months compared to a baby boy (p-value = 0.000). For the second model, the results identified that women who desire for more sons have 7% higher odds to be current contraceptive user compared to those who have no preference (p-value = 0.03). The latter results do not indicate the son preference. However, one limitation for this result was the timeliness of the questions asked since contraceptive use in the current time was asked along with a question on 'future' desired sex composition. Moreover, women may have just given birth and want to reach a certain time span of birth interval before planning for another child, even if it was a boy, which might have affected the results. Conclusion: Overall, this study has demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between son preference and one main fertility behaviors, birth interval. The second fertility outcome, current contraceptive use, was not a good indicator to measure son preference. Based on the finding, recommendations will be made for appropriate interventions addressing gender norms and related fertility decisions.

Keywords : Afghanistan, birth interval, contraceptive, son preference

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