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Delhi female births rise hailed

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A girl in Delhi (File photo)

There is a cultural preference for male children in India

India's capital, Delhi, recorded more female than male births during 2008, for the first time in many decades.

Latest government data shows for every 1,000 males, 1,004 girls were born in Delhi in 2008.

One of the main reasons for the earlier skewed male-female ratios was seen to be the greater number of abortions of female foetuses.

The news has been hailed as a gender revolution in a country that has been struggling to get the balance right.

Delhi is now second only to the southern state of Kerala, which has the highest number of female births.

Skewed sex ratios

Now activists hope that those days have been consigned to history.

They say that it is the news that they have been waiting for.



Haryana boy

Boys have traditionally been seen as superior to girls

Although the government made scanning pregnant mothers to determine the sex of foetuses illegal, the practice continued.

Dr Dharm Prakash of the Indian Medical Association, which ran a campaign against aborting girl foetuses, welcomed the report.

"The community has responded to our request that girls should be born," he said.

His organisation started a "Say No To Sex Selective Abortions" campaign and urged doctors to refrain from doing so.

"Our own colleagues have stopped especially after the implementation of the law against it," Dr Prakash said.

Officials also put the turnaround down to a number of schemes started by the Delhi government, including financial incentives for parents to register the births of female children.

Women's groups say more time is needed to analyse the data to know if it really indicates a favourable trend towards girls.

At the last count in 2001 the figure for females stood at 933 per 1,000 males.

Experts say achieving a normal sex ratio remains an uphill task but the latest figures show that it is not impossible.

The real challenge, they say, is changing the attitude towards daughters given the preference for boys in Indian society.