

Effectiveness of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Campaign: Application of Nudge Theory to Address Gender Imbalance in Northern India

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ABSTRACT

Gender imbalance is a significant socio-cultural issue. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (B3P) campaign of the Indian Government referred to nudge theory to promote gender equality and reduce the perceived burden of the girl child. It has however shown limited effectiveness in certain northern states like Haryana where it is being run in 95% of the districts. This research investigates how nudge theory can be better employed to bring about the required behavioral change.

The B3P campaign includes financial incentives, facilitation of female education, and public awareness initiatives. Regardless of these efforts, the preference for a male child continues to dominate in states like Haryana, and Punjab, and even urban territories like the national capital- Delhi reversing the early success of the initial few years.

Literature indicates that this inclination towards the male child is rooted in a multilateral complex web of historical and socio-economic structures that ensure that sons are viewed as economic assets. A pan- India review reveals significant regional differences and seemingly highlights that the preference for a male child is influenced by inheritance rights and familial considerations, perpetuating the benefits associated with sons.

Government efforts have addressed reducing the perceived burden of the girl child. This primary research through a thorough literature review suggests the startling debilitating role played by technological advancements. Furthermore, it indicates that unless girls are viewed as economic assets alongside boys, the desired mindset will not change through financial incentives that support upbringing alone.

1. Introduction

Gender imbalance is a significant socio-cultural issue in many regions of India. Various

governmental initiatives have been launched to date to address this imbalance. One such initiative is the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (B3P) campaign, which promotes gender equality and aims to reduce the perceived burden of raising a girl child. Utilizing principles of nudge theory¹, the B3P campaign includes financial incentives, facilitation of female education, and public awareness initiatives. However, its effectiveness has been limited, especially in northern states like Haryana², where it operates in 95% of the districts.

Nudge theory was conceptualized by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein in 2008. It posits that indirect suggestions and positive reinforcements can significantly influence behavior and decision-making. This theory has been employed globally to promote public welfare, including health, finance, and social behavior modifications. One prominent example is the UNiTE to End Violence Against Women campaign by the United Nations, which leverages nudge theory by engaging the public through symbolic actions like "Orange Day," educational workshops, and extensive social media campaigns. Orange Day, observed on the 25th of each month, encourages people to wear orange and participate in various activities to raise awareness about violence against women and girls. Such nudges create a continuous reminder of the issue by encouraging both individual and collective actions to combat gender-based violence. The campaign has achieved notable success in raising global awareness and driving policy changes to protect women. This approach is strikingly similar to the B3P campaign of the Indian government, which employs financial incentives, educational programs, and public awareness initiatives like the Sukhanya Scheme to promote gender equality³. Both campaigns effectively utilize nudge theory principles to subtly steer public attitudes and behaviors toward greater gender equality.

When the government launches a campaign as extensive as B3P, one would expect significant results. However, the persistence of the male child preference in states such as Haryana, and Punjab, and even urban territories like Delhi highlights a complex problem. This bias seems deeply rooted in historical and socio-economic structures where the male child is viewed as an economic asset. This diverse issue necessitates a more enhanced exploration of the root causes and the development of more effective strategies.

¹Nudge: Concept, Effectiveness, and Ethics, www.researchgate.net/publication/320969370_Nudge_Concept_Effectiveness_and_Ethics. Accessed 5 July 2024.

²Improvement in Sex Ratio at Birth and Other Achievements, www.researchgate.net/publication/352847522_Beti_Bachao_Beti_Padhao_Scheme_Haryana_Improvement_in_sex_ratio_at_birth_and_other_achievements. Accessed 5 July 2024.

³Mishra, V. (2015). Sukanya Samridhi Yojana. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 50(30), 4–5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24481956>

The B3P campaign is built on the principles of nudge theory. Nudge theory is the subtle steering of people towards beneficial actions without cutting down on their choices. It includes financial ‘nudges’ for families with girl children, schemes to facilitate female education and public awareness initiatives. This theory has been effective in multiple global scenarios, such as the organ donation scheme where countries switched to an ‘opt-out system’, which resulted in significantly higher donor registrations in countries like Spain and Austria⁴. Despite its great triumphs, in the context of B3P in India, the results have been diverse. There has been progress in ameliorating the sex ratio at birth, however, the strongly entrenched cultural proclivity for male children continues to provide significant challenges.

Therefore, this research centers around the twin aspects of why the currently employed nudges that affect gender imbalance are ineffective, as well as the impact of modernisation on tilting the balance for gender equality. The socio-cultural context of Northern India, particularly in states like Haryana and Punjab, is crucial as traditional patriarchal norms and socio-economic factors often undermine well-intentioned campaigns. Understanding them would help create a pivotal analysis of the failure of certain nudges. Moreover, the current strategies might not be resonating with the target audience or addressing the root causes of gender discrimination. Modernisation offers new avenues for promoting gender equality, from digital awareness campaigns to data analytics for targeted interventions, but the integration and impact of certain medical technologies remain underexplored. Given this backdrop, this research seeks to explore the effectiveness of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (B3P) campaign by applying the Nudge Theory, which emphasizes subtle behavioral prompts to influence decisions and actions. This brings us to the question: *"How effective is the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Campaign in addressing gender imbalance in Northern India through the application of Nudge Theory?"*

2. Research Question

How effective is the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Campaign in addressing gender imbalance in Northern India through the application of the Nudge Theory?

⁴ Beraldo S, Karpus J. Nudging to donate organs: do what you like or like what we do? *Med Health Care Philos.* 2021 Sep;24(3):329-340. doi: 10.1007/s11019-021-10007-6. Epub 2021 Mar 17. PMID: 33733389; PMCID: PMC8349348.

3. Literature Review

Article Name	Author, Journal, and Year	Summary
‘Conditions of Girl Child with Reference to Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme’	<p>Sudhakar, G. J.(2018). ‘Conditions of Girl Child with Reference to Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme’ <i>Proceedings of the Indian History Congress</i>, 79, 875–882.</p> <p>https://www.jstor.org/stable/26906327</p>	<p>The article provides a comparative analysis of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (B3P) initiative versus other policies aimed at improving female rights in post- colonial India. It highlights the societal structures and organization impacting women's rights, particularly in Punjab and Haryana, where the policy's effectiveness has been notably limited.</p> <p>A detailed examination of budget utilization under B3P is presented, showcasing both strengths and shortcomings, supported by robust statistical data. The analysis suggests that while B3P has potential, its impact remains constrained by deep-rooted social norms and inadequate implementation in certain regions.</p>
‘The promise of a boy’	<p>Cousins, S. (2017). The promise of a boy: Indian women are being mis-sold drugs to change their babies’ sex. <i>BMJ: British Medical Journal</i>, 356.</p> <p>https://www.jstor.org/stable/26949671</p>	<p>This article delves into the pervasive issue of fetal sex selection in Haryana, focusing on the misconception being promoted that suggests that one can alter a baby’s sex through drugs. It underscores the societal mindset that fuels such practices and the widespread popularity of unethical methods in the region. The article exposes the dangerous implications of this mindset, contributing to a gender imbalance and perpetuating discrimination against female children.</p>

<p>‘Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana’</p>	<p>Mishra, V. (2015). Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana. <i>Economic and Political Weekly</i>, 50(30), 45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24481956</p>	<p>The Sukanya Yojana scheme is presented as a complementary initiative to B3P, offering income tax benefits and the opening of bank accounts in girls' names. The scheme is praised for providing a positive financial nudge without reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. By incentivizing savings for girls, it aims to enhance their financial independence and security, providing tangible benefits that support gender equality.</p>
<p>‘Effectiveness of India’s National Programme to save the girl child’</p>	<p>Gupta, R., Nimesh, R., Singal, G. L., Bhalla, P., & Prinja, S. (2018). Effectiveness of India’s National Programme to Save the girl child: experience of Beti Bachao Beti Pado (B3P) programme from Haryana State. <i>Health Policy and Planning</i>, 33(7), 870–876. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48508796</p>	<p>Focusing specifically on Haryana, this article provides a detailed analysis of gender issues and policies in the state. It sheds light on the unique challenges faced by women in Haryana, including societal norms, economic factors, and policy implementation hurdles. The article serves as a crucial resource for understanding the local context and the specific needs of women in this region.</p>
<p>‘Sex selective abortion, neoliberal patriarchy and structural violence in India’</p>	<p>Purewal, N. (2018). Sex selective abortion, neoliberal patriarchy and structural violence in India. <i>Feminist Review</i>, 119, 20–38. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26776499</p>	<p>This article examines the concept of neoliberal patriarchy, discussing how neoliberal economic policies intersect with patriarchal structures to influence gender relations. It highlights the ways in which economic liberalization can reinforce traditional gender roles and exacerbate inequalities. The analysis provides a critical perspective on the broader socio- economic framework that shapes gender dynamics in contemporary India.</p>

<p>‘Girls Just Want to Learn: Schoolgirls in Haryana remind us that education is more than infrastructure’</p>	<p>Girls Just Want to Learn: Schoolgirls in Haryana remind us that education is more than infrastructure. (2017). <i>Economic and Political Weekly</i>, 52(23), 9–9. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26695571</p>	<p>The article investigates the attitudes and perspectives of girls in Haryana, offering crucial insights into their experiences and aspirations. Understanding their mindset is vital for assessing the impact of policies like B3P on their lives. The findings emphasize the importance of considering girls' voices and experiences in policy formulation and implementation to ensure that initiatives are truly beneficial and empowering.</p>
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4. Methodology

In this study, the keywords identified include "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao," "gender imbalance," "nudge theory," "Northern India," "Haryana," "Punjab," "government campaigns," "gender equality," and "social change." A limited systematic literature review was conducted using JSTOR and Google Scholar, focusing on articles published between 1966 and 2023 to capture the most relevant studies and recent census data. The initial search yielded 120 articles based on keyword relevance, which were then reduced to 15 articles through title and abstract screening. After a detailed review, 9 articles were selected for their significant insights into the effectiveness of the BBBP campaign and the application of the nudge theory. The summary findings from these selected articles are presented in the literature review section. A primary thematic analysis was conducted on the 3 most relevant papers from the selected articles. However, this study is limited by its focus on specific regions, namely Haryana and Punjab, which may not fully represent the diversity of experiences across Northern India. Additionally, the limited systematic literature review may have excluded some relevant studies not available in the selected databases.

5. Thematic analysis

Sex discrimination in India is closely tied to fertility patterns⁵. As families opt for fewer children, the preference for sons remains disproportionately high. This skewed preference exacerbates gender bias, particularly in regions with strong son preference. As Bhat Xavier, 2003⁶ suggests,

⁵ Osters, Emily. "Proximate Sources of Population Sex Imbalance in India." *Demography*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, May 2009, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2831281/.

⁶ Bhat, P.N. Mari, and A.J. Francis Xavier. "Fertility Decline and Gender Bias in Northern India." *IUSSP*, 2003, iussp.org/sites/default/files/Brazil2001/s80/S87_02_Bhat.pdf.

"as fertility falls, the sex discrimination could also spread to lower-order female births if the fall in desired family size is not accompanied by a proportionate fall in desired number of sons" (p. 1). This statement underscores the persistence of gender bias even as families reduce their overall desired family size. The pressure to have male offspring leads to discriminatory practices, including female feticide and infanticide, which distort the natural sex ratio at birth.

This bias seems to be rooted in a multilayered web of socio-cultural but particularly economic issues. These have been gleaned from the literature review and have been discussed in detail below according to specific themes.

The term "gender bias" is used in particular rather than "gender inequality" to emphasize the ingrained prejudices and preferential treatment towards male children. Gender bias reflects the societal norms and values that prioritize one gender over another, leading to discriminatory practices and unequal outcomes. Addressing gender bias involves changing attitudes and perceptions, which is crucial for achieving long-term gender equality.

The natural biological laws of human reproduction dictate a relatively balanced sex ratio at birth⁷. However, societal interference has significantly distorted this natural balance. This distortion is evident in cultures that prioritize male offspring due to various socio-economic reasons. In many societies, particularly in parts of India, the preference for sons over daughters has led to a skewed sex ratio. The natural sex ratio, approximately 105 males to 100 females, has been disrupted in many regions. For example, in India, advanced medical technologies such as prenatal sex determination and selective abortions have exacerbated the preference for male children. The literature suggests that "the natural biological laws of human reproduction of mankind for balancing its natural sex ratio, has been distorted by man-made norms, customs, traditions, religious beliefs and more recently by sophisticated medical technology to result in lower sex ratio in India" (Arokiasamy, Pradhan, 2012). The preference for male children is driven by economic and social factors, including the belief that sons provide financial support and security in old age, carry on the family name, and perform crucial religious duties. The desired family size in India is heavily influenced by cultural and socio-economic factors. In many parts of the country, particularly in the northern regions, families exhibit a strong preference for sons, which significantly impacts their reproductive decisions. Data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-1) reveals that even as the ideal family size decreases, the number of sons that families desire does not decline proportionately.

⁷ "Sex Ratio." *Sex Ratio - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics*, www.sciencedirect.com/topics/biochemistry-genetics-and-molecular-biology/sex-ratio. Accessed 25 June.2024.

Son Preference

Son preference is a significant driver of fertility behavior in India. This preference is deeply rooted in socio-cultural norms and has far-reaching implications for family planning and fertility decisions. Women in northern and central India exhibit a much stronger preference for sons compared to their counterparts in the southern regions. This is evident in the high percentage of women reporting a preference for more sons than daughters. As the literature showcases, "Women in northern and central India have a much stronger preference for sons than their counterparts in southern India" (p. 4). (Bhat, Zavier, 2003) This pronounced son preference is influenced by factors such as education, urban residence, and landholding. Urbanization and higher educational levels are associated with a lower preference for sons, suggesting that socio-economic development can mitigate some aspects of gender bias. However, in regions with high son preference, families often continue to have children until they achieve the desired number of sons, leading to higher fertility rates and larger family sizes. Despite lower morbidity rates among females, the healthcare they receive is often subpar. This paradoxical situation arises from a societal bias that deems female health less important. Studies have shown that female children are less likely to be taken to healthcare facilities when ill and less likely to receive adequate medical attention. There is also a bias in reporting illnesses, where symptoms in female children might be underreported or dismissed. A literature suggests that "apparently lower female morbidity might result from a bias against reporting incidence of sickness among female children although the question asked is exactly same". (Arokiasamy, Pradhan, 2012)⁸

Healthcare disparities are a significant aspect of gender bias. Female children are often neglected in terms of medical care, including vaccinations, leading to higher morbidity and mortality rates. Female children are less likely to receive vaccinations and necessary medical care compared to their male counterparts. This neglect is part of a broader pattern of undervaluing female health needs. This bias can be traced back to the belief that investing in a male child's health is more beneficial to the family's future. The literature discusses this disparity by noting that "the third indicator is considered as gender disparity (female/male ratio) in terms of the possession of the vaccination card" (Arokiasamy, Pradhan, 2012). Due to a lack of sanitary care or proper toilets, issues which would not affect the male gender, the rate of dropouts from school for females is significantly higher⁹. This could be an additional cause.

⁸ Arokiasamy, P., and Jalandhar Pradhan. "Gender Bias Against Female Children in India: Regional Differences and Their Implications for MDGs." *Population Association of America*, 2003, [paa2006.populationassociation.org/papers/60960#:~:text=Gender%20inequalities%20prevail%20in%20work,children%20\(Arokiasamy%2C%202003\)](http://paa2006.populationassociation.org/papers/60960#:~:text=Gender%20inequalities%20prevail%20in%20work,children%20(Arokiasamy%2C%202003))

⁹Gender Differences Related to Wash in Schools and Educational Efficiency,

Cultural bias

This phenomenon discussed above is more pronounced in northern and central India, where 50 to 64 percent of women report a preference for more sons than daughters¹⁰. The persistence of this preference is reflective of the socio-cultural importance placed on male offspring, who are often viewed as bearers of the family name and primary breadwinners. This cultural bias results in larger family sizes in the quest for male children, perpetuating a cycle of high fertility and gender bias. As one moves southward, this preference diminishes, with states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala showing less than 20 percent of women expressing a similar bias. (Bhat, Zavier, 2003). "Traditional biases favoring sons are extremely resilient, and economic incentives may not be sufficient to improve the survival of girls when discrimination is propagated in economically prosperous households". (Mukherjee, 2013¹¹). Cultural biases are so deeply rooted that even economic prosperity does not necessarily lead to better survival rates for girls. The resilience of these traditional biases suggests that addressing gender discrimination requires more than just economic improvements; it necessitates a fundamental shift in cultural attitudes.

Further, cultural biases significantly affect women's participation in paid work, dowry practices, and property rights. Literature highlights how these biases are deeply rooted in the social fabric, affecting women's economic and social standing. "The economic disenfranchisement of women through denial or restriction of both the right to property and paid work participation is strongest in areas of the Hindu heartland of the country". (Mukherjee, 2013). The evidence indicates that cultural biases result in women being economically disenfranchised, particularly in regions where traditional practices are more rigid. Women are often denied property rights and participation in paid work, which limits their economic independence and reinforces their dependence on male family members. Moreover, dowry has evolved into a coercive payment system despite modernization, further reinforcing the economic burden associated with daughters. "Instead of waning with modernization and rising women's employment, contemporary reports indicate the metamorphosis of dowry into a compulsory coercive payment" (Mukherjee, 2013). This statement reveals that modernization has not eradicated the practice of dowry. Instead, dowry has adapted to modern contexts and remains a significant

www.researchgate.net/publication/325842852_Gender_differences_related_to_WASH_in_schools_and_educational_efficiency. Accessed 5 June 2024.

¹⁰ Evans, Jonathan. "How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society." Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center, 2 Mar. 2022, www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/03/02/how-indians-view-gender-roles-in-families-and-society/#:~:text=These%20norms%20are%20part%20of,with%20their%20parents%20and%20provide.

¹¹ Mukherjee, S. S. (2013). Women's Empowerment and Gender Bias in the Birth and Survival of Girls in Urban India. *Feminist Economics*, 19(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2012.752312>

financial burden on families with daughters. The persistence of dowry as a coercive payment system underscores the continuing economic disadvantages that women face.

Cultural values and customs that have developed over centuries contribute significantly to gender bias. These entrenched practices often favor males, reinforcing discrimination against females. In many traditional societies, patriarchal norms dictate that males are the primary heirs and breadwinners. This preference is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric and affects various aspects of life, from property inheritance to family lineage. Sons are often preferred over daughters for religious rituals and ceremonies, which reinforces their perceived value. The literature suggests that "sons are preferred over daughters for a number of economic, social and religious reasons, including financial support, old age security, property inheritance, dowry, family lineage, prestige and power, birth and death rituals and beliefs about religious duties and salvation".

The deep-rooted cultural norms continue to perpetuate discrimination against girls. This persistence is seen even in modern and urban settings. "Women's birth and survival disadvantage remains a stubbornly persistent feature of Indian demography, and girls continue to be absent from successive census counts". (Mukherjee, 2013) This illustrates that despite changes in other areas, the demographic disadvantage for girls persists. The continued absence of girls from successive census counts indicates that gender bias remains deeply entrenched, even in areas where one might expect progress. The persistence of traditional cultural norms and the evolving nature of dowry in a modern context illustrates how modernization can sometimes reinforce rather than reduce gender biases. "Recent research in the context of South Korea shows urbanization and the associated improvements in women's education and paid work participation to have reduced prenatal gender bias, leading to similar predictions for India". (Mukherjee, 2013). This evidence suggests that urbanization and increased opportunities for women can reduce gender bias, but this has not necessarily been the case in India. The persistence of traditional cultural norms, combined with the evolution of dowry practices, indicates that modernization alone is not sufficient to overcome deep-seated gender biases.

Economic and Technological Development

In this context of current research, modernization is defined as the economic and technological advancements in healthcare, including prenatal sex determination, highly accurate ultrasounds, and easier access to such technology. Contrary to expectations, modernization has not necessarily led to reduced gender bias. Instead, there is evidence suggesting a negative relationship between modernization and women's status. To be specific, the pressures of modern economic systems can worsen existing biases. Modernization, which was mainly assumed to dilute patriarchal influence, improve feminist influence, and aid economic development has now

resulted in a negative impact on women's status (Mukherjee, 2013). This directly challenges the status quo assumption that modernization inherently leads to gender equality. Instead, modernization can sometimes reinstate such inequality in the form of patriarchal norms which manifests into son preference, by providing tools for sex-selective practices that are misused to favor male offspring.

The misuse of medical technology for sex determination and consequential selective abortion has emerged as a critical issue in regions with a strong preference for sons. The increasing trend of female feticide suggests a means to achieve the 'ideal' family composition, indicating the reliance on medical technologies for sex determination. Bhat and Zavier (2003) highlight this trend, stating, "The increasing trend of female feticide as a means to achieve the desired family composition indicates a reliance on medical technologies for sex determination and selective abortion" (p. 5). The exploitation of prenatal sex determination technologies for selective abortions has worsened juvenile sex ratios in regions with high son preference, reflecting the deep-seated gender bias and has severe implications for the sex ratio at birth. The preference for sons has led to unfavorable outcomes, including a decline in the female population and skewed juvenile sex ratios.

Driven by the desire to ensure the birth of male offspring, sex-selective abortion can be seen as a rising trend. This practice is particularly prevalent in regions with a bias towards the male gender, where technological advancements in prenatal sex determination are misused for selective abortions. Bhat and Zavier (2003) suggest, "The misuse of prenatal sex determination technologies for selective abortions has intensified the gender bias and worsened the juvenile sex ratios in regions with a high preference for sons" (p. 5). The trend underscores the urgent need for regulatory measures to prevent the misuse of medical technologies for gender selection. Addressing this issue requires a multifarious approach, including promoting gender equality, improving educational opportunities, and enforcing stricter regulations on the use of prenatal sex determination technologies.

Even though there has been implementation of legal measures such as bans which have had their associated implications, various methods of circumventing these laws persist. These include the operation of illegal clinics, the crossing of domestic and international borders to seek unauthorized medical services, the proliferation of unqualified medical practitioners (commonly referred to as quacks), the use of open fields for unregulated procedures, and the misuse of over-the-counter (OTC) medications.

Educational discontinuation is a major issue, with girls often being pulled out of school during or after primary education. This interruption severely hampers their future opportunities and perpetuates the cycle of gender inequality. Many families prioritize educating sons over

daughters due to limited resources. Girls are often expected to contribute to household chores or work to support the family financially. Concerns about safety and societal norms also play a role. Parents may feel that it is unsafe for girls to travel to school or believe that a girl's primary role is within the home. Arokiasamy and Pradhan (2012) mention that "while the gap in primary enrollment is a first stage, girls not being sent to school, discontinuation of girls at middle and secondary levels is the second stage of discrimination of girls, which is one of the important pathways of gender bias against female children."

Lack of Success in Survival Despite Improvements in Technology

Improvements in women's education and employment opportunities have not translated into better survival rates for girls. Instead, socio-economic and cultural factors continue to favor sons, leading to persistent gender biases." Despite improvements in women's work opportunities and educational achievements, women's survival disadvantage is a demographic reality of urban India". (Mukherjee, 2013). Increased opportunities for women in education and employment have not resulted in better survival rates for girls. The expectation would be that with better opportunities, the value of girls would increase, thereby improving their chances of survival. However, deep-rooted cultural biases that prioritize sons over daughters continue to prevail, leading to a demographic disadvantage for girls. The survival disadvantage of girls in urban India persists due to a combination of traditional gender roles, dowry practices, and limited economic opportunities for women. The traditional role of men as breadwinners may make sons a more desirable 'investment' with regard to parental economic concerns regarding the future". (Mukherjee, 2013) explains that traditional gender roles still view men as primary earners and future economic supporters of the family. As a result, sons are seen as more valuable investments compared to daughters, reinforcing the survival disadvantage for girls even in urban settings where educational and work opportunities for women have improved.

6. Discussion

This research focuses on two critical problem statements: the role of technology in perpetuating gender imbalance and how to shift perceptions to view girls as assets for families. Technological advancements, such as prenatal sex determination, have played a debilitating role in reinforcing gender biases, often exacerbating the preference for male children. Additionally, the current efforts have primarily targeted reducing the perceived burden of the girl child without addressing the fundamental need to reframe girls as economic assets.

Despite these well-intentioned efforts, the campaign has encountered significant challenges in achieving its objectives. The cultural and socio-economic landscape of northern India presents deep-rooted biases and systemic barriers that simple nudges cannot easily dismantle. The reasons

for the campaign's limited effectiveness can be explored through the inadequacy and inappropriateness of the nudges employed.

The financial incentives, although theoretically sound, have proven insufficient to address the entrenched cultural and socio-economic biases that favor male children. The modest financial incentives offered by the B3P campaign rarely alter the long-standing preference for sons, deeply embedded in cultural traditions, inheritance rights, and economic considerations where sons are viewed as future providers and caretakers.

The educational programs, while increasing access to education, do not necessarily translate into significant changes in societal attitudes. Although more girls are attending school, this has not led to a corresponding decrease in gender discrimination, as the societal status of women remains relatively unchanged. This is because the expectation of girls still remains to work from home. The campaign does not effectively challenge the cultural biases that devalue female children, leading to girls being seen as a burden rather than valuable members of society.

One of the critical shortcomings of the B3P campaign is its inability to translate educational and employment improvements into a reduction in gender discrimination. While the campaign has successfully increased educational opportunities for girls and improved their prospects for future employment, these achievements have not significantly reduced gender discrimination. Persistent cultural norms and socio-economic structures continue to undervalue women, regardless of their educational or professional achievements. Educational and employment opportunities alone cannot dismantle deeply ingrained biases and discriminatory practices. The campaign needs to go beyond providing opportunities and address the underlying cultural attitudes that devalue women, changing the narrative around their status and roles in society by highlighting their contributions and capabilities.

While government improvements are helping society, the perception that once considered women a cost and men an asset has just changed to considering women neither a cost or a benefit, while men remain benefits. Because of this phenomenon, there is no change in societal perceptions and thus the problem continues. One government campaign that aided this was the 'Laadli Behna' Scheme in 2008 by the Madhya Pradesh Government¹². It aimed to address gender inequality and promote the welfare of girl children. This initiative provides financial assistance to families upon the birth of a girl, helping cover the expenses related to her upbringing and education. To encourage continued education, the scheme includes scholarships and financial incentives for families ensuring their daughters attend school regularly, thus

¹² "Department of Women and Child Development Government of NCT of Delhi." *Department of Women and Child Development*, wcd.delhi.gov.in/wcd/delhi-ladli-schemes-2008. Accessed 5 July 2024.

reducing dropout rates and promoting higher education among girls. Additionally, the programme emphasizes health and nutrition by providing regular health check-ups and medical nutritional supplements. Accompanied by extensive awareness campaigns to influence societal behaviors and promote gender equality, the 'Laadli Behna Scheme' represents a significant effort to empower girls and improve their socio-economic status.

Technological advancements, as a part of modernisation, have had an adverse impact on the gender bias issue. The availability of medical technology that facilitates prenatal sex determination has resulted in an increase in sex-selective abortions, worsening the problem the B3P campaign seeks to address. Instead of promoting development, this advancement has been further misused, contributing to a decline in the female population. This highlights the need for stricter regulations and better awareness about the ethical implications of such practices; it also highlights the need for more effective nudges to influence the mindset of the people and the root of the problem itself.

7. Conclusion

The current societal perception of women needs to evolve from viewing them as equals to recognizing them as valuable assets. Boys are still perceived as having an additional advantage, often seen as future breadwinners and caretakers, which keeps the scale tipped in their favor. While efforts to equalize the status of women with men are necessary, they are not sufficient. To address this, nudges should aim to not only promote gender equality but also elevate the status of women by emphasizing their unique contributions and the specific advantages they bring to families and society.

To bring about meaningful change in the status of women, nudges need to focus on elevating their perceived value beyond equality to demonstrate their significant contributions to society. This involves not only promoting gender equality but also emphasizing the economic and social benefits that women bring to families and communities. For example, campaigns could showcase successful women in various fields, highlighting their achievements and the positive impact they have on society. Promoting women's participation in community decision-making processes can also help demonstrate their capabilities and leadership potential, further elevating their status.

In conclusion, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign, although rooted in the principles of nudge theory, has faced significant challenges in addressing gender imbalance in northern India. The campaign's financial incentives, educational programs, and awareness efforts, while beneficial, have proven inadequate in dismantling the deeply rooted cultural and socio-economic biases that favor male children. For the campaign to achieve its goals, it must incorporate more specific nudges that address the deep-seated preference for male children and elevate the status of women

in society. This involves not only promoting gender equality but also highlighting the economic and social contributions of women, demonstrating their value as significant contributors to families and communities. Integrating technological advancements can play a crucial role in changing perceptions and showcasing the capabilities of women. A new perspective should be highlighted which goes beyond merely addressing gender imbalance to actively creating an environment where women are seen as indispensable assets. It would require a shift in the cultural narrative of Northern India itself, emphasizing the strengths and potential of women, fostering an inclusive society that values every individual equally, and consequently presenting them as assets. Only through such comprehensive and multi-faceted approaches can the campaign hope to achieve its objectives and foster a society where women are truly valued as indispensable assets. By leveraging technology, promoting women's achievements, and challenging discriminatory norms, the B3P campaign can pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

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