

A DECADE OF BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO: EVALUATING CHILD SEX RATIO, GENDER EQUITY, AND THE STATUS OF THE GIRL CHILD IN HARYANA

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ABSTRACT: The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme was launched by the Government of India on 22 January 2015 at Panipat, Haryana, as a tri-ministerial initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development/Education, in response to Haryana's persistently low child sex ratio and the wider national problem of gender-biased sex selection. Haryana was chosen as the launch site precisely because, as per the 2011 Census, its overall sex ratio (877 females per 1,000 males) and child sex ratio (834) were among the lowest recorded by any major Indian state. Nearly a decade after implementation, this paper presents an integrated empirical assessment of the scheme's demographic, social and economic impact in Haryana, combining secondary data on sex-ratio trends and BBBP fund utilisation with a primary field survey of 500 respondents drawn from five purposively selected districts spanning the state's northern, eastern, western, southern and central regions — Kurukshetra, Sonapat, Sirsa, Gurugram and Rohtak. The sample comprised 150 officials associated with the scheme's administration and 350 parents, guardians and teachers directly affected by its provisions, and was supplemented by secondary data from the Census of India, the National Family Health Survey, and government reports. The study finds that Haryana's sex ratio and child sex ratio have both risen from their pre-2015 lows — the overall sex ratio moving from 876 in 2015 to a range of 914–923 in subsequent years, and the child sex ratio from 836 in 2015 to figures as high as 917 in 2022 but that the improvement is gradual, uneven across districts and vulnerable to reversal, with the 2023 child sex-ratio estimate of 830 underlining its fragility. Officials report only partial success (58% describe “some improvement” against 25% reporting clear improvement), while 61% simultaneously acknowledge that prenatal sex determination continues and 63% report a rise in crimes against women and girl children. Among parents, guardians and teachers, more than four in five respondents (82%) express some form of preference for a son over a daughter, rooted less in outright rejection of daughters than in concerns about family responsibility, dowry, safety and the post-marital loss of a daughter to her marital family. Gendered disadvantage persists well beyond birth, in school drop-out rates, subject choice, food allocation, domestic responsibility and age at marriage. The paper concludes that BBBP has been a necessary but not sufficient intervention: it has built awareness, institutional infrastructure and a legal deterrent, but weak public cooperation, under-resourced enforcement of the PC&PNDT Act further weakened during the COVID-19 period and the persistence of dowry-linked patriarchal norms continue to limit its transformative reach. The paper closes with recommendations for strengthening surveillance and prosecution, institutionalising village and block-level monitoring, deepening community engagement, and addressing the economic roots of son preference directly.

Keywords: Beti Bachao Beti Padhao; Child sex ratio; Gender equality; Haryana; Son preference; Female foeticide; Patriarchy; Women empowerment; Socio-economic impact

1. INTRODUCTION

The status accorded to women in a society is widely regarded as an index of that society's overall development, and India's long history of gender disparity marked by female infanticide and female foeticide has

produced a persistently skewed sex ratio, particularly in the northern states. The availability of prenatal diagnostic technology from the 1970s onward made it possible for families to identify the sex of a foetus and, in a society where sons are widely preferred, to terminate pregnancies carrying female foetuses (Ara-vamudan, 2007). Haryana has occupied a particularly troubling position within this national picture: its child sex ratio has historically been among the lowest of any Indian state, reflecting a combination of agrarian patriarchy, dowry-linked marriage practices, and a cultural emphasis on sons as carriers of lineage, property and old-age security.

It was this context that led the Government of India to launch the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme from Panipat, Haryana, on 22 January 2015, as a tri-ministerial initiative bringing together the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development/Education. The scheme combines strict enforcement of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PC&PNDT) Act, 1994 (Government of India, 2003) with mass-media awareness campaigns and incentive-linked financial instruments such as the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, with the twin aims of preventing gender-biased sex selection and ensuring the survival, protection and education of the girl child. Initially targeted at 100 districts nationwide identified as having a low child sex ratio as per the 2011 Census of which 12 belonged to Haryana the scheme has since been expanded in phases to cover all districts of the country (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2016).

Haryana was selected as the scheme's launch site precisely because, according to the 2011 Census, its overall sex ratio stood at 877 females per 1,000 males against a national figure of 943, while its child sex ratio (0–6 years) was as low as 834, compared to 918 for the country as a whole. In Haryana, the national scheme's implementation has been accompanied by a range of state-specific interventions, including the Ladli Laxmi Scheme, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, Kanya Kosh, Apki Beti Hamari Beti Scheme and Dhana Laxmi conditional cash-transfer scheme, alongside grassroots initiatives such as the Digital Guddi-Gudda Board, Ghar Ki Pehchan Beti Ke Naam, and the Pink Card scheme for birth registration. Although the scheme has now been in operation in the state for close to a decade, recent reporting suggests that several districts of Haryana recorded a fall in the sex ratio at birth even in 2023, indicating that the desired attitudinal change has not been fully realised.

A decade on from its launch, BBBP offers a natural opportunity to examine whether legal, administrative and communicative interventions of this kind can shift a demographic pattern as deeply rooted as son preference, and whether improvements recorded in official statistics are matched by comparable shifts in the attitudes of the population the scheme is meant to serve. This paper draws on a primary field survey undertaken across five districts of Haryana, together with secondary data on sex-ratio trends and scheme finances, to assess the scheme's impact on three related outcomes: the child sex ratio, understood narrowly as a demographic indicator; gender equality, understood more broadly as the set of attitudes and practices that determine how girls are valued, raised, educated and eventually married; and the socio-economic circumstances— income, family structure, schooling and health within which these attitudes are formed and expressed.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 sets out the objectives and research questions. Section 4 describes the methodology. Section 5 profiles the sample. Section 6 outlines the scheme's implementation in Haryana and presents secondary data on sex-ratio trends and fund utilisation. Section 7 presents and discusses the survey findings. Section 8 discusses the findings in light of the wider literature. Section 9 summarises the key findings. Section 10 concludes, and Section 11 sets out policy recommendations.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A substantial body of research links India's declining sex ratio to the interaction between fertility decline and persistent son preference. Studies going back to the late 1990s have shown that as families choose to have fewer children, the pressure to ensure that at least one of those children is a son intensifies, and prenatal sex selection becomes a means of achieving a desired family composition rather than a rejection of daughters altogether (Das Gupta et al., 1997). Research specific to Haryana has repeatedly identified the state's sex ratio as an outlier within India, attributing it to the strength of patrilineal inheritance, the economic centrality of land, and marriage practices that treat daughters as a net financial liability because of dowry and the loss of her labour to the natal family after marriage (Arnold et al., 2002; Agrawal & Unisa, 2007; Kumar & Devi, 2013; Kamal & Kumar, 2014; Meenu, 2014; Vinod Kumar et al., 2015).

Work situating gender discrimination within India's broader socio-economic, cultural and political structures argues that patriarchal domination generates a cycle of repression and vulnerability that only gender mainstreaming and equitable distribution of opportunity can break, while research on gender stratification highlights how the denial of opportunity and voice to women across education, employment, health care and decision-making perpetuates gender disparity rooted in unequal access to resources and rights (Haq, 2007; Pandey & Kumar, 2019). A parallel strand of literature has examined the effect of female empowerment on demographic and developmental outcomes more broadly, showing that political representation, education and access to information can shift household decision-making in favour of daughters, though such effects

tend to be gradual and unevenly distributed across social groups (Beaman et al., 2012; Desai, 2019; Garg, Kothari, & Sharma, n.d.; Pandey, J. K., n.d.; Haq, 2023).

Evaluations of BBBP itself present a mixed picture. Government progress reports and independent case studies of the Haryana model have generally credited the scheme with raising public awareness and tightening the enforcement of anti-sex-selection law, while flagging continuing gaps: uneven monitoring of diagnostic centres, limited penetration of the scheme's messaging in rural and economically weaker households, and the risk that publicised improvements in the aggregate sex ratio mask considerable variation across districts and social groups (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2018; Srivastava, 2017; Bharati, 2019; Bilal & Qureshi, 2019). A critical review of the scheme's implementation nationally found it to be a long-overdue but under-delivering intervention, noting that state and district task forces have often failed to convene regularly and that expenditure has been concentrated on national media campaigns rather than community-level interventions in education and health (Nikore, 2019). At the state level, field studies present a similarly mixed picture: one study found limited impact of the scheme in rural Jharkhand despite families professing equal treatment of sons and daughters, while a study of labour colonies in Hisar district, Haryana, found that awareness and impact improved markedly once the scheme was properly implemented and evaluated (Singh, Sami & Ranjan, 2018; Saini & Sangwan, 2018; Agnihotri & Malipatil, 2018). Other work argues that slogans alone are insufficient, and that successful outcomes require free and adequately resourced education for girls, corporate social responsibility contributions, and stronger legislative backing (Leena, 2018), and that tackling the declining child sex ratio requires convergence of policy across the Centre, the states and multiple ministries, with Panchayati Raj Institutions playing a central, accountable role in service delivery (Kuriakose & Iyer, 2019).

On the legal and institutional side, detailed analyses of the PC&PNDT Act, 1994 cover its registration, offence and penalty provisions relevant to sex-selective practices (Sachdeva & Chaudhary, 2017), while historical and legal studies note that its enforcement has been inconsistent since enactment, with prosecutions and convictions remaining low relative to the scale of the practice it seeks to curb a pattern that recurs in the present study's findings on official respondents. Comparative demographic research situates India's experience within a wider Asian pattern: alongside China, Taiwan and South Korea, India exhibits a strong preference for male children, with sex-selective abortion contributing to an estimated 90 million "missing women" across seven Asian countries as of 2005 (Garg & Garg, 2019), and demographic research adds the further nuance that even where the sex ratio at birth is unaffected, strong son preference can depress the sex ratio at later parities as families continue childbearing until a son is born (Arokiasamy, 2007).

Taken together, this literature suggests that a demographic indicator such as the child sex ratio is the outcome of deeply layered social, economic and administrative processes, and that a single scheme, however well designed, is likely to alter such an indicator only partially and gradually, with long-term success depending on sustained, multi-sectoral, community-level engagement rather than awareness campaigns alone. This understanding informs the framework of the present study, which treats the sex ratio not simply as a target to be met but as a proxy for the underlying state of gender relations that the scheme seeks to transform, and builds on the existing literature by providing integrated, state-specific, primary-survey evidence from Haryana.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To examine trends in the sex ratio and child sex ratio in India and Haryana from 1971 to 2023, before and after BBBP's 2015 launch.
2. To analyze BBBP fund allocation and expenditure patterns at the national level over time.
3. To assess officials' perspectives on BBBP's implementation obstacles, outcomes, and enforcement effectiveness in Haryana.
4. To examine parents/guardians/teachers gender preferences, their underlying reasons, and gendered disparities in survival, education, and marriage outcomes.
5. To assess respondents perceived social effects of the BBBP scheme and the channels through which awareness of it has spread.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Sources of Data

The study adopts a mixed-methods design combining secondary demographic and financial data with a structured primary survey. Secondary data on the sex ratio and the child sex ratio in India and Haryana, covering the period from 1971 to 2023, were compiled from the Census of India and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) to establish long-term trends against which the post-2015 period could be assessed. Additional secondary data were drawn from BBBP scheme guidelines, annual reports of the Department of Women and Child Development, reports of the Department of School Education (Government of Haryana), media reports, and publications of UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires, interview schedules, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observation.

4.2 Sample Design

Haryana constitutes the universe of the study on account of its persistently low sex ratio. Primary data were collected through purposive and snowball sampling from five districts selected to represent the state's northern, eastern, western, southern and central regions: Kurukshetra, Sonipat, Sirsa, Gurugram and Rohtak. A total of 500 respondents were surveyed, 100 from each district, divided into two categories as shown in Table 1. The first category comprised 150 officials directly or indirectly associated with the implementation of the scheme, drawn from the departments of Women and Child Development, Health, and School Education, together with medical practitioners, diagnostic-centre staff, representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions, NGO representatives and functionaries of local self-government bodies. The second category comprised 350 parents, guardians and teachers whose households are directly affected by the scheme and by the wider gender dynamics it addresses.

TABLE 1. Sample Distribution across Districts and Respondent Categories

Category of Respondents	Kurukshetra	Sonipat	Sirsa	Gurugram	Rohtak	Total
Officials (Category I)	30	30	30	30	30	150
Parents / Guardians / Teachers (Category II)	70	70	70	70	70	350
Total	100	100	100	100	100	500

4.3 Pilot Testing and Limitations

Separate structured interview schedules, administered in Hindi, were used for the two categories and were pilot-tested on a sub-sample of 100 respondents (20% of the total sample), drawn proportionately across districts and categories, before the main survey, after which non-functional items were removed to improve the reliability of the instrument. A key limitation of the study, as in most research on sex selection, is the sensitivity of the subject: respondents were often reluctant to openly discuss gender preference, sex determination, female foeticide and infanticide, and many preferred to offer only general opinions; diagnostic centres were similarly unwilling to disclose accurate information regarding sex-selective abortions. Answers on these questions are therefore likely to understate the true prevalence of such practices, and the findings should be read as a conservative indication of the attitudes and practices the scheme continues to confront. These constraints were mitigated through triangulation with secondary data and through the use of indirect and observational methods alongside the structured schedules.

5. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE

The 500 respondents were fairly evenly divided by sex (47% male, 53% female) and were drawn predominantly from urban and semi-urban localities (48% and 34% respectively), with the remaining 18% from rural areas reflecting the largely urban character of declining sex ratios in Haryana. The sample was overwhelmingly Hindu by religion (90%, with 7% Jain and 3% Muslim) and was dominated numerically by the Other Backward Classes (45%) and General category (32%), with Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes accounting for 15% and 7% respectively. The large majority of the sample (86%) fell within the 18–45 age bracket, indicating a predominantly young to middle-aged respondent base. Educational attainment was relatively high: 61% of respondents were graduates or held postgraduate qualifications, with female respondents in the sample showing marginally higher educational attainment than male respondents. Occupationally, 47% were employed in government service reflecting the weight of official respondents in the sample while 21% reported being unemployed and the remainder were spread across private-sector, agricultural and other occupations, with many households also drawing supplementary income from agricultural landholding.

TABLE 2. Selected Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 500)

Characteristic	Category	%
Locality	Urban / Semi-urban / Rural	48 / 34 / 18
Sex	Male / Female	47 / 53
Religion	Hindu / Jain / Muslim	90 / 7 / 3
Caste	OBC / General / SC / BC	45 / 32 / 15 / 7
Age group	18–45 years	86
Education	Graduate and above	61
Occupation	Government / Public-sector service	47

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Trends in the Sex Ratio and Child Sex Ratio

Haryana's overall sex ratio has lagged behind the national average throughout the period for which data are available. Table 3 shows that in 1971 the state recorded 819 females per 1,000 males against a national figure of 930 (Census of India, 2001, 2011; National Family Health Survey, various rounds), and although both figures have risen over subsequent decades, the gap between Haryana and the national average has persisted. The years immediately following the launch of BBBP show a distinct improvement: the state's sex ratio rose from 876 in 2015 to above 900 from 2016 onward and touched 923 in 2019, before settling in the range of 914–917 in the early 2020s.

The child sex ratio (0–6 years), the indicator BBBP was principally designed to move, tells a more sobering story. Haryana's child sex ratio stood at 819 in 2001 and 834 in 2011 among the lowest recorded by any major state and had only recovered to 836 by 2015, the year of the scheme's launch. Subsequent estimates show a rise to 893 in 2021 and a further improvement to 917 in 2022, but the 2023 estimate of 830 suggests the gain has not been fully consolidated, with annual fluctuations around a slowly rising trend rather than a steady one-directional improvement better describing the post-2015 pattern.

District-level data on the sex ratio at birth reinforce the picture of an uneven and incomplete recovery. In 2015, several districts including Ambala, Faridabad, Jhajjar, Mahendragarh, Panchkula, Rewari and

TABLE 3. Overall and Child Sex Ratio, India and Haryana, Selected Years (1971–2023)

Year	Overall SR — India	Overall SR — Haryana	Child SR — India	Child SR — Haryana
1971	930	819	964	898
1991	927	865	945	879
2001	933	861	927	819
2011	943	877	918	834
2015	896	876	919	836
2017	904	914	—	—
2019	919	923	—	—
2021	918	914	929	893
2022	—	—	918	917
2023	1020*	916	933	830

*Note. Census of India and NFHS survey reports. *The 2023 India figure reflects NFHS-5 sample-based estimates rather than Census enumeration.*

Yamunanagar recorded sex ratios at birth well below 800, with Yamunanagar as low as 616. By 2019–2021 most districts had moved into the 890–960 range, with some, such as Karnal, Panchkula and Sirsa, briefly touching or exceeding parity with males in particular years. Yet the improvement is neither linear nor uniform: several districts recorded their post-scheme peak in the late 2010s and then slipped back closer to 870–900 by 2022–23, and no district has sustained a ratio consistently at or above 950 through the entire post-2015 period (Times of India, 2024a). This district-level volatility is consistent with the survey finding, discussed below, that respondents overwhelmingly characterise the scheme's impact as partial rather than transformative.

6.2 Fund Allocation and Expenditure

Fund allocation and utilisation for the scheme have grown substantially since inception but remain subject to under-spending relative to allocation, particularly from 2019–20 onward. Table 4 summarises the trend at the national level (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2023); the near-total decline in central media-advocacy spending in 2020–21 and 2021–22 corroborates official respondents' own assessment, discussed in Section 7, that implementation capacity weakened during the COVID-19 period.

Among the 150 officials surveyed, a majority (50%) had been associated with the scheme's administration for more than ten years, lending their responses considerable experiential weight, and 87% reported direct involvement in scheme-related activities, most commonly the celebration of Girl Child Day and celebrations marking the birth of a girl child. Officials identified lack of public awareness (28% of responses), rigidity of gender preference among parents (27%), lack of parental cooperation (24%) and social stigma (21%) as the principal obstacles to effective implementation, alongside the involvement of medical personnel in illegal sex identification, cited by 53% as an ongoing problem.

TABLE 4. BBBP Fund Allocation and Expenditure, Government of India (₹ crore)

Financial Year	Revised Estimate	Actual Expenditure
2014–15	50	34.84

2015–16	75	59.37
2016–17	43	28.66
2017–18	200	169.10
2018–19	280	244.73
2019–20	200	85.78
2020–21	100	60.57
2021–22	100	57.13
2022–23	222	40.57

Note. Annual Report 2022–23, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

6.3 Perspectives of Officials on Implementation

On outcomes, a majority acknowledged some positive movement in the child sex ratio since the scheme's introduction, but few were prepared to describe the change as substantial. Table 5 shows that 58% reported "some improvement," 25% reported clear improvement, and 17% reported no improvement at all in their area of responsibility. A similar pattern held for the educational status of girls, where only 44% of officials reported maximum improvement against 53% reporting minimum improvement. When asked more directly about the scheme's outcomes, 63% of officials agreed that it had been beneficial overall and 60% agreed that its objectives were being achieved, yet 61% simultaneously acknowledged that prenatal sex determination continues to occur in Haryana, and 63% reported an increase in crimes against women and girl children over the same period a pattern consistent with contemporaneous media reporting of a roughly 19% year-on-year rise in crimes against children in the state (Times of India, 2024b).

TABLE 5. Official Assessment of Improvement in the Child Sex Ratio since 2015

Response	No. of Officials	%
Improvement	38	25
Some improvement	87	58
No improvement	25	17
Total	150	100

Note. Field survey

Enforcement activity, by officials' own account, remains limited: only 4% could cite a village in their district that had been formally recognised for an improved sex ratio, and only 6% reported cases filed under the PC&PNDT Act since 2015. Officials also noted that enforcement action under the PC&PNDT and MTP Acts, including raids that led to the apprehension of doctors and intermediaries involved in sex-determination rackets since 2016, had been hampered by the diversion of health personnel to COVID-19 duties during the pandemic period. Read together, these responses point to a scheme that has succeeded in raising the visibility of the sex-ratio problem and in prompting greater official attentiveness to it, but that has not been matched by a commensurate increase in prosecutions, community-level recognition schemes, or public willingness to report violations. Officials themselves locate the shortfall less in the design of the scheme than in the weak cooperation of the community it targets and in the difficulty of holding private medical practitioners accountable.

6.4 Perspectives of Parents, Guardians and Teachers

Among the 350 parents, guardians and teachers surveyed, 57% belonged to nuclear families and 43% to joint families; the latter tend to retain stronger patriarchal structures of inheritance and authority that work against gender parity. A majority (63%) reported household incomes above ₹2,00,000 per month, suggesting the sample was drawn disproportionately from economically comfortable households a pattern with implications for interpreting attitudes toward dowry, inheritance and gender preference, since it suggests that son preference in this sample is not simply a function of poverty.

Outright preference for sons over daughters remains widespread, even though few respondents express an explicit rejection of daughters. Table 6 shows that only 3% of respondents said they would prefer a daughter first, while 40% preferred a son first with no stated preference thereafter and a further 42% preferred a son first followed by a daughter together accounting for 82% of respondents expressing some form of son preference in birth order.

TABLE 6. Gender Preference Reported by Parent/Guardian/Teacher Respondents

Preference	No. of Respondents	%
Daughter first	15	3
Son first (no further preference)	192	40
Son first, then daughter	202	42
No daughter at all	20	4

No preference	25	5
No response	32	7

Note. Field survey

The reasons respondents gave for this preference (Table 7), drawn from a multiple-response question, centre on the practical and social costs associated with raising and marrying a daughter rather than on an explicit devaluation of girls as such. The single most frequently cited reason was that a daughter increases a family's responsibilities (21% of responses), followed by the vulnerability of daughters to atrocities and crime (17%), the burden of dowry (15%), the perception that daughters cannot carry forward family lineage or traditions (14%), and the difficulty parents anticipate in living apart from a married daughter (11%). Notably, very few respondents (1%) framed the issue in terms of a daughter offering no economic return, suggesting that son preference in the sample is driven less by a narrowly economic calculation than by concerns about safety, social obligation, and the structure of marriage and residence after a daughter weds.

When asked directly about the causes of the declining child sex ratio, respondents identified gender preference (32%), female foeticide and infanticide (26%), and sex determination through diagnostic technology (21%) as the three leading causes, together accounting for nearly 80% of responses. Data on children

TABLE 7. Reasons Cited for Gender Preference (Multiple Responses)

Reason	%
A daughter increases family responsibility	21
A daughter is vulnerable to atrocities/crime	17
Dowry burden associated with a daughter	15
A daughter cannot continue family lineage/tradition	14
Difficulty of living apart from a married daughter	11
Difficulty in arranging a daughter's marriage	5
Social stigma associated with a daughter	5
A daughter is considered unequal to a son	4
A daughter cannot perform religious rituals	4
A daughter is seen as a liability	3
A daughter's upbringing seen as yielding no return	1

Note. Field survey

born to respondent families since 2015 show a male-to-female birth ratio skewed well beyond the natural range (55% male against 43% female among live births), and among reported child deaths after 2015, 57% were female against 43% male with the largest share of female child deaths occurring either before birth or within one month of birth, a pattern consistent with sex-selective elimination rather than natural mortality. Gendered treatment extends well beyond survival outcomes. Girls were somewhat more likely than boys to attend government rather than private schools, recorded a substantially higher drop-out rate (19% versus 6% for boys), and were disproportionately steered toward arts and humanities subjects rather than science. Gender-based differences were also evident in food allocation, after-school engagement (with girls concentrated in domestic work and boys in academic or outdoor activity), and intended age at marriage, with 52% of respondents favouring marriage for girls between the ages of 19 and 21, compared with the 22–25 age bracket favoured for boys.

6.5 Perceived Effects of the Scheme on Society

When asked to assess the scheme's broader social effects, respondents' answers cluster around moderate rather than substantial change. Table 8 shows that on the question of whether violence against the girl child had declined since the scheme began, the largest group of respondents (258 of 350, or 52%) reported no change, against only 30 who reported a decline "to a great extent." More encouraging patterns emerged on equal treatment between men and women and on children's education, where roughly 30% of respondents in each case reported change "to a great extent" and a further 30–33% reported change "to some extent," though sizeable minorities again reported no change at all. A comparable pattern held for the age at marriage of girls and for awareness of legal provisions relating to the Marriage Act, both of which showed more respondents reporting change than reporting none, but with the "to some extent" category consistently outweighing the "to a great extent" category across nearly all outcomes probed.

TABLE 8. Perceived Effect of the BBBP Scheme on Society (Multiple Responses, N = 350)

Indicator	To a Great Extent	To Some Extent	No Change
Reduction in violence against girl child	30	62	258
Equal treatment of men and women	100	215	94
Increase in education of children	97	115	103

Improvement in health status of girls	70	75	100
Girls sent outside home for education/work	62	89	89
Attitudinal change towards girl child	35	104	74
Decline in female foeticide	150	100	75
Rise in age at marriage of girls	130	70	60
Increased awareness of Marriage Act	68	174	22

Note. Primary survey data

A parallel question on shifts in gender perspective found that the most commonly cited change was an increased recognition that women are capable of taking on responsibilities traditionally reserved for men (26% of responses), followed by a more general positive outlook towards women (22%) and growing acceptance of the idea of gender equality (13%). Changes touching more deeply embedded customs — such as women performing religious rituals traditionally reserved for men, or families no longer expecting dowry because a daughter is seen as an asset in her own right — were reported far less frequently, at 3% and 12% respectively, indicating that the scheme's influence has been felt more strongly in general social attitudes than in specific ritual and economic practices tied to marriage.

Respondents' main sources of awareness about the scheme were television (29%), advertisements (23%), NGO representatives (15%) and government officials (14%), pointing to a continuing reliance on mass-media messaging rather than sustained interpersonal or community-level engagement. Notably, when the “some extent” and “no change” responses are combined, they substantially outnumber the “great extent” responses on almost every indicator in Table 8 suggesting that although the scheme has shifted opinion and behaviour at the margin, it has not yet produced the scale of transformation intended a decade after launch. Across nearly every outcome measured, the modal experience of BBBP in Haryana is one of partial, incremental change: awareness has spread, some attitudes have softened, and the sex ratio has moved off its pre-2015 lows, but the deeper structures of preference, obligation and risk that make a daughter's birth a matter of anxiety for many families remain substantially intact.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are broadly consistent with the wider literature on gender-biased sex selection in India, which has long argued that legal prohibition and public communication, while necessary, are insufficient on their own to override the economic and social logic that makes sons more valuable than daughters within a patriarchal kinship system. In Haryana specifically, the persistence of dowry, the association of daughters with post-marital residence away from the natal family, and continuing anxiety about the safety of girls all recur in this study's data as reasons for son preference, echoing findings from earlier research on the state's demographic profile.

The gap between official confidence in the scheme's benefits (63% of officials describe it as beneficial) and official acknowledgement of continuing violations (61% report that sex determination continues) is itself instructive. It suggests that officials experience the scheme primarily as a legitimate and worthwhile administrative mandate, while at the same time recognising that the enforcement apparatus in particular, surveillance of private diagnostic centres and prosecution under the PC&PNDT Act remains under-resourced relative to the scale of the practice, a shortfall the fund-utilisation data in Table 4 corroborate directly, particularly for the years since 2019–20. The very low reported numbers of cases filed and villages recognised for improved sex ratios point to an implementation gap between the scheme's stated ambition and its operational reach at the district level, a gap the officials themselves attribute chiefly to weak public cooperation, rigid gender preference among parents, and continuing social stigma.

On the demand side, the fact that only a small minority of parent respondents openly reject daughters, while a large majority nonetheless express a preference for sons in birth order, suggests that the scheme's awareness campaigns have succeeded in making explicit anti-daughter sentiment socially undesirable to state, even where the underlying preference persists in more subtle form — for instance, in preferring a son as the firstborn or as the family's only child. This distinction between stated norms and underlying preference is consistent with the observation that a large share of respondents describe change as occurring “to some extent” rather than “to a great extent”: public discourse and formal attitudes appear to have shifted more decisively than the private calculus that governs actual reproductive, schooling and marriage decisions. The finding that this pattern holds even among the economically comfortable households that dominate the survey sample (63% with monthly incomes above ₹2,00,000) further suggests that son preference in Haryana is sustained less by material necessity than by deeply socialised expectations around lineage, dowry, safety and the post-marital transfer of a daughter to another family.

8. KEY FINDINGS

1. Patriarchal values and hierarchical family structures continue to shape attitudes toward the birth, rearing and upbringing of girl children in Haryana, and act as the principal structural barrier to the scheme's objectives.
2. Formal and informal patterns of socialisation reinforce gendered outcomes in schooling, nutrition, domestic responsibility and age at marriage, independent of the scheme's formal provisions.
3. The BBBP scheme is regarded by both officials and the public as relevant, but public cooperation with its implementation remains weak identified by officials as the single largest constraint on effectiveness, despite the public being its primary beneficiary.
4. The scheme has achieved only partial success: the sex ratio, child sex ratio and female literacy have improved, but not to the extent envisaged at launch.
5. The role of state officials, medical personnel and local bodies in pursuing the scheme's objectives is perceived as only partially effective.
6. Patriarchal values, weak socialisation practices, insufficient public support, administrative inefficiency and misuse of diagnostic technology are the principal drivers of the declining sex ratio; the consequences include poor health outcomes for women, a persistent deficit of girl children, and reputational harm to the state.
7. Diagnostic technology continues to be misused for sex determination despite legal prohibition under the PC&PNDT Act.
8. State government schemes supplementing BBBP have had some positive effect on the male–female birth ratio, but the effect remains limited
9. Haryana's overall sex ratio rose from 876 (2015) to a range of 914–923 in subsequent years, and the child sex ratio rose from 836 (2015) to a high of 917 (2022) — but the 2023 estimate fell back to 830, showing the gains are fragile and reversible.
10. No district has sustained a sex ratio at or above 950 consistently through the post-2015 period; several districts peaked in the late 2010s and then slipped back.
11. Officials report only partial success: 58% see “some improvement,” 25% see clear improvement, 17% see none.

9. CONCLUSION

A decade after its launch, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme has made a measurable, if incomplete, contribution to Haryana's demographic, social and economic landscape. The state's sex ratio and child sex ratio have both moved upward from their pre-2015 lows, official awareness of the sex-selection problem has deepened, and public attitudes towards the value of daughters have softened in general terms, particularly around education and the recognition of women's capabilities. Officials and the public alike regard the scheme as a relevant and legitimate intervention, and secondary data confirm gradual improvement in the sex ratio at birth in several Haryana districts since 2015.

At the same time, the study's evidence does not support a conclusion that the scheme has resolved the underlying drivers of son preference in the state. District-level sex ratios remain volatile, enforcement of the PC&PNDT Act continues to lag behind the scale of the practice it targets and was further weakened during the COVID-19 period, and a majority of surveyed parents still express a preference for sons rooted less in outright rejection of daughters than in continuing anxieties about dowry, safety and post-marital family structure. Gender preference, sex-selective elimination, gendered patterns of nutrition and schooling, and early marriage of girls persist even among educated and economically comfortable households, indicating that awareness alone does not translate automatically into changed behaviour.

The scheme should therefore be understood as a necessary but not sufficient intervention: it has built the awareness and institutional infrastructure on which further progress can be built, but the persistence of patriarchal norms means that sustained gains in the sex ratio and child sex ratio will depend on deeper and more sustained engagement with the economic and social arrangements i.e. dowry, inheritance, marriage residence and women's economic independence that continue to make sons more valuable than daughters to many Haryana families. Sustained, community-embedded engagement, rather than periodic media campaigns, appears necessary if the scheme is to achieve the scale of transformation originally envisaged.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen surveillance and prosecution under the PC&PNDT Act, with particular attention to private diagnostic centres, and publish district-level enforcement data regularly to improve accountability; this enforcement should be made less vulnerable to disruption during public-health emergencies, given the documented decline in enforcement capacity during the COVID-19 period.
2. Institutionalise a monitoring mechanism that tracks the scheme's outcomes at the village and block level, rather than relying solely on state-level aggregates, with defined accountability and consequences for non-performance, so that lagging areas can be identified and targeted.

3. Expand community-level engagement focus-group discussions, parental counselling and village-level recognition schemes to build public cooperation, which officials in this study identified as the single largest constraint on effectiveness; regular focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews with the public across districts should be conducted to generate ongoing, ground-level feedback for policy adjustment.
4. Address the economic roots of son preference directly, through stricter enforcement of anti-dowry law and expanded support for women's economic independence, so that daughters are not perceived as a net financial liability to their families.
5. Sustain and refresh media and awareness campaigns beyond their initial phase, since the study suggests that public discourse has shifted faster than underlying attitudes, and continued reinforcement is needed to close that gap.
6. Involve local leadership, women's groups and the education system more directly in scheme delivery, so that behavioural change is reinforced through everyday social institutions rather than through periodic official messaging alone.
7. Provide sustained parental counselling in rural, urban and backward regions to promote girls' education with particular emphasis on skilling in non-traditional livelihood areas — and to discourage early marriage.
8. Insulate incentive-based and action-oriented programmes under the Haryana model from short-term political considerations, and expand fund utilisation to close the gap between allocation and actual expenditure evident since 2019–20.
9. Institutionalise more frequent, structured feedback loops involving both officials and the public to recalibrate implementation strategy, given that measurable change after nearly a decade remains only partial.

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