



Are sons and daughters substitutable?

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Australian families have a preference for a son and a daughter. Previous studies of sex preference indicate that sex composition of existing children is an important factor in parity progression. While the sex of the first born in Australia has no influence on the decision of mothers to have a second child, mothers with two children of the same sex are 25 per cent more likely to have a third child than are mothers with a boy and a girl. Past research suggests that as gender roles in society become less distinct there is a high level of 'substitutability' of the sexes, resulting in declining preference for both sons and daughters. Using data from in-depth interviews with mothers and fathers this paper explores the perceived attributes of sons and daughters and their relative advantages and disadvantages for parents. Counter arguments to 'substitutability' are investigated. If sons and daughters are not substitutable, what then do they provide that is different?