



Gender Selection in Demand

Many Women Would Choose Baby's Gender, But Raises Ethics Issues

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(WebMD) Many women treated at infertility clinics would say yes to a free option to choose their baby's sex, according to a new study.

Researchers found that 41 percent of women said they'd take advantage of a free option to select the sex of their baby during infertility treatment, and half of those women would still opt to choose the sex of their baby if they had to pay for the opportunity.

Although folk methods for selecting the sex of babies have been around for centuries, effective medical options for sex selection have only become available since the 1970s. Researchers say the two techniques for sex selection available in the U.S. — sperm separation and preimplantation genetic diagnoses — are usually reserved for the prevention of sex-specific genetic disorders.

Many physicians' groups are opposed to the use of sex selection for non-medical reasons. But researchers say this is the first study to look at the potential demand for sex selection among women undergoing treatment at an infertility clinic.

Sex selection is a topic that's almost taboo for physicians to talk about. Yet it's important to understand patient interest in non-medical sex selection and adequately address the ethical and social implications before the cat is out of the bag," says researcher **Tarun Jain, MD**, professor of reproductive endocrinology and infertility at the University of Illinois at Chicago, in a news release. "Prior to this study, there has been no data to indicate what the demand might be."

Selecting a Baby Boy or Girl

In the study, which appears in the March issue of the journal *Fertility and Sterility*, researchers surveyed 561 women who sought treatment at a hospital-based infertility clinic in 2002 about their demand and preferences for sex selection.

Among the women surveyed, 41 percent they wanted to select the sex of their next child if the option was offered at no additional cost. Of those, 45 percent did not have any children and 48 percent had children of the same sex. Half of the women who said they'd select the sex of their next baby if the option was free also said they'd be willing to pay for the opportunity.

Researchers found that about 38 percent of the women who wanted to select the sex of their child wanted a boy and about 61 percent wanted a girl. The study also showed that most women who already had children wanted to use sex selection to balance the gender composition of their family: women who had only daughters wanted to select a boy and women with only sons wanted to select a girl.

The study showed that women who were younger, African-American, Hispanic/Latino, less educated (bachelor's degree or lower), nonreligious, and less wealthy were also more likely to report a demand for sex selection.

Researchers say sex selection is controversial for many reasons. Some believe it would lead to gender imbalances in society as well as contribute to gender stereotyping and discrimination.

"One of the fears is that sex selection will drive patients toward a certain sex," says **Jain**. "And the presumption is a preference for boys. But our study did not show that. In fact, in patients who did not have children, there was no greater desire for boys over girls."

Based on these findings, researchers say it may be important for infertility clinics, as well as society, to determine what is an acceptable use of sex selection for non-medical reasons.

Sources: Jain, T. *Fertility & Sterility*, March 2005; vol 83: pp 649-658. News release, University of Illinois at Chicago.

For complete copies of the above publication or any other of Dr. Jain's recent publications, please call 1(866) IVF-CHGO.