

October 27, 2020

Dear Author,

The review of your revised submission to *Demography* (MS# 2018-184) “Birth Spacing in the Presence of Son Preference and Sex-Selective Abortions: India’s Experience over Four Decades” is now complete. After consulting with a Deputy Editor we still have additional improvements we would like you to make to the manuscript. We feel that the introduction and background sections are still hard to follow (although the arguments are all there) and as such they need more attention before the manuscript can be accepted. Please address all comments below.

The editorial team will review in house the next version of your manuscript and your response memo. We will draw on the editorial board if we cannot make a clear determination on your responsiveness.

Comments:

The author has undertaken much reorganization and has made very useful clarifications to benefit the reader in the text and tables. Nevertheless, we still find three issues with the writing style:

- (1) Explanations of key concepts or theories need to be spelled out more clearly, particularly for the non-economist. Much has been done in this regard, but further work is still needed.
- (2) The arguments do not flow from section to section and paragraph to paragraph. Each section and argument need to be introduced so the reader understands why this information is being presented in this place. Many times, the author jumps into new arguments without an introduction or transition or explanation.
- (3) There is no clear outline of the arguments presented in the Background section. Each argument is presented separately rather than tying into the overall framework and subsequent analyses.

The following are some examples of (1) and (2); however, the author should check the entire paper for similar issues and address (3) as well.

1. In general, each argument in the background section is not clear and fully described for the reader.

a. P. 4 first sentence: The author states that female education is a crucial explanatory variable and it matters for fertility, sex ratios, mortality, etc. in a list. It would be useful for the reader to briefly spell out how female education fits into the entire framework looking across all these outcomes. In addition, the second paragraph on measurement of education seems like it belongs in the data section, unless there is some conceptual reason why this information is included here.

b. The 2 paragraphs on female labor force participation on pp. 5-6: The two findings that support the argument that changes in birth spacing are not due to economic reasons are merely listed, leaving the reader to make the connection as to why these facts support the argument herself. The income effect dominating the substitution effect and greater negative elasticity of women's wages need to be explained to readers unfamiliar with these concepts or how they fit together.

c. P. 6 regarding sex selection: "The introduction of sex selection allows parents to avoid giving birth to girls but increases the expected interval to the next birth." The reader needs an explanation here of why sex selection increases birth interval length. The author mentions waiting time to conception and other components in the introduction (and footnote). A clear explanation of this argument needs to be reiterated (or moved) here.

d. P. 6: "As women's education increases, their productivity in the production of offspring human capital also increases. With relatively more boys born because of increased access to sex-selective abortions and the increasing income potential for (male) offspring, demand for better-educated women can increase, even if they do not participate in the labor market." I am unclear as to why this argument is included. It needs explanation. Is this related to length of birth intervals here? Or is this mentioned because women's education and increasing demand for better-education women will actually lower the sex ratio?

e. Pp. 6-7: I do not understand the importance of this argument and how it fits into the authors' story: "If more and "better" parental attention per child results in higher child "quality," we should expect longer birth intervals. However, the evidence on spacing's effect on child quality measures such as IQ and education is mixed for developed countries and nonexistent for developing countries. The exception is health and mortality, where longer spacing does lead to better outcomes, although this relationship weakens with maternal education."

f. P. 7: The final summary paragraph lists predictions based on the earlier arguments. Yet it is hard to connect these predictions to the paragraphs above. Perhaps predictions could be noted with the earlier arguments.

2. Estimation strategy section.

In the first paragraph, it would be useful to clearly outline the analyses that will be undertaken (such as first, I document changes in birth intervals over time and how influenced by sex selection, second how birth intervals affected fertility, and third how birth intervals affected mortality). As it stands, this section jumps into a discussion of the hazard model and the reader does not know in which analyses it will be used.

Some additional issue as examples where more clarification is needed:

[Type text]

3. Abstract. Please reorganize to start with a statement of the problem and main aims of the study. As it stands, the abstract is a list of findings, with no context as to the issues/questions the author investigates. Please be cognizant of using terms such as “women most likely to use sex-selective abortion.” The reader does not understand how this is measured yet, and may get the false impression that sex-selection abortion is measured directly.

4. P. 1: The second motivation is unclear. “the combined changes in birth spacing may outpace what we have observed in other countries.” Outpaced means what? decreasing faster, or increasing faster, or sex selection plays more of a role?

5. Throughout the paper, the author compares the total fertility rate to cohort fertility rate. For the former, is the period fertility rate a more accurate definition?

6. P. 2: the main point of this sentence is unclear: “Counteracting effect is possible if longer birth intervals arise from multiple abortions because the short duration between pregnancies could increase mortality.”

7. Sometimes the use of the term “birth interval” actually refers to “birth interval length.” Please check the uses of these terms and correct accordingly.

8. P. 2: “The key variables are maternal education, the sex of previous children, and the area of residence.” Does the author mean key independent or predictor variables?

9. The author should clearly note that sex selection is not observed and tone down some conclusions, such as “Sex selection, however, is behind the most substantial increases in birth spacing. The best-educated women with two girls had the most biased sex ratio and the most significant increase in birth intervals.” The author could say that sex selection appears to be behind these findings; or evidence suggests that sex selection is behind these findings, etc. In addition, clarify that those most likely to practice sex selection (women with highest education and two girls) is based on your analysis, not settled in the literature.

10. While it might be messy to show the confidence intervals in all the figures, is it possible to note some significant differences in the text?

Note, that while the journal has transferred to Dr. Mark Hayward (University of Texas at Austin) the Penn State team is handling all submissions under review before April 30, 2019.

As you prepare the conditional draft, please ensure that the manuscript has no more than 8,000

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words (including the abstract and notes, but excluding references) and no more than 10 total tables and figures). Any appendix material will appear as an online supplement (and would be easily accessible). Please note that supplemental materials are not copyedited and are essentially linked “as is” to the manuscript.

Please include the following manuscript files:

- The manuscript in Word or LaTeX format. Figures and tables can be embedded in the file, or in an Excel file, or as a .pdf file.
- The entire manuscript, including figures, in a single .pdf file.

The revised manuscript and the cover letter should be submitted online using our electronic submission process. The URL is <http://editorialexpress.com/demography>.

If you have any questions about the submission process please contact Yiwen Wang (Editorial Assistant, Demography Editorial Office, at the University of Texas at Austin) at demography@utexas.edu.

For detailed information regarding the preparation of manuscripts for *Demography*, including information on matters of style, visit Springer’s *Demography* website at www.springer.com/13524. Click on “Instructions for Authors” on the menu along the right-hand column.

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Thank you very much for submitting your paper to *Demography*.

Best wishes,

Stephen Matthews

John Iceland

Jennifer Van Hook

Handwritten signatures of the three individuals listed above. From left to right: Stephen Matthews, John Iceland, and Jennifer Van Hook. The signatures are in black ink and are cursive.