

Chapter 3 Summary: So many missing girls: abortion and sex selection

The rise of prenatal testing to determine sex, along with pre-existing social beliefs, has allowed for sex-selective abortion to become widespread across the globe. It has recently been determined that more than 160 million girls are "missing", mainly in Asia. This circumstance is due in large part to "gendercide" via sex-selective abortion, the systematic killing of females before birth. Sex-selective abortion has contributed to gender imbalance as the sex ratio at birth (SRB), which is the number of male births for every 100 female births, has been skewed from the normal range of 103 to 107 up to 160 and 200 in some regions.¹ The explanation for this phenomenon is straightforward: with the technological advancements of ultrasound and amniocentesis came the possibility of aborting the unborn according to their sex. As UNICEF explains, "Where there is a clear economic or cultural preference for sons, the misuse of these techniques can facilitate female foeticide."²

Female foeticide is especially prevalent in China and India, where male children are favoured due to sociocultural biases and/or the financial burden of having a female child. According to China's 2010 census, the country's SRB was 118, soaring as high as 135 in some rural areas, resulting in 32 million more males than females under the age of twenty.³ In India, there are about 7.1 million fewer girls than boys aged six and under.⁴ Sex-selection has begun to spread to the West, especially Canada.⁵

The ethical and social impact of sex-selective abortion is beginning to manifest, as girls are now being abducted and sold for marriage in remote rural regions.⁶ The loss of over 160 million girls is not only a direct, sexist attack on the female half of the human race, but has left the remaining women more vulnerable as men begin to confront the marriage squeeze.

¹ Das Gupta M, Chung W, Shuzhuo L. Evidence for an incipient decline in numbers of missing girls in China and India. *Population and Development Review*; 35(2): p. 412.

² UNICEF. *State of the world's children 2007: women and children: the double dividend of gender equality*. New York: UNICEF House, 2006. Online edition: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/report/report.php>.

³ Zhou C, Wang XL, Zhou XD and Hesketh T. Son preference and sex-selective abortion in China: informing policy options. *International Journal of Public Health* 2012; 57(3): pp. 459-65. Zhu WX, Li L, Hesketh T. China's excess males, sex selective abortion, and one child policy: analysis of data from 2005 national intercensus survey. *BMJ* 2009 April; 338(b1211): p. 1.

⁴ Sahni M et al. Missing girls in India: infanticide, feticide and made-to-order pregnancies? Insights from hospital-based sex-ratio-at-birth over the last century. *PLoS ONE* 2008; 3(5): p. 3.

⁵ Vogel L. Sex selection migrates to Canada. *CMAJ* 2012; 184(3): p. e163.

⁶ Milliez JM. Sex selection for non-medical purposes. *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* 2007; 14(S1): pp. 109-13.