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Sex Selection Issue Continues To Haunt Indo-Canadian Community With Data Showing High Ratio Of Boys



Provincial Health Officer Dr. Perry Kendall

*In a report released in 2011 titled **The Health and Well-Being of Women in British Columbia**, Provincial Health Officer Dr. Perry Kendall discovered that children born to first generation Indo-Canadian parents had the highest ratio of boys to girls in 20 of the last 24 years—a number that cannot be attributed to chance alone.*

VANCOUVER – Community and health leaders are calling for an open dialogue about the cultural values that lead to sex selection in light of evidence that suggests some Indo-Canadian parents in BC still continue to choose sons over daughters.

Data from BC's Provincial Health Officer indicates that sex-selective abortions still occur in the Indo-Canadian community despite the fact that government-funded prenatal sex diagnosis is not available in British Columbia.

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"Typically, the ratio of newborns in our province is 106 boys to every 100 girls, but for Indo-Canadian families, that ratio is much higher at 111 boys to every 100 girls," says Dr. Meena Dawar, medical health officer at Vancouver Coastal Health. "Since ratios of boy to girl births are generally consistent over time and population, this variance suggests that some parents are choosing to prenatally determine the sex of their child and selectively seek an abortion."

Sex-selective abortions involve terminating a pregnancy when the fetus is of an undesired sex, usually female. Evidence indicates that some new immigrants from India have a strong preference for sons due to deep social and cultural roots, since males carry on the family name, inherit the family property and play a special role in family traditions. As a result, there is considerable pressure on a woman from their family and community to produce a male heir.

According to Ninu Kang, director of communications and development at MOSAIC, underlying values that lead to preference of boys need to be addressed through open discussion in families and the community. "At this occasion of the Lohri festival, we would like to encourage and support young parents in welcoming all children into their families, regardless of sex," she says.

Suki Grewal, founder and president of South Asian Family Association, adds, "We want to honor the strength and resilience of women in our lives. We also want to encourage the new parents in our community to celebrate the joy that young girls bring into our families."

Publicly-funded procedures for the sole purpose of determining prenatal sex are not available in BC. All provincial health authorities support the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada's 2007 Statement on Gender Selection, which states: "Medical technologies and/or testing for the sole purpose of gender identification in pregnancy should not be used to accommodate societal preferences." However, expectant parents wanting to learn the sex of their child can do so in private clinics or through prenatal

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“While health authorities do not support sex-selective abortion, we want to ensure women who do seek an abortion are provided this service in a medically safe manner,” says Dr. Victoria Lee, medical health officer at Fraser Health. “Women aren’t required to reveal the reason why they’re terminating their pregnancy, and both Fraser Health and Vancouver Coastal Health remain supportive of this non-disclosure policy.”

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