

Birth Spacing in the Presence of Son Preference and Sex-Selective Abortions: India's Experience over Four Decades

The author(s) have considered and addressed reviewers' comments and have revised the paper thoughtfully. The changes to the presentation of the results and added explanations are especially well done. There is much to be liked in the revised version. While the revised paper is stronger than the earlier version, there are still some issues that require further attention.

The paper still lacks a stronger narrative on the motivation and framework for the empirical work. Four reasons are mentioned as motivations; but, with the exception of the first, all other reasons, such as the impact of spacing on child and mother's health, are not really motivating the empirical work of this paper (they are rather evidence for importance of spacing).

The conceptual framework is not fully developed. The paper suggests possible explanations at various places but they don't add up to a coherent narrative. For instance, it is not clear whether maternal education acts through access for sex selective technology or preference for sons. The core idea of the paper that sex selection changes the relationship between spacing and son preference needs to be developed further. There is significant amount of good empirical work, but without proper development of framework it is difficult to evaluate the contribution and understand the findings, and also to see its contribution beyond the Indian case.

As an illustration, the paper looks at changes over time during which the access the sex selection has become increasing difficult AND also almost all groups (by education, religion...) have seen an decline in fertility. How do we consider the impact of these on spacing, sex selection and sex ratios? How do we put the findings in the context of changing educational attainments of women? The paper doesn't provide us a framework to think about the broader changes during the time period under consideration.

I'm not fully convinced of the main conclusions of a "substantial increase in the use of sex selection" or of an "an almost complete reversal of the traditional spacing patterns" for urban educated women. They don't seem to be supported by the findings. For urban women this seems to apply only for third spell. The substantial increase in sex selection is

also not evident from the findings for all groups or for all spells. The paper does acknowledge the complexity, but at places (including in the abstract) seems to stretch the interpretation beyond what is shown in the findings. The conclusions are presented in way that implies that they apply to different spells or groups. But the findings are more limited and differ clearly by spells. This should be presented accurately in the text.

While I really liked the methodology and visual presentation of the findings, in my reading, I don't see the paper's contribution to methodology. Though the paper makes a claim for methodological novelty, I see it more as an adoption of a widely used technique to spacing rather than a proposing a new technique. Despite the changes, the paper still reads as a piece demonstrating a methodology rather than significant contribution to the demographic literature.

Minor: It might be a disciplinary style, I would recommend cutting down on the footnotes. I would also not go into the effect of child spacing in countries that are very dissimilar to the context of India, unless there is a wider point being made. Some points are not clear: for instance, "On the other hand, increased reliability of access and effectiveness of contraceptives can lead to shorter intervals between births if women used to have longer spacing to avoid having too many children by accident (Keyfitz, 1971; Heckman and Willis, 1976)."