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# Order of birth decides survival of 3rd-borns: Study

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NEW DELHI: Focused on the third child, a new study shows that boys were less likely than girls to die in infancy if born subsequent to two older sisters. This converts into a 64% greater risk for infant mortality for girls relative to boys in this third-order birth group.

The study highlights that just concentrating on sex ratio at birth is not the answer. The third child – particularly daughters need support to survive the odds.

The research paper published in The Lancet's "EClinicalMedicine" journal underlined the link between infant mortality and birth order of siblings and the role of son preference in influencing the survival of the girl child, particularly if she is the third daughter after two older sisters.

Data shows that in India "the sex composition of older siblings differentially affects risk for infant mortality by sex, with boys born after two sisters and no brothers having lower odds of dying in infancy relative to both boys born after an older brother and girls born after two sisters and no brothers."

The statistics also show that sex of the third born child with two older brothers or with one older brother and one older sister also makes the third born male vulnerable. "While having two living older sisters and no living older brothers was significantly protective for male infants, for female infants, there was no significant association between being of second or higher birth order and infant mortality," the analysis states.

The findings based on a retrospective cross sectional study of infant mortality in India analyses data from National Family Health Surveys 1 - 4 from 1992 to 2016 (unweighted number: 338,504 for children aged 1-5). "The fact that higher birth order

males with older sisters have greater protection against infant mortality is a finding that has persisted for over 25 years," it is highlighted.

The analysis is a gender data research collaboration between the University of California San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health (GEH, UCSD) and the International Institute on Population Sciences, Mumbai (IIPS).

This lower mortality risk for the third male child may be attributable to greater nutritional and health care investments in these male children. Correspondingly, the sex ratio of IMR for third order infants with two older sisters is 1.4, indicating a 40% higher IMR for females relative to males in this group.