

Boy Preference and Imbalance in Sex Ratio in Korea

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I. Introduction

Korea is known as one of the countries where strong boy preference is widely spread. The persistently strong boy preference can be explained by the cultural and social system of Korea. Korean society was basically family oriented, and the Korean family was established into a patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal system, affected by the Confucianism during the past hundred years (Chung, et al., 1974; Lee and Choe 1982). It was widely spread in traditional Korea that boys were considered to be crucial for carrying on the family name and were also wanted to provide economic security for parents, particularly in old age, and to perform the rituals of ancestor worship. In this sense, bearing no son to the family was considered a sin for a couple, and in the

traditional Korean society, a man could desert his wife in such circumstances.

During the last 30 years, however, Korea has experienced a rapid industrialization and urbanization through the successful implementation of a series of 5-Year Socio-Economic Development Plans, resulting in rapid changes in social structure. The observed decrease in the level of fertility in Korea is considered as a response to the social changes as well as a result of the strong Governmental population control policy. The level of fertility in Korea has decreased as low as below replacement level, i.e., Total Fertility Rate of 1.6 since the mid-1980s while it was six in the early 1960s (Kong, et al., 1992; Moon et al., 1989).

During the period, for the successful implementation of the population control policy in Korea, the Korean Government

and related Organizations, including the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs-(KIHASA), paid great attention to the study on impacts of boy preference on family size and level of fertility. Numerous researches were conducted regarding sex preference (Lee, 1987; Suh, 1992; Park and Cho, 1994; Cho, 1990). Many researches revealed that the boy preference was a barrier to reduce the level of fertility, if parents continued to have children until they reached to the desired number of children in terms of sex composition (Han and Lee, 1977; Cho, 1982; Lee, 1982; Kim et al., 1990; Lee, 1982). However, in general, couples have relatively less control over the sex of the children than they do over the number of children, since the sex of children is determined through biological rather than behavioral process. For this reason, as more couples in recent years tend to rely on sex-selective induced abortion to accomodate both boy preference and small family size norm, a new demographic phenomena of distortion of sex ratio at birth is emerging in Korea. For example, a

rapidly rising sex ratio with birth order is reported in many researches (Lee, 1989; Kim et al., 1990; Park and Cho, 1994).

In this paper, special attention was paid to find the level and trends of boy preference and its impact on the sex ratio. To do this, present conditions of the boy preference, in particular, the necessity of sons and the reasons for wanting boys will be discussed. Following this, the distorted sex ratio at birth and its impact on the marriage market will be discussed.

I. Present Conditions of Boy Preference

1. Ideal Number of Children

Several surveys in Korea showed the level of boy preference by reporting the ideal number of children by sex. When the ideal number of boys exceeds the ideal number of girls, one can safely assume that it reflects the prevailing boy preference in a society. Results from the several rounds of National Fertility and Family Health Surveys conducted by KIHASA regarding

Table 1. Changes in the Ideal Number of Children among Married Women Aged 15-44 over the 1968-1991 Period

| | 1968 | 1978 | 1988 | 1991 |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Ideal Number of Children (A) | 3.9 | 2.7 | 2.0 | 2.1 |
| Ideal Number of Boys (B) | 2.4 | 1.6 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Ideal Number of Girls (C=A-B) | 1.5 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 0.9 |
| Ideal Sex Ratio (B/C×100) | 160.0 | 145.5 | 150.0 | 133.3 |
| Total Fertility Rate (TFR) | 4.2 | 2.7 | 1.6 | 1.6 |

Source: KIHASA, National Fertility and Family Health Surveys.

the ideal number of children by sex are summarized in Table 1.

The ideal number of children among Korean women in the survey, conducted in 1991, was 2.1, a figure slightly higher than the 2.0 level of 1988 survey but lower than the 3.9 of the 1968 and 2.7 of the 1978 surveys, reflecting that the ideal number of children decreased from 3.9 in 1968 to 2.1 in 1991.

The four rounds of surveys selected for this study showed that the ideal number of boys, which was 2.4 in 1968 and 1.2 in 1991, exceeded the ideal number of girls which was 1.5 in 1968 and 0.9 in 1991 respectively, though the ideal sex ratio seems decreasing from 160.0 in 1968 to 133.3 in 1991. This implies that strong son preference in Korea is still prevailing in Korea though it might be weakened, compared to the traditional Korean society.

It is interesting to note that the actual level of Total Fertility Rate (TFR) was higher in 1968, and lower in 1988 and 1991 than the ideal number of children, reflecting the rapid decline in the level of actual fertility, but also the slow decline in the

ideal number of children over the 1968-1991 period.

2. The Level of Son Preference

Table 2 presents percentage distribution of ever-married women aged 15~49 with regard to their sex preference, in particular, the level of son necessity. According to the table, 61.0% of the women in 1976 responded that a son was definitely necessary and another 11.0% stated that it was better than no son. To the same question, 28.0% responded that it did not matter. The boy preference among Korean women was observed to decrease during mid-1980s. In particular, in 1988, only 29.8% of women responded that a son was definitely necessary while 49.4% of women stated that it did not matter. However, the boy preference gained weight again in 1991; that is, 40.5% of women mentioned that a son was definitely necessary and another 30.7% stated that it was better than no son. Only 28% responded that it did not matter.

The level of son necessity by characteristics of ever married women aged 15-49

Table 2. The Level of Son Necessity for Ever Married Women Aged 15-49 over the 1976-1991 Period

| Extent | 1976 | 1985 | 1988 | 1991 |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Number | 6,020 | 7,005 | 6,511 | 7,448 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Definitely Necessary | 61.0 | 38.7 | 29.8 | 40.5 |
| Better than No Son | 11.0 | 21.6 | 20.3 | 30.7 |
| No Matter | 28.0 | 38.5 | 49.4 | 28.0 |
| Don't Know | 0.0 | 1.2 | 0.5 | 0.8 |

Source: KIHASA, National Fertility and Family Health Surveys.

Table 3. Extent of Son Necessity by Characteristics of Ever Married Women Aged 15-49, 1991

(Unit: %)

| Characteristics | Total | Definitely Necessary | Better than No Son | No Matter | Don't Know |
|--------------------|-------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Whole Country | 100.0 | 40.5 | 30.7 | 28.0 | 0.8 |
| Area | | | | | |
| Urban | 100.0 | 34.6 | 34.5 | 30.3 | 0.6 |
| Rural | 100.0 | 62.6 | 16.9 | 19.3 | 1.2 |
| Age of Women | | | | | |
| 15-24 | 100.0 | 28.0 | 29.6 | 41.4 | 1.0 |
| 25-29 | 100.0 | 27.7 | 35.3 | 36.0 | 1.0 |
| 30-34 | 100.0 | 34.1 | 33.9 | 31.3 | 0.7 |
| 35-39 | 100.0 | 41.3 | 31.1 | 26.7 | 0.9 |
| 40-44 | 100.0 | 50.4 | 28.4 | 20.6 | 0.6 |
| 45-49 | 100.0 | 63.1 | 20.5 | 16.1 | 0.3 |
| Level of Education | | | | | |
| Primary School | 100.0 | 62.5 | 19.8 | 16.9 | 0.8 |
| Middle School | 100.0 | 42.4 | 31.9 | 25.0 | 0.7 |
| High School | 100.0 | 30.7 | 34.2 | 34.3 | 0.8 |
| College And Over | 100.0 | 26.2 | 38.3 | 34.7 | 0.8 |

Source: Kong, et al., 1991 National Fertility and Family Health Survey, 1992.

in 1991 were presented in Table 3. As shown in the table, rural women reveal greater son preference than urban women. That is, 62.6% of rural women respond that a son is quite necessary, while only 34.6% of urban women state a son is quite necessary. The reason may be that women residing in cities may be exposed to new ideas about sex equality, opportunities for women, new roles for women and freedom of women from family influence, while rural women hold the traditional values more strongly.

In the age pattern of son preference, the son preference increases with advancing age. This means that the extent of son preference increased continuously from

younger age to older age women. This was apparently brought about through a drastic increase in the proportion of women with strong son preference measured by necessity of son from 28.0% in age group 15~24 to 63.1% in age group 45~49; accompanied by a drastic reduction in no-preference, from 41.4% in 15~24 to 16.1% in 45~49. This pattern may be explained by the fact that in countries like Korea, where the societal structural transformation has been speeded up during a relatively short period, the process of modernization is more likely to have an influence on younger women since they have more opportunities to participate. Conversely, the women at later stages of the life cycle

have been exposed to the pre-industrial societies where they put much more emphasis on the traditional values of sons and hence they are less likely to be influenced by this process of modernization.

Son preference as an intervening factor that would affect fertility also shows the negative relation with education. In particular, 62.5% of women with primary schooling responded that a boy is quite necessary, while only 26.2% of women with college or above level of education assert

that a boy is quite necessary. In this sense, it may be argued that the wife's educational attainment, as one of the most important indicators of modernization, has played a very important role in transforming the traditional value of sons.

3. Values of Boys

The childbearing motivations are directly influenced by the perceived noneconomic as well as economic benefit derived from having children. For instance, rituals of

Table 4. Distribution of Women by Reason for Boy Preference over the 1964-1991 Period

| Reason for Boy | (Unit: %) | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| | 1964 Seoul 1) | 1965 Town 1) | 1966 Rural 1) | 1985 National 1) | 1991 National 3) |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Support in Old Age | 48.3 | 61.3 | 62.2 | 26.1 | 6.8 |
| Family Lineage | 27.9 | 19.3 | 28.2 | 37.3 | 42.2 |
| Ancestor Worship | N.A. | 1.5 | 5.0 | 9.1 | N.A. |
| As a family labour force | | | | | |
| A Son can rise to eminence | N.A. | 2.6 | 0.8 | N.A. | N.A. |
| Daughter is an outsider once married | N.A. | 1.5 | 1.7 | N.A. | N.A. |
| It is a tradition | N.A. | 9.8 | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. |
| Economic Assistance | 7.7 | N.A. | 0.8 | N.A. | N.A. |
| Family Harmony | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | 6.6 | N.A. |
| Prestige | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | 15.6 | 16.8 |
| Others | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | 20.3 | 34.2 |
| | 23.8 | 17.9 | 4.6 | N.A. | N.A. |

Note: N.A. refers Not Applicable due to no specific question items available in corresponding survey.

Source:

- 1) From KIPH, Population and Family Planning in the Republic of Korea, Vol. II, 1974, p308.
- 2) Lee, S.S., 1989, Determinants of Son Preference, Cairo.
- 3) Kong, et al., 1991 National Fertility and Family health Survey, 1992.

ancestor worship have a very strong impact on the perceived noneconomic utility of children. Under the tradition, it has been observed that the greater value the respondents placed on the ancestor worship ceremonies, the more likely they were to perceive the utility of children.

This section examines selected values of sons that Korean parents attached to sons, which include reasons for having sons such as carrying on the family name, economic support, old age security, rituals of ancestor worship, prestige, and family harmony, etc. The reasons given for boy preference were listed in Table 4. In the table, the direct comparison of the reasons for wanting sons

may be limited because some categories in different round of surveys are not consistent.

Support in old age was the most important of all values of a boy in 1960s, while the family lineage was the second most important, regardless of the area.

The importance of the support in old age became less important than family lineage in 1985. Among reasons for wanting sons, the most pronounced is family lineage (37.3%) which has been stressed as important in Korean society influenced by Confucian tradition. The provision of security in old age (26.1%) also appears as the next most important reason for having

Table 5. Distribution of Ever-Married Women Aged 15-49 by Reason for Boy Preference, 1991

(Unit: %)

| | Total | Family Lineage | Old Security | Family Harmony | Prestige |
|--------------------|-------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------|
| Total | 100.0 | 42.2 | 6.8 | 16.8 | 34.2 |
| Urban | 100.0 | 35.8 | 5.4 | 20.3 | 38.5 |
| Rural | 100.0 | 55.1 | 11.6 | 9.8 | 25.5 |
| Age of Women | | | | | |
| 15-24 | 100.0 | 51.4 | 3.7 | 15.0 | 29.9 |
| 25-29 | 100.0 | 38.0 | 4.6 | 25.1 | 32.3 |
| 30-34 | 100.0 | 36.3 | 6.5 | 22.0 | 35.2 |
| 35-39 | 100.0 | 37.0 | 8.3 | 18.3 | 36.4 |
| 40-44 | 100.0 | 45.4 | 6.2 | 12.7 | 35.7 |
| 45-49 | 100.0 | 51.2 | 8.4 | 9.0 | 31.4 |
| Level of Education | | | | | |
| Primary School | 100.0 | 51.9 | 10.1 | 7.9 | 31.1 |
| Middle School | 100.0 | 39.1 | 7.0 | 16.1 | 37.9 |
| High School | 100.0 | 36.7 | 4.8 | 23.0 | 35.5 |
| College and Over | 100.0 | 29.0 | 3.4 | 38.6 | 29.0 |

Source: Kong, et al., 1991 National Fertility and Family Health Survey, 1992.

sons, followed by prestige (20.3%) and family harmony (15.6%). However, rituals of ancestor worship (9.1%) and economic assistance (6.6%) as functions of sons seem to lose their strong hold in Korea.

Also in 1991, the most pronounced was family lineage (42.2%), followed by prestige (34.2%), implying that emotional ties between generations are important in Korea. While the support in old age (6.8%) as value of boys seems to lose its strong hold in Korea. This finding implies that boys are wanted more likely not for economic reasons but for the emotional or traditional reasons in Korea. Therefore, it appears that the parents may consider less important the economic utility of a son with the economic development observed in Korea during the last three decades.

Table 5 presents reasons for wanting sons by characteristics of women, i.e., residential characteristics, age of women, and educational attainment in 1991.

The reasons for boy preference reveal a slightly different pattern by area. The most important reason for preferring boys in urban areas is emotional, such as prestige (38.5%), followed by traditional reasons such as family lineage (35.8%), while the most pronounced reason in rural area is traditional reason such as family lineage (55.1%), followed by emotional reason such as prestige (25.5%). The economic reason such as old age security reveals only 5.4% in urban women and 11.6% in rural women.

The reasons for wanting boys by age of

women reveal that the greater the age of women the higher the proportion of women who assert that a boy is necessary for family lineage, except for the 15~24 age group. Proportions of women asserting that a boy is necessary for family lineage are 38.0% in 25~29 age group, 36.3% in 30-34 age group, and 37.0% in 35~39 age group. However, the proportion increased to 45.4% among women aged 40~44 and 51.2% among women aged 45~49.

The reasons for preferring boys by educational attainment of women reveals that women with low education expressed the family lineage (51.9%) as the most important value of children, followed by prestige (31.1%). Women with middle or high school level of education expressed almost equal value of boys for family lineage and prestige. However, women with college level of education or more expressed the happiness or harmony in a family (38.6%) as the most important value of boys. These findings imply that higher educated women stressed the importance of boys for the happiness or harmony of family, while low educated women stressed the traditional value of family lineage.

Hence, value and disvalue differ by the socio-economic status of the parents, in particular by the residence and educational level. The more educated parents residing in urban areas tend to emphasize the emotional benefits from childbearing, while rural parents tend to be more concerned with the traditional value of children such as family lineage.

III. Implications of Boy Preference in Korea

The aforementioned strong boy preference in Korea has significant impact on a wide range of social life in Korea, particularly, sex ratio at birth and marriage squeeze(shortage of brides) in the near future. In this sense, as consequences of the boy preference, the phenomena of the distorted sex ratio at birth and future marriage squeeze will be discussed.

1. Sex Ratio at Birth

The sex ratio at birth in Korea has been positively associated with birth order in recent years as shown in Table 6. This phenomena could be found in Korean vital statistics data over the 1980~1992 period. Sex ratio at birth in Korea was not high from the beginning. For example, the sex ratio at birth for the first child is recorded around 105.7 in 1980 and 108.7 in 1990. This level represents a slightly higher level than the accepted sex ratio of 105. And for the second child, the sex ratio records around 104.2 in 1980, 105.4 in 1982, and

107.2 in 1984. However, after that year, the sex ratio for the second child increased from 111.3 in 1986 to 117.2 in 1990.

For the third and fourth child, the sex ratio increased significantly, for instance, 195.6 for the third child and 229.0 for the fourth child in 1992. Considering that the ideal number of children decreased to around two children and that the total fertility rate in Korea is about 1.6 in 1991 as shown previously, majority of women in Korea may stop their childbearing activities before they get three children. Therefore, the high sex ratios for the third and fourth children may be considered as the result of boy preference.

This may imply that women in Korea tend to have boys by means of sex-selective induced abortion after checking the sex of the fetus within the range of their ideal number of children. In other words, this increasing sex ratio with birth order can be explained as follows. If family size must be limited in a society with strong boy preference, the female birth for over a certain number of birth must be suppressed by the sex-selective induced abortion

Table 6. Sex Ratio at Birth by Birth Order, 1980-1992

(Unit : %)

| Birth Order | 1980 | 1982 | 1984 | 1986 | 1988 | 1990 | 1992 |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Average | 103.9 | 106.8 | 108.3 | 111.8 | 113.4 | 116.8 | 114.0 |
| First | 105.7 | 105.4 | 106.1 | 107.3 | 107.4 | 108.7 | 106.4 |
| Second | 104.2 | 106.0 | 107.2 | 111.3 | 113.3 | 117.2 | 112.8 |
| Third | 102.7 | 109.2 | 116.9 | 138.7 | 166.3 | 191.9 | 195.6 |
| Fourth and Over | 99.1 | 113.7 | 128.1 | 150.6 | 185.7 | 218.9 | 229.0 |

Source: NSO, Annual Report on the Vital Statistics, Various Years.

Table 7. Induced Abortion Experience Rate over the 1968-1991 Period

(Unit:%)

| Induced Abortion | 1968 | 1971 | 1976 | 1979 | 1985 | 1988 | 1991 |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Experienced Rate | 16 | 26 | 39 | 48 | 53 | 52 | 53 |
| Urban | 26 | 37 | 46 | 53 | 55 | 54 | 46 |
| Rural | 10 | 19 | 29 | 40 | 48 | 47 | 52 |

Source: KIHASA, National Fertility and Health Surveys.

through the sex identification test result, so that the desired number of boys may be attained within the small family size norm. This could be possible by the development of the sex identification test technique which was widely available in clinics as well as in hospitals in Korea from the mid-1980s, when the ultrasonic equipment was mass produced in Korea.

The women who experienced induced abortion increased significantly from 16% in 1968 to 53% in 1985 as shown in Table 7. Though the proportion became slightly decreased to 52% in 1988, the induced abortion experience rate is still high.

Hong and Oh(1992) analyzed the relation-

ship between pregnancy order and outcome of the pregnancy. The result of the analysis reveals that only 14.9% of first order pregnancy was terminated by induced abortion. This proportion increased significantly with order of pregnancy; that is, 48.8% for third order pregnancy and 54.1% for fourth order pregnancy and 69.5% for fifth and above order pregnancy as shown in Table 8. Therefore, it could be assumed that among the wide spread induced abortions, there are many sex-selective induced abortions when the sex of the fetus is female identified by the sex identification test.

The data for the sex identification test

Table 8. Pregnancy Outcome for 7,110 Married Women by Pregnancy Order(1985-1991)

(Unit: %)

| Pregnancy Outcome | Pregnancy Order | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5+ |
| No.of pregnancy | 1,693 | 1,639 | 1,302 | 827 | 919 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Live Birth | 74.3 | 57.6 | 42.4 | 38.0 | 21.4 |
| Still Birth | 0.1 | 0.9 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Spontaneous A. | 10.8 | 10.3 | 8.7 | 7.8 | 8.9 |
| Induced | 14.9 | 31.3 | 48.8 | 54.1 | 69.5 |

Source: Hong and Oh, "Trends of Induced Abortions in Korea," A Special Analysis on 1991 National Fertility Survey, KIHASA, 1992.

Table 9. Sex Identification Test and Pregnancy Outcome, 1988 (6,500 married women aged 15 - 44)
(Unit: person)

| Pregnancy Outcome | Total | | Test Results | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|-------|--------------|------|------|------------|
| | Pregnancy | Total | Boy | Girl | Twin | Don't know |
| Total | 22,094 | 275 | 169 | 87 | 1 | 18 |
| Birth | 13,650 | 227 | 154 | 56 | 1 | 16 |
| Induced Abortion | 6,494 | 31 | 3 | 27 | - | 1 |
| Still Birth | 157 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - |
| Spontaneous Abortion | 1,416 | 3 | - | 2 | - | 1 |
| Pregnancy | 377 | 13 | 11 | 2 | - | - |

Source: Moon, et al., 1988 National Fertility and Family Health Survey, KIPH, 1988.

are available in the 1988 National Fertility and Family Health Survey, though the accuracy of the data may be suspected for underreporting since the test is illegal in Korea since 1987. The data are shown in Table 9. According to the table, 1.2% (275 pregnancies out of 22,094 pregnancies) are reported to be tested during her pregnancy. Out of the tested 275 cases in 1988, the test results reveal that 169 cases as boy, 87 cases as girl, and 18 cases were don't know because doctor did not reveal the sex of the fetus. The majority of the pregnancies tested as boy was terminated as normal delivery. However, as much as 31% of the pregnancies known as girl was terminated by induced abortion.

Kim and Joo (1994) estimated the proportion of births which experienced sex identification test during the period of 1989~1991 as 3.6%, which is higher than the 1988 survey result of 1.2%, and argue that the sex identification test is the main cause of the distorted sex ratio in Korea recently.

2. Marriage Squeeze (shortage of brides)

Another implication of rising population sex ratio which is caused by the strong boy preference seems to be the possible marriage squeeze in the future. If it is assumed that males aged 25~29 generally married females aged 20~24, though the most preferred age gaps at marriage between male and female is about 4 years in Korea, the future imbalance in matching can be projected.

According to the Future Population Projection data published in April, 1991 as shown in Table 10, there may be little problems in marriage market before 2000, since the sex ratio of the eligible persons for marriage are 100.2 in 1985, 104.7 in 1990, and 101.3 in 1995, implying that the number of eligible males and females are almost balanced. However, in the year of 2000, males aged 25~29 should face great difficulty in finding their mates, since 19.1% of males is estimated to be outnumbered their female counterparts. The situation

Table 10. Projected Population Eligible for Marriage in Korea

(Unit: Thousand Persons)

| | Male (Aged 25-29) | Female (Aged 20-24) | Sex ratio |
|------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| 1970 | 1,207 | 1,254 | 96.2 |
| 1975 | 1,290 | 1,504 | 85.8 |
| 1980 | 1,584 | 2,015 | 78.6 |
| 1985 | 2,093 | 2,089 | 100.2 |
| 1990 | 2,181 | 2,083 | 104.7 |
| 1995 | 2,184 | 2,155 | 101.3 |
| 2000 | 2,263 | 1,896 | 119.4 |
| 2005 | 2,009 | 1,823 | 110.2 |
| 2010 | 1,946 | 1,513 | 128.6 |

Source: NSO, Future Population Projection, 1991.4.

would be worse in 2010, as males are estimated to outnumber their female partners by 28.6%. Since the surplus males must find their mates from the other age groups, the marriage market in 2010 would be greatly distorted.

IV. Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, special attention was paid to find the level and trends of boy preference and its impact on the sex ratio. To do this, present conditions of the boy preference was discussed. In particular, the necessity of son and the reasons for wanting boys were discussed. Followed by this, the distorted sex ratio at birth and its impact on the marriage market were discussed.

According to the survey results conducted by the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, the ideal number of boys exceeds the ideal number of girls in each year,

though the ideal sex ratio seems decreasing from 160.0 in 1968 to 133.3 in 1991, reflecting that strong son preference in Korea is still prevailing in Korea though it might be weaker compared to the traditional Korean society. Regarding the value of boys, the support in old age which was the most frequently cited value of son in 1960s became recently less important than family lineage. Also emotional ties between generations become important in Korea. This finding implies that boys are wanted more likely not for economic reasons but for the emotional or traditional reasons in Korea.

The aforementioned strong boy preference in Korea has significant impact on a wide range of social life in Korea; in particular, sex ratio at birth and marriage squeeze in the near future. For example, the sex ratio for the third and fourth child increased significantly; that is, 195.6 for the third

child and 229.0 for the fourth child in 1992. Another implication of rising sex ratio which is caused by the strong boy preference seems to be the possible marriage squeeze by shortage of bride in the future. In the year of 2000, males should face great difficulty in finding their mates, since 19.1% of males will outnumber their female counterparts. The situation would be worse in 2010, as males are estimated to outnumber their female partners by 28.6%. Since the surplus males must find their mates from the other age groups, the marriage market in 2010 would be greatly distorted.

The increasing sex ratio with birth order can be explained by the fact that if family size must be limited in a society with strong boy preference, the female birth for over a certain number of births to the parents must be suppressed by sex-selective induced abortions based on the sex identification test result so that the desired number of boys may be attained within the small family size norm.

Therefore, more attention should be paid to the prevailing boy preference in Korea, which might cause distorted sex ratio at birth and eventually serious marriage squeeze in Korea. In particular, the determinants and consequences of the boy preference in Korea should be studied in depth. Finally, to bring a balanced sex ratio at birth and to neutralize the strong boy preference in Korea, special measures including the enhanced social status of women and the prohibition of sex

identification test and the sex-selective induced abortion should be strongly implemented.

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<국문요약>

한국의 남아선호와 성비의 불균형

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한국보건사회연구원의 조사결과에 의하면 이상적인 성비는 1960년의 160에서 1991년에는 130으로 크게 낮아졌다. 아직도 한국 부인들의 이상자녀수는 여아보다 남아가 더 많이 나타나고 있다. 남아의 가치에 대해서는 1960년대에는 노후봉양이 가장 으뜸가는 변수였으나, 최근에는 가계계승보다도 그 중요도가 떨어지고 있는 경향을 보이고 있다. 또한 정서적 유대, 즉 아들이 있어야 든든하다는 식의 주장이 보다 강한 이유로 지적되고 있다.

이러한 남아선호사상은 사회적으로 상당한 영향을 미치는 요인이 되고 있다. 즉 성비의 불균형과 장래의 결혼시장의 혼란이 초래된다는 문제가 그것이다. 예를 들면 현재 셋째 및 넷째 아이의 성비가 크게 상승하고 있는 문제이다. 즉, 1992년의 경우 첫째 아이의 출생성비는 여아 100명당 남아 196.5이고, 넷째 아이의 경우는 229.0으로 더욱 높게 나타났다. 그리고 2000년에는 결혼적령의 남녀 성비의 차이는 신부보다 신랑이 19.1%나 많아질 것이며, 이러한 차이는 2010년에 가면 더욱 심화되어 신부감보다 신랑감이 무려 28.6%가 초과될 전망이다. 가뜰이나 농촌 총각들이 장가 들기가 어려운 터에 장가 못갈 총각이 크게 늘어날 수 밖에 없는 사정이 된다면 사회적으로 큰 혼란이 야기될 것임에 틀림없다. 이러한 성비의 불균형이 초래되는 배경은 남아선호사상의 잔존으로 저출산 내에서 태아의 성을 감별함으로써 선택적인 인공유산술을 하는데서 비롯되는 것으로 볼 수 있다.

따라서 현재에도 불식되지 않고 있는 남아선호사상에 대한 주의를 다시 한번 환기시켜야 할 것이다. 특히 이 분야의 보다 깊은 연구를 지속적으로 실시하여 대응전략의 제시에 노력해야 할 것이며, 우선 무엇보다도 여성들의 사회적 지위향상 등 여권신장에 관한 정책적 노력과 더불어 교육 홍보를 통한 노력이 강회되어야 할 것이다. 아울러 태아의 성감별 등 바람직하지 못한 의술남용 행위 등을 근절토록 보다 강력한 법적 적용에도 행정력을 집중시켜 나가야 할 것이다.