

'Maha will gain little with three-kid policy'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Will the skewed child sex ratio improve with the Maharashtra government's move to relax the two-child norm for couples whose third child is a girl? Experts say the gains, if at all, wouldn't be huge.

Child sex ratio compares the number of girls for every 1,000 boys.

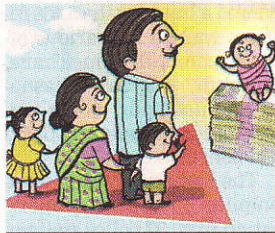
Projections from Census 2011 showed that the child sex ratio for the country had fallen to 914 girls per 1,000 boys from 927 girls per 1,000 boys in 2001. Maharashtra fared worse: It now has only 883 girls per 1,000 boys.

Government officials have been announcing schemes ever since the Census report was made public. But experts aren't convinced about the latest announcement. "It is a noble gesture, but defies logic," said a senior academican from the University of Mumbai.

Dr Vibhuti Patel, director of economic studies in

SNDT Women's University, said that the move would mainly help poorer sections, especially those living in rural areas. "At present, government-run hospitals don't

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EXPERTSPEAK

offer free delivery to women having a third child. With the three-child norm to boost the girl child, such women will stop delivering at home and thus not endanger themselves and their newborn," she said.

Dr P Arokiyaswami of the International Institute of Population Sciences said the move would help in a small measure in increasing

the child sex ratio. "It would help, but not in a great measure," he said. He provides researched facts to back his reasoning. "In urban hubs like Maharashtra, especially in big cities like Mumbai, the total fertility rate (or the number of children that a woman in the reproductive age has) is low," he said. For instance, most women in Mumbai would have one or two children, resulting in a total fertility rate of less than two. So, allowing people to have more children wouldn't affect the population too much.

"But just because the government has incentivized more-children norm, it doesn't mean that the fertility rate will automatically increase," said the senior researcher. "It is both sociologically and biologically not possible for women to make a switch immediately. European countries have been unable to reverse low fertility rates with incentives," Arokiyaswami said.

'Concept of family planning flawed, promotes sex determination'

Sharad Vyas | TNN

Mumbai: The state plans to push the three-children idea provided the last one is a girl. The existing laws will be tweaked to ensure that government employees or elected representatives at all levels, including the gram panchayats, are not disqualified for giving birth to a third girl child.

Senior Mantralaya officials on Monday convened a meeting on effective implementation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PC-PNDT). A consensus was achieved on introducing the new changes as part of a new proposal for amendment which will be forwarded to the cabinet soon, said officials attached to the chief secretary's office. "We all agreed that if the third child is a girl child, it could be safely assumed the couple did not go for a prenatal sex selection," said a senior official confirming a need to strengthen the information network to curb the practice of prenatal sex selection, increasingly being embraced in remote parts of the state. An awareness campaign will be launched in the seven worst-affected districts of the state soon, he said.

However, the changes could raise the hackles of sociologists who feel by saying that it is all

right to have a girl child as the third child, the state government seems to be going against its own law of banning sex determination. "Prima facie, it looks like a ridiculous idea. How can the government work on the basic premise that the third child could be a girl child?" said AL Sharda, director of Population First, an NGO that has been working on population and health issues, especially those related to the girl child.

There are also experts, activists and lawyers who feel the state intervening or influencing a personal decision is against the basic principle of human rights. "The concept of family planning is flawed and indirectly promotes sex determination. The government should undertake an integrated, healthy and non-discriminatory approach in making the state gender-friendly. Right now, everything it is doing in this regard is piecemeal," said Varsha Deshpande, a Satara-based advocate and activist who has been conducting sting operations on radiologists and doctors practising sex selection technique.

Lakshmi Lingam, professor in women's studies and deputy director of Tata Institute of Social Studies, Hyderabad, said: "People have their own reasons to have more or less kids. One needs to look at what incentives are being offered because penalties and incentives are two sides of the same coin."