

# Female Infanticide

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For Mr Toole  
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## Preface

We detest daughters! We hate them so much that we kill them before birth. And we kill them after birth! We kill them as they take their first breath. We kill them while they are suckling infants. We kill them as they learn to walk. We kill them as they learn to talk and say 'mama' and 'baba.' We kill them as they learn to smile and trust, and love, and ask for their favorite foods – mangoes or sweets. We kill them as they learn to play with their friends, and listen to stories about fairies, princesses, and far away dreams. We kill them because we hate them. We kill our daughters in the millions. (genderbytes.wordpress.com, 2015)

Throughout all periods of history, there exists a major repetition. Inequality in all different forms has repeatedly been prevalent as a dominant issue and still exists in the 21st century. In our current global society, one of the biggest threats that remains is gender inequality. This does not refer to men and women being completely equal in all aspects, which biologically both genders are not, but rather respecting that each possess the same mental capabilities that need to be recognized, respected, and honoured equally. Men and Women depend strongly on each other for their strengths and make up for each other's weaknesses, and could not exist without the other. The harmony that should exist between man and woman but does not, has created an unnatural balance between the genders of the human race and is the result of a long history of prejudice against women.

Female infanticide is a subcategory of genocide, matching the definition: "the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular nation or ethnic group" (oxforddictionaries.com, 2015). Female infanticide is the intentional killing of infant girls, which

over time has accumulated to be a group of people that surpasses the appropriate use of the word *large*. Arguably, it could be considered the most barbarous and devastating manifestation of the discrimination against females. A characteristic specific to infanticide is the reality that the massacre is not committed altogether where it could easily be recognized and condemned, but instead each instance is usually a singular event which together accumulate to form a mass genocide. This brutal crime often passes without recognition because it is performed against a victim without a voice, and has been widely accepted into society as being both ordinary and necessary.

Monetary and cultural reasons are just a few of the causes behind female infanticide, as many countries still do not have equal rights between men and women. In certain cultures and countries, females are looked down upon and are shameful for mothers to bear. Not being able to produce money for their families, women and girls often stay home to do the cooking and cleaning, and take care of children. Girls are sometimes not even allowed to go to school, making them just another mouth to feed. Daughters are considered to be financial burdens more than sons are because in certain places a very expensive dowry requires to be paid at their weddings by the family of the bride, which often cannot be afforded. Leaving their family to live with their new husband and his family, daughters leave their parents with nobody to look after them in their old age. Another reason why infanticide occurs is because smaller family sizes are sometimes imposed, or forced. This eliminates the multiple chances a family would have had to produce a male child. Given only one chance in some cases (such as the one-child policy imposed in China), families are under pressure for a baby boy as their first and only child.

In 1990, Amartya Sen, an Indian economist and Nobel Prize winner, estimated 100 million girls were missing from Asia. (Sen, 1990) However, in 2007 Christophe Z. Guilmoto

presented a paper at the Fourth Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights that stated he had calculated "If its [Asia's] overall sex ration was the same as observed elsewhere in the world, in 2005 Asia's population would have comprised of about 163 million more women than reported." (Guilmoto, 2007)

163 million: more than the number of deaths in World War I and World War II combined; a number that exceeds the death toll in all of the genocides of the 20th century, and surpasses the amount of people eliminated by the AIDS epidemic or the influenza pandemic of 1918. (Klasen and Wink, 2002). That number is strictly in Asia alone. Including the rest of the world, it would be logical to assume that the number is much higher than that.

The world's two countries which have the highest population also have the greatest number of missing women. There are 66 million missing in China and 43 million missing in India. (Guilmoto, 2012, p. 47) Although the media does not report heavily on the issue of female infanticide, the information they do cover is almost strictly concentrated in India and China, and this is because the issue is most commonly known to occur in these regions. It creates an illusion that the issue is not global, but instead exclusively a national issue for the two countries. This general misconception is easily deconstructed by simply observing sex ratios in other Asian, European and North American countries and communities where female infanticide and sex selection is clearly prevalent.

The normal biological sex ratio is approximately 105 boys born for every 100 girls (Guilmoto, 2012) This ratio usually ends up evening out in the first few years of life, as overall worldwide boys tend to die more frequently from natural causes during their lifetime. This same information could also be represented as a percentage, where 51% of all births should be of the

male gender. As life progresses, women have a greater endurance and tend to outlive males. Therefore, with old age the ratio tips in favour of females. However, in China, baby girls under the age of five experience 42% higher mortality compared to boys in the same age group. (Guilmoto, 2009, p. 528) The rate in Pakistan is 66% more than boys, and in India the rate is 40%. (Hudson & Boer, 2004, p. 55) This completely unbalances the normal ratio and tips it in favour of the males.

In these countries where women are clearly not wanted, it is much less likely for there to be a celebration at the birth of a daughter. Instead, it is common for apologies to be given for their misfortune. If the baby girls are kept, they are destined to live a life of great discrimination and a huge risk of neglect. In India, the disappointment in the gender of a child is sometimes not even hidden, and it is possible for them to be named Venda (meaning: don't want) or Poddum Pennu (meaning: enough of daughters) (Sabu George, n.d.)

Because of the laws and biases that exist preventing females to essentially be of any economic use, the growth of prenatal technology and abortion, and the pressure to have a smaller family size, the amount of females that no longer exist is alarming. This lack of females poses a huge risk to the lives of the females that do exist, living in a world where there are not enough women to provide wives for all of the men. Sex trafficking and rape is highly linked to the gender imbalances that occur. This is not just a concern for girls in these countries, but even from other countries worldwide where girls now have a higher chance of being kidnapped, raped, and sold into the sex trade.

Until gender equality exists, female infanticide will continue to occur. The only solution is to eliminate the discrimination and prejudice towards females, misogyny, and bigotry that still

continues in a never-ending circle. Combined, these concepts continue to fabricate a world where men do not want females to exist, and a world where females do not want to exist either.

## Summary of Research Methods

This paper includes a thorough analysis of the issues surrounding female infanticide in the developing world and provides information on the history and future of this major global concern. Because it has occurred for decades, the information comes from both historical and contemporary sources. The majority of the content written is based on knowledge obtained from sources, including scholarly books, documentaries, news articles, and reliable internet websites. The information discovered was checked with multiple different sources to confirm its validity. Some of the reputable organizations that were used as sources for information include UNICEF, BBC News, and Because I Am a Girl. Books from authors, including Nobel Memorial Prize winner Amartya Sen, have been extensively examined and used as valuable resources as well.

Three case studies have been included to provide insight on female infanticide worldwide, specifically in China, India, and Pakistan. The articles examined from these countries provide an in-depth look into the issue and how it pertains to life in their respective places. Ensuring an unbiased report on each of the cases was crucial, as there are many very strong religious and cultural beliefs that lead people to provide opinionated information. These religious and cultural beliefs are explored in the paper as well, to provide insight. It was ensured that all perspectives were represented and it is therefore up to the reader to form their own opinion on the facts that have been included.

## Background

As previously stated, a common mistaken belief of many is that female infanticide only occurs in India and China. The fact that it has a long history in these two countries is true, but it also is widespread in many others. In the past decade, statistics have been released to show that in 2010, the birth ratio in China was 117.8 boys for every 100 girls, and in India the average was 110.5 for every 100. In certain provinces it was even higher, with 128.7 : 100 in the Anhui Province and 120.3 : 100 in the Punjab State. This gender imbalance was alarming, and received a large reaction from the media. Despite many beliefs, the European data was also unbalanced with Albania having a 111.7 : 100 ratio. Other countries that fell into the category of having a sex ratio unnaturally favourable to men were West Asia 's Azerbaijan at 116.5 : 100, and Vietnam's 111.2 : 100. (Guilmoto, p. 18) More recently, the leaders in the 2015 gender imbalance are:

Vietnam 0-14 years: 1.11 male(s)/female

India 0-14 years: 1.13 male(s)/female

Armenia 0-14 years: 1.15 male(s)/female

China 0-14 years: 1.16 male(s)/female

and finally the current leader in imbalanced sex ratio's is a European Country: Liechtenstein. The ratio at birth in this country is an astonishing 126 male(s) for every 100 females. (cia.gov, 2015) This recent unexpected data is proof that infanticide is clearly not a problem unique to only Asia, and sex determination and abortion can be modern tools to be manipulated for gender discrimination on a global scale.

Historically in many cultures it has been permitted by the government to kill female infants or other unwanted children. It has even been encouraged in certain societies, or ignored by the persons in power. There have been studies showing it occurred among Arabian tribes, among the Yanomani in Brazil, and in ancient Rome. It has also been proven to have been a common occurrence among the Inuit of Canada and Northern Alaska. (Milner, 2000) Female Infanticide can be followed all the way back to 200 B.C., when various studies have reported the desire for male children was quite obvious. In Delphi during this time, there was a sex ratio of 28 daughters to every 118 sons. Of every 60000 families living there, only 1% had two daughters. (Rummel, 1994) This can only be explained with female infanticide, where girls must have been killed as infants or at a young age.

Some of the methods that have been used to kill infants throughout history include drowning, suffocation and starvation. In medieval England, laying across a child and hence crushing or suffocating it was common. (Milner, 2000) Placing an infant in a basket and placing them outside in the elements to freeze to death was also common. Also, another frequent practice was to bury a female child alive by placing her in an earthen pitcher, with cane sugar in her mouth and cotton in her hands. (sisindia.net, n.d.) Other methods include wrapping her too tightly in a quilt, poisoning her, strangling her, or breaking her spinal cord by snapping it.

Two of the largest factors that contribute to the history of female infanticide are poverty and misogynist traditions. More specifically, the extermination of baby girls is a product of four forces: the ancient preference for sons, poverty, a modern desire for smaller families, and ultrasound scanning and other technologies that identify the sex of a fetus.

In India, there is an ancient preference for sons that still exists today because of the ancient laws and misogynistic ideals that also still exist. The issue has been ongoing for thousands of years but “after abortion was legalized in India in 1971, and technologies to diagnose the sex of the fetus became widely available, the practice of sex-selective abortions became widespread,” (Deolalikar 2011) The practice of female infanticide took on a new spin and women started getting rid of their baby girls before they were even born. The Indian law stated that:

Pregnancies not exceeding 12 weeks may be terminated based on a single opinion formed in good faith. In case of pregnancies exceeding 12 weeks but less than 20 weeks, termination needs opinion of two doctors . Mifepristone (RU 486) & Misoprostol are approved for use up to 63 days gestation. (m.icma.md, 2015)

Because the gender of a baby can only be determined after 18-20 weeks, and abortion was/is illegal after 20, two doctors would need to give approval for the abortion or it would not be formally permitted. If it was found impermissible, illegal abortions were and are still also quite common. The government realized the severity of the imbalance that was being created because of the gender determining equipment and by 1994 they had passed the PNDT Act (Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostics Techniques Act) which illegalized sex determination tests. The act prohibited any diagnostic tools to be used towards discovering the gender of an unborn child, but that did not stop under the table money and bribes towards doctors.

Clinics providing for pre-natal diagnosis and sex determination flourish in connivance of local administration, police and other concerned authority only because those who are entrusted with the duty of taking action choose to look the other way. This is a harsh

social and national reality and the court of law cannot shut its eyes to the same, Additional Sessions Judge Kamini Lau said. (dnaindia.com, n.d.)

The reality is that many Indian societies are built upon misogynist tradition, and unless the views of the public are changed, the laws will do very little to prevent the existence of the gendercide.

The history behind female infanticide in China spans approximately 2000 years. Christian missionaries began to arrive in the late sixteenth century, and because of the extreme poverty newborns were documented to have been seen thrown into rivers or onto garbage piles.

(Mungello, 2009) Later on in nineteenth century China, infanticide was even more widespread.

Drowning was the most common method used to kill children during this time period.

(Mungello, 2008) The normality of the practice stayed relatively the same for years before the 1980's, when the "one-child policy" was introduced by the Chinese government in 1979. The law was implemented to control the rapidly increasing population at the time. It had devastating effects on the sex ratio, and in 2012 the government of China estimated there to be 40 million more males than females. (cia.gov, 2013)

Not only does the deep history lie within China and India, but in 2011 a report was released by CNN decrypting the severity of female infanticide in Pakistan. It detailed that nine out of every 10 newborns thrown into the dumps of Karachi are female. The Edhi Foundation recorded 1,200 infants dumped in 2010, which was a rise of 200 since 2009 (Reza, 2011).

Sex ratio at birth has recently emerged as an indicator of certain kinds of sex discrimination in some countries. For instance, high sex ratios at birth in some Asian countries are now attributed to sex-selective abortion and infanticide due to a strong

preference for sons. This will affect future marriage patterns and fertility patterns. Eventually, it could cause unrest among young adult males who are unable to find partners. (cia.gov, 2015)

The extreme occurrence of female infanticide over time has created an overpopulation to men in comparison with women and an epidemic of men who cannot find wives. These lonely men are known as "bare branches", and in China alone they exist in numbers that are as high as the total population of young men in America. Presently that number is as high as 40 million men under 20. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences estimates that in China, there are 40 million more men than women in that same age group. (British Medical Journal, 2009) It is estimated that India will have another 30 million men unable to marry. (Hudson & Boer, 2004, p. 124, 181.)

Studies suggest that the number of single men trying to marry after 2030 might "exceed the corresponding number of unmarried women by 50-60% in both countries [India and China] for several decades." Chinese men were already having trouble finding brides in 2005, when it was found that 88% of all single Chinese citizens between 35 and 39 were of the male gender. In this same age group, 99% of females were already married. (Tucker, 2005, p. 539-547) In Vietnam, on May 2009, Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam Nguyen Thien Nhan warned that the gender imbalance could lead to about 3 million men having difficulty in finding wives by 2030. (bbc.com, 2015)

This imbalance would clearly lead to a rapid rise in bachelorhood in some countries, bringing with it an increase of crime related activities, violence, rape, and sex-trafficking. (Guilmoto, p. 11) As large-scale female infanticide has occurred in the past in Asia, the surplus of single men were shown to have a strong relationship with violence and crime. In India and

China, these patterns are re-emerging with the increase in unbalanced sex ratios. Crime related to violence and rape can be traced back to unmarried young men and the levels are most alarming in regions where gender imbalance is most noticeable. (Hudson & Boer, 2004, p. 203, 234-241) The crime rates are yet just another consequence of the gender imbalance.

It may be logical for one to think that women's status and power increases as their population decreases to dangerously low levels, but instead the scarceness of the female gender has avoided this outcome. Instead, men decide to marry younger brides. Sometimes even before girls have reached puberty, they are married off to much older men. Therefore these girls have no time for education if it is even legal for them to attend, and are completely dependent on their husbands. (Hudson & Boer, 2004, p. 204-205)

These young girls who are married off are often pressured into child birth as soon as their bodies are ready, by their husband and their in-laws. This results in very high rates of injury and maternal death. (Hudson & Boer, 2004, p. 204-205) A third of women aged 20-24 years old were married as child brides in the developing world. (unicef.org, 2015) Today, the amount of women still alive who were married as children works out to be more than 700 million, four times the population of the US. More than 1 for every 3 were married before the age of 15. (unicef.org, 2015)

Another solution for the bachelors is to turn to other provinces or countries for their wives. Although, this is not as innocent as what it may seem, and many husbands end up turning to the sex trafficking industry and literally buying their wives. Sometimes the two are seen together, where child brides are in fact purchased illegally. 36% of South Korean men in rural

areas were reportedly married to foreign brides in 2005. (Lee, 2007, p. 9) In China, this is also a problem:

Since 1990, say official Chinese figures, 64,000 women -- 8,000 a year on average -- have been rescued by authorities from forced 'marriages'. The number who have not been saved can only be guessed at. ... The thirst for women is so acute that the slave trader gangs are even reaching outside China to find merchandise. There are regular reports of women being abducted in such places as northern Vietnam to feed the demand in China. (Manthorpe, 1999)

The sex industry effects the entire female population, and therefore female infanticide indirectly effects them as well. The safety of women in the surrounding countries and safety of all women around the world is threatened by this practice:

China is a destination country for women and children who are trafficked from neighboring countries including Burma, Vietnam, Laos, Mongolia, Russia, and North Korea, and from locations as far as Romania and Zimbabwe for sexual and labor exploitation. (2011 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report)

The wives are not always bought, but also abducted and raped. In China, marital rape is not illegal, nor is same-gender rape. (ibtimes.com, 2013) The UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific released a survey including over 10,000 men at nine sites in six countries: Bangladesh, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Sri Lanka. In China, 23% of the men surveyed admitted to at least one rape. For another UN study in Asia and the Pacific, one in four men admitted to the rape of at least one woman.

(partners4prevention.org, 2015)

In rural India, inter-state marriages are rare because of differences that exist in food, language, cultural habits, attitudes towards women. These easily combine to make such marriages unpractical. However, men in Haryana who are unable to find a bride in their own province, are paying "up to 100,000 rupees (\$2,222) to marry an 'imported' girl from states like West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar or Madhya Pradesh." (bbc.com, 2015)

The discriminative thinking in these countries have led to killing and aborting baby girls, and then complaining about a lack of brides and importing them from other countries for marriage. It is a downward spiral that keeps spinning in circles. At a press conference on gender imbalance at birth on September 23, 2014, the Deputy Minister of Health Nguyen Viet Tien said:

During our trips to several communes in the Red River Delta, we counted nearly 150 boys per 100 girls at birth. Gender imbalance at birth there was clear. How will we address the consequences of gender imbalance? Many villages and communes will lack women. Vietnam is not as rich as South Korea where men can marry foreign women. (english.vietnamnet.vn, 2015)

The Minister states that a possible solution for the male population would be for the men in Vietnam to buy their brides, if they had the money to do so. He speaks as if this purchase of a human will be a solution for the issue occurring in Vietnam. Women are spoke of as objects that can be bought and sold for the pleasures of the male gender, and this completely supports the ideology behind female infanticide that created the gender imbalance and problem in the first place.

Other governments however have taken approaches in combating female infanticide. In India, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu introduced the "Jayalaitha Protection Scheme for the

"Girl Child" in 1992. This protection act ensured a family with one or two daughters and no sons would receive monetary support if one parent agreed to undergo sterilization. The money would be given in the name of the infant girl, and be held in a fixed deposit account until she reached the age of 21. (Sabu, n.d., p. 4) This same Chief Minister developed the "Cradle Babies" system, which depended on the public support of families abandoning their unwanted female infants in cradles which were set up in government health centers, instead of killing them. This was a spinoff of 1845 China, when Buddhist nunneries created "baby towers" for families to leave their unwanted babies. In the province of Jiangxi, a missionary documented that the infants could survive for days while exposed to the elements, and it was so common that others passing by would not pay any attention. (Mungello, 2008) However, both of these two programs failed to eradicate female infanticide in the area.

This created a new problem of sorts, with orphanages worldwide overflowing with female babies that were discarded. Because of this, there are more than 11 million abandoned children in India; over 90% of them are girls. (worldschildren.org, 2015) Female orphans are less likely to be given as much healthcare and nutrition as their male counterparts in certain orphanages. In state orphanages in China, dubbed "Dying Rooms", Chinese infant girls face terrible neglect and mistreatment. 95% of the orphans at these Dying Rooms are girls, and the remaining 5% are usually boys with mental or physical disabilities. The babies are provided with no physical attention, toys, or other mental stimulation, and instead spend their days tied to wicker chairs. This environment is unbearable, disease often fills the orphanages, and an estimated one in five infants die. (Woods, "The Dying Rooms Trust").

## **Role of Control**

In every global issue there are main powers that have control of the situation, and main powers that should have control. Often times, the people in control are the wrong people and therefore the issue is still a problem, and other times the control is split amongst different powers.

Ultimately, it may be obvious that the murderer of the baby girls has the literal control of their actions in a situation such as female infanticide. It is simple to recognize that:

those women who undergo sex determination tests and abort on knowing that the foetus is female are actively taking a decision against equality and the right to life for girls.

In many cases, of course, the women are not independent agents but merely victims of a dominant family ideology based on preference for male children. (Karlekar, 1995)

The woman herself, the husband of the pregnant woman, and the parents of either side (most commonly the husband's parents) can be the guilty party in each individual murder. Often it is the man who has the overall control over his wife who will force the death. This fact proves that the people who bring the child into the world have control over each occurrence of female infanticide. An enlightening quote is that "Women in India are victims of the patriarchal ideology that oppresses them. For, it is they who carry out the murders of India's daughters. Mothers are often helpless to do anything, having no rights over their children." (Warrier, 2000). Taken literally and metaphorically, this quote is valid both ways. As mentioned earlier, the man often kills the baby against the mothers wishes, and this can show patriarchal control being abused. Also, society's oppression of females gives mothers sometimes no better option than saving them from a life of inequity.

The underlying criminal that may not be obvious is the misogyny and societal adaptations to the discrimination of the female gender. When examining this piece of information, it is evident that a larger power in fact has the real control behind the existence of this major world issue. The government controls the rights of females in their country. The police have control in enforcing these rights, and the citizens have control in notifying the police and following the laws. An example of a situation where these forces can develop is a pregnant woman who is forced by her husband to go to the clinic and get a sex determination test. The man has control over the woman, and the doctor who performs it has control and responsibility to obey the law. The police that should persecute the doctor who illegally performs the test do nothing because they either do not know about it, or feel the patriarchal societal obligations to ignore the crime.

The police in many parts of India have been unsuccessful in deterring the concept of female infanticide. Often the police do not even know about most cases of murder because no citizens inform them of the crime. Sometimes women or men come forward, but it is a great risk to take because it is not guaranteed to be acted upon. It is a known fact that "Of those cases that are reported to the police, not many are successfully prosecuted. Police officers have often been found to extract bribes from parents, as well" (Sabu, n.d.) This monetary advantage can be important for the doctors, who may be in a difficult situation in terms of wealth.

Preventing sex determination tests is even more difficult than preventing the murder of the babies, because of "the sheer number and diversity of private healthcare centres, the corruption of service providers, and their collusion with their customers." (Guilmoto, n.d., p. 61) There is no stopping the doctors from revealing the gender of the babies using code words, and there is also no stopping women from giving reasons other than the sex of her baby as to why she wants an abortion. Indian government passed the first act against prenatal diagnosis in 1994,

which was followed by the Chinese who passed the prohibition of sex selective abortions in 1998. (Guilmoto, n.d., p. 61) Despite these two laws, the gender imbalance is still in existence. Laws cannot change everything, especially in a society that disagrees with them.

Even passing equal rights laws is ineffective when societal traditions are severely misogynous. The control that the government has also enthrones them with a responsibility to educate their people on the proper treatment of women.

## Logic of Evil

In a massacre as large as the deaths connected to female infanticide, it is necessary for the guilty party to have an accumulation of logic supporting their actions. It is also important that this logic be considered by those in power, as this reasoning is clearly quite thought-out since it has been customary for thousands of years. After carrying and nurturing a baby in the womb for approximately 9 months, a mother gives birth and is able to kill her child, or a man is able to watch his wife give birth to a helpless infant and then dispose of it. These actions are not only morally wrong, but they are criminal. Because infanticide continues to occur, it is essential to question how it is morally possible for parents to commit such actions. Due to such harsh circumstance, the reasoning must be extremely persuasive, persuasive enough to counter the maternal instinct of nurture.

The reasons behind female infanticide can be categorized into three main groups: the modern desire for smaller families, poverty, and misogynist traditions. Most reasons fall into the latter two categories, as the first is more of a contemporary concept.

In some predominantly patriarchal societies, such as rural Pakistan or India, where cultural misogyny exists, women are primarily viewed as being largely inferior to men. In extreme cases, not only are they viewed as the "lesser" sex, but the entire female gender is viewed as the legal property of and therefore entirely subservient to males. Misogyny has been in existence perpetually. Although progress has been made in some parts of the world concerning the treatment of women, this is not true for others.

To begin, the logic behind female infanticide may be perceived as originating from religious beliefs. Within every religion, there exists extremists who are able to use variations of

this misogynistic mindset to cause harm towards women and the way women are portrayed in their societies. However, it is important to understand that this is not by any means applicable to all followers of a religion. Examples of this gender discrimination also exist largely in cultural traditions. Examples of such traditions are common in India and China, among many other places where female infanticide is prevalent.

In the Hindu religion, sons or male relatives must fulfill the last rites for their parents at their funeral, a very sacred act. In a family of only daughters, this poses a large problem for parents who believe that their last rites are not religiously acceptable unless performed by the eldest son. Even currently, daughters have been harassed and even shunned in their communities for lighting their father's funeral pyre or performing the last rites. One example is in Purnia, India, where relatives and neighbours tried to deter a girl from performing the religious ceremony at her father's funeral, and "did not go to the cremation ghat as a mark of opposition." (timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 2015) She lit the funeral pyre anyway, despite the wrath she received from the public. This cultural tradition reinforces sexist attitudes which encourage people to refrain from producing female children.

The cultural discrimination against females that still exists in India is also shown by the existence of Dowry in the 21st century. This is the process in which:

the family of a prospective bride must pay enormous sums of money to the family in which the woman will live after marriage. The combination of dowry and wedding expenses usually add up to more than a million rupees ([US] \$35,000). In India the average civil servant earns about 100,000 rupees (\$3,500) a year. (Porras, n.d.)

These figures are enormous; families with one daughter can find themselves buried in debt after having to pay them, and families with multiple daughters are consequently even worse off. Tradition explains the existence of this common practice. Furthermore, in traditional Indian culture the "sons are called upon to provide the income; they are the ones who do most of the work in the fields. In this way sons are looked to as a type of insurance". (Porras, n.d.) A family with no sons sometimes has no additional source of income (as a son would provide), rendering them incapable to pay for such a dowry. This explains why a poor family would not be happy with a birth of a daughter; she may be looked at as a financial burden. According to the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund): "This suggests a simple cost-benefit framework applied within a patriarchal system in which gender roles and trajectories diverge, opposing the specific "costs" related to girls and the "benefits" accruing from boys." (unfpa.org, 2015) If not enough dowry is provided, it is not uncommon for the husband that has agreed to marry the girl to beat her, torture her, and even kill her or drive her to commit suicide. These are called "dowry deaths" and are common but not exclusive to countries such as India and Pakistan. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) figures state that "8,233 dowry deaths were reported [in India] in 2012 from various states. The statistics work out to one death per hour." (timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 2015). From the parental point of view, it may be inferred that families who know that they cannot afford dowry would not want to take the risk of having a daughter only to have her mistreated or even killed by her future husband or in-laws. Even in cultures where dowries do not exist, the daughters are still often times not able to contribute to the overall income of the family as much as sons are due to reasons such as lack of education, and cultural preferences. Girls often times stay at home to do the cooking and cleaning and do not have the same

opportunities for schooling as boys do. They are seen to belong at home rather than in the workplace.

Another problem with the extreme patriarchal systems in some countries including India and China, is the fact that it is customary that when women are married off, they leave their family to live with their new husband and his family. In a family where all of the children are girls, this leaves the parents alone in old age with nobody to care for them. The cultural view towards daughters is portrayed well in the old Asian saying: "raising a daughter is like watering the neighbour's garden." This implies that daughters are raised with the knowledge that they will be given away, while sons will be kept. This reason could weigh heavily on parents thinking about their old-age security, and is a valid concern. It produces worry and provides logical justification for disposing of a female child.

To continue with family support, in many cultures, sons are the only transmission of the family name and property. It is very expected that birthing a son will extend the family lineage, while a daughter will not. Although legislation is continually improving to include females in the inheritance laws, there is still much progress to be made. The male child is thus seen as more advantageous to the family. The concept that girls are raised only to be given away and that they provide little benefits for the family reinforces the concept that males are superior to females, and are therefore more desirable as children.

One of the many problems with the relatively modern desire and pressure to have smaller sized families and less children is that a family that bears a daughter cannot always try again for a son that will support the family. The pressure that has been put on countries to control population and have smaller sized families has eliminated the possibility of having multiple

children after the birth of a female to produce a son. Instead, because of systems like the one-child policy in China, families feel obligated (or forced) for their first and only child to be of the male gender.

This discrimination is the basis on which female infanticide has been cultivated. The root of the entire issue is based on the blatant problem of female discrimination and gender inequality. The mothers of baby girls often know that in some situations it would be less cruel to kill their infant daughters than to bring them into a life of misery and pain. Even girls put up for adoption are likely to be sex trafficked or sold as a child bride. Because of this fact, some could argue that female infanticide is not always only an act discriminating against women and opposing female rights, but rather recognizing that an equal and safe environment for females needs to exist for one to want to bring a baby girl into the world. It can sometimes be considered a protest against misogyny, because when there are not enough girls left to provide wives for all of the men, a change will have to be made. The situation is clearly very terrible for females if mothers believe death is better than life for their children.

## Expert

Evan Grae Davis is an activist, speaker, documentary filmmaker, social justice advocate, and director of the "It's a Girl" documentary. His passion is to "create (and equip others to create) strategic media communication tools that impact culture through storytelling methods that engage the heart." (evangraedavis.com, 2015)

He is the youngest of four children and his parents influenced him from a young age by helping people recover from addictions and supporting the homeless. After college he worked with many non-profit organizations creating tools for them using his film appreciation to raise funds and mobilize the community to get involved. Soon, he expanded to work with international humanitarian and aid NGO's. 20 years later he speaks that he is "...privileged to still be traveling the world with camera in hand, bringing home the story that engages our hearts in the plight of those who need rescue from hunger and poverty or are victims of tyranny and exploitation." (evangraedavis.com, 2015)

His most recent and famous film, "It's a Girl", is a feature length documentary about gendercide and female infanticide. It embodies the truth about how girls (mainly directed at Indian and Chinese) are killed aborted and abandoned because of their gender. It was shot on location in India and China, and interviews people with first-hand experience on the issue of gendercide. Certain scenes are in-depth and graphic, such as one lady admitting (while laughing) that she has strangled 8 of her baby girls and buried them in her backyard. ("It's A Girl", 2012) The documentary is on Netflix and is therefore an important step to be made in regards to educating the public on the issue of female infanticide. It has been shown in the British Parliament in London, the European Union in Brussels, at the UN Commission on the Status of

Women, and on Capitol Hill in Washington DC. It was also screened as part of International Women's Day. (evengraedavis.com, 2015)

Davis performed a TED Talk on May 9th in West Michigan, and also does other live audience speeches more frequently now since the film has raised significant exposure for NGO's such as Women's Rights Without Frontiers and Invisible Girl Project. The film has also been featured at Human Rights Film Festivals like Amnesty International's Reel Awareness Film Festival.

## Religion

Religion is "a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects." (dictionary.com) Generally speaking, these fundamental beliefs are that of importance and followers of religion can have very strong and powerful beliefs that may conflict with others. Most religions trace far back in history and have long been followed and honoured. Many still contain opinions and ideas from these historical time periods.

It is very difficult to eradicate gender inequality when it still exists in so many religious texts and teachings. Many examples of this are found in cultural traditions or religious texts, which is why gender equality is such a challenge achieve. All major religions are based on patriarchal principles. The issue remains when solving an issue as serious as female infanticide becomes an issue of changing religious beliefs. This is not an easy task. "There's little doubt, outside circles filled with self-delusional reactionaries, that religion is probably the most important force in continuing the oppression of women worldwide." (altnet.org)

In some religions, including Islam and Sikhism, female infanticide used to be very prominent but has diminished over time. The murder of female infants was very common and often female infants were buried alive the moment after they were born. More currently, infanticide has been strictly forbidden. It is noted that "Islam not only prohibits female infanticide, but it forbids all types of infanticide, irrespective of whether the infant is a male or female." (islamawareness.net) However, in religions such as Hinduism and Confucianism, female infanticide is still very much a common practice. These two religions are observed in India and China and these two countries have also seen the greatest devastation from the practice

of infanticide, therefore validating the statement. 80.5% of the population of India recognizes as Hindu, and Confucianism is traditional Chinese culture. (censusindia.gov.in)

The male bias in China is deeply rooted in Chinese traditions which leads parents to want their first child to be a boy. Confucianism views male children as more advantageous as they provide security for the elderly, work to provide money, and are important for the performance of ancestral rites. In China, religion that discriminated against women was a large part of society: "Attacks on Confucianism for gender oppression have marked China's modern period, beginning with the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and reaching prominence during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s" (Rosenlee, 2006). Many disagreed with the gender discrimination that existed in the country, but it was still widely accepted into society.

Historically, "there has been a saying that the three most delightful moments in one's life come with success in the imperial examination, marriage and the birth of a son" (travelchinaguide.com) This does not necessarily state that girl children are bad, only that boy children are better. In Confucianism, sons (and particularly the eldest) are responsible for the ancestors' cult: "a ritualistic system of veneration, honor, and propitiation of the spirits of dead ancestors for the purpose of avoiding evil consequences and securing good fortune" (merriam-webster.com) Having only daughters could devastate very spiritual and strong believers in Confucianism. Attempting to solve the patriarchy that clearly exists in traditional Chinese culture depends on weakening the sexist beliefs that exist in common religion.

Hindu authorities condemn infanticide, but son-preference in the religion is largely based upon the fact that men provide for the family, and sons are required for the proper performance

of funeral rites when their parents die. The son is responsible for lighting his parents' pyre which is required in order for them to reach Nirvana, which is a special spiritual path.

In India, the Caste system has been part of the cause of the discrimination against females because of extreme suppression and exploitation by the upper classes. This is legitimized by Hindu religious scriptures. (Thind, 2000). Also, the caste system in the Hindu religion states that having only girls in the family "amounts to being condemned to a lower caste in the next world." (wilpfinternational.org) Although the caste system was deemed illegal in 1949, many values have been adapted into Hindu society. (religioustolerance.org) This is not just in the traditional rural areas - in some major cities where the illiteracy rate can be close to 70 percent, there are "Son temples" which are places of worship created exclusively for people who want male children. (ibnlive.in.com) This further deepens the future of Hindu based patriarchal societies by specifically connecting religious beliefs to gender discrimination. Condemning death of infants is a logical statement, but it does not address the specific praising of male children, which in turn indirectly (or directly in some cases) creates the stigma around baby girls.

Hinduism also believes in karma, which is one's spiritual path. Non-violent principles are meant to be abided by and therefore infanticide and foeticide would normally be believed to be unthinkable. However, gender discrimination is a problematic issue that exists in the diverse examples of Hindu texts which can be interpreted in different ways, as most religions can be. Texts such as the Ramayan or Mahabarat are war stories that feature women playing protagonists, and are sometimes not shown as equals to men. It all depends on what one wishes to take away, as there are also female deities that are worshipped by millions. These ancient stories have created assumptions that women are inferior to men in society, and this has merged into tradition and culture.

Multiple other major religions believe women are inferior to men, including Islam. This is seen in Pakistan where 97% of the population is Muslim, and the patriarchal society has created a prime environment for female infanticide. (countrystudies.us) Specific passages from the Quran illustrate the female prejudice such as:

Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient.

They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and forsake them in beds apart, and beat them.

(Quran 4:34, "Women,")

Speaking for itself, the religious text illustrates the severity of the female oppression that can be experienced depending on the level of extremism that the follower chooses to practice.

A child that is illegitimate and born out of wedlock is looked upon as an embodiment of sin. This is another reason why these infants are disposed of, so perhaps the parent will be forgiven by god. These religious ties make female infanticide hard to combat.

An ambulance driver for the Ehdi foundation that rescues abandoned babies reported he saw worshippers spend three hours talking about "women in the Quran who were valued and loved by both Muhammad and Allah." (america.aljazeera.com) The next day, he found another abandoned female baby who was still alive, covered in burns, in a trash can.

## Case Studies

### Case Study: China

China has a long history of female infanticide. When Christian missionaries arrived in the late sixteenth century, it was noticed that female infanticide was practiced commonly, and newborns were seen being thrown into rivers or into garbage piles. Since the introduction of the one-child policy in the early 1980's, the issue exploded and has resulted in a concerning gender imbalance in the country.

China's patriarchal culture includes a preference for sons that has been in existence for centuries. Infanticide has often been the means of disposing of female babies, and on the contrary sons have been treated with favourable conditions which has created a country with a very large surplus of men. After the one-child policy was introduced in 1979, no longer were families able to have multiple kids and chances to produce a boy. The Chinese government has stated that the policy has prevented more than 400 million births. If the first child was a girl, the parents would never have a son to carry on the family name and bring a source of pride and income for the family. Because of this, it became very common to kill newborn babies if they were girls in hopes that the next child would be a boy. However, if the family lived in a rural area it was permitted to have a second child only if the first was female (to help on the farm), but two girls were an even worse fate than one and brought shame to the family.

In the past two decades the birth gap has become even larger because of the new existence of ultrasound scans revealing the gender of the babies even before birth. Sex-selective abortion - though illegal - has provided a new disguised form of infanticide called foeticide. Together these two practices have provided a country in which their men cannot find brides, and

this has created even more danger for women. Rape, the sex-trade, crime, and child brides have become increasingly common in the country. More than 24 million Chinese men of marriageable age could find themselves without a partner to wed by 2020 (wantchinatimes.com).

This process is still ongoing despite the obvious gender discrimination that is occurring. Babies are abandoned, strangled, drowned, and disposed of at an alarming and disturbing rate.

In Anshan city of northeast China, a premature female baby was found in a plastic bag which was thrown into a garbage bin in 2012. Her throat was sliced open and her placenta and umbilical cord was still attached when she was found by a man searching for recyclables in the trash, still breathing. Residents called the police and the baby was taken to hospital in very critical condition. Still breathing and with a heartbeat, the newborn's body was covered in blood from her two-inch long wound on her neck so deep that doctors say it went down to her windpipe. If the cut would have been any deeper she "would have died instantly." (dailymail.co.uk)

The incident horrified China, despite the large numbers of abandoned children that commonly exist. In cities, however, the children are not as commonly murdered or left in plastic bags to die with their throats cut open - they are simply left to be rescued by adoption agencies or governmental organizations. This baby was believed to be a victim of China's one child policy. It also serves as a reminder to confirm the known belief that "parents upon which this restriction is imposed prefer boys." (dailymail.co.uk)

This baby girl was purple in colour and had not moved until she was examined closely by the man who had discovered her. Born prematurely she was between 32 and 34 weeks old, and only weighed three pounds.

Because of the very large amount of unregistered pregnancies and births that are hidden from the Chinese government, the issue of female infanticide is difficult to keep control of. The family planning committee in the country has been condemned by critics outside of China because of the horror of forced abortions, sterilization, and children taken away from families to be given for adoption.

It is reported that "when the Family Planning Police force women to be sterilized for violating the One-Child Policy, these sterilizations are most often not performed by highly trained gynecological surgeons." ([womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org](http://womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org)) It is not uncommon for infection and other health complications to arise as a result of these sterilizations. It is understandable why illegal pregnancies would not want to be reported, resulting in the large amount of abandoned and killed babies, specifically girls.

## Case Study: India

India is the main country that female infanticide exists in. It is a dangerous country in general for women, with very high levels of rape, violence, child marriage and slavery.

(huffingtonpost.ca) "In India, women and girls continue to be sold as chattels, married off as young as 10, burned alive as a result of dowry-related disputes and young girls exploited and abused as domestic slave labour," says Gulshun Rehman, health program development adviser at Save the UK.

It is because of this that female children are not wanted in India. In some instances the mother of the child does not want a girl and kills it because of a multitude of reasons. Often it is a combination of many, including not wanting a female child because of the terrible patriarchal society it will be raised to be a part of. The mother knows the issues a woman faces and does not wish to pass these onto her children. Another is the financial burden a female child becomes because of the dowry practice that still exists today, and the social pressure and stereotypes that prevent girls from earning money. When a woman is married off, her family pays a huge sum of money to the husband's family called a dowry. The girl is often married off at a very young age, not uncommonly to a man as much as double her age. This process is becoming more common as the surplus of men results in a shortage of brides their own age and they are forced to marry younger women. The girl moves in with the family and therefore is not there to take care of her parents in their old age, and the parents are left poor and childless, as well as worrying about the wellbeing of their daughter, who faces the common risk of being beaten and mistreated by her husband.

Another reason is the husband or family of the bride kills the baby against the mothers wishes, or forces her to do so. Although illegal, sex determination tests are often forced upon future mothers by their husbands and families. Frightened of what the test might reveal, mother's commonly do not want to have the test performed. A female result will almost always result in sex-selective abortion, which is also illegalized. Bribes make this possible, but not necessarily safe. If she does not obey, it is likely that she will either be killed, beaten, have acid thrown on her, or be left without a husband to raise the child on her own. In a patriarchal society like the one in India, a single mother is looked down on and there is little chance for the woman to be remarried. A single mother in India "is greeted with a slew of demands from government departments. Benefits are unheard of," says feminist lawyer Flavia Agnes. This is much different from many westernized countries such as the UK where single mothers are entitled to benefits from the government such as essential income support, housing benefit, child tax credit, council benefits, maternity grant, working tax benefit, child maintenance, in work credit, job grant, childcare grant, cold weather payments, and even free school meals.

(timesofindia.indiatimes.com) This is a blatant example of the female prejudice that exists in India and how it relates to the dwindling levels of girls in the country.

Becoming numbed to the violence that exists on a regular basis, often people do not look twice at instances of violence and oppression of women. Such is the case with female infanticide and foeticide. In December of 2014, an infant baby girl was found abandoned in a garbage can eaten alive by ants in Bhopal, India.

Only believed to be 2 hours old, the baby was found by school security guard Ahmed Kahn. It was still alive and clearly in pain when discovered. After hearing the sound of a baby crying, Kahn uncovered the "blood red body of a baby covered in ants, waving its arms and legs

around to get away from the pain from the bites...they were crawling all over her and eating her alive.” (opposingviews.com) After pulling the little girl out and brushing the ants off the baby was taken to a hospital in critical condition.

By studying video footage of the area, the baby's mother was found dumping her child into a garbage bin. She was arrested and faced possible charges of endangering the life of a child. She was living with her sister and became pregnant with a man who she was supposed to marry but he left her shortly afterwards. The situation of pregnancy out of wedlock is highly condemned by Indian society, and to avoid the shame and financial burden of the girl she simply disposed of her.

This practice of female infanticide in India has led to numerous deaths among the female population. Census figures report only 914 girls for every 1000 boys under the age of 7. The patriarchal society in which girls are raised has created a violent and dangerous environment for the female population, and as it grows smaller the danger increases. Mothers have difficulty independently supporting themselves and rely heavily on their husbands, which give the fathers a large amount of power over both the mother and the child. Without educating the husband on the importance of respect for females, and creating an environment where women can support themselves independently, India's gender gap will continue to grow and even more problems will become evident. Already this has been affecting neighbouring countries and the female population with child brides, violence, rape, and the sex trade looking for prospects.

## Case Study: Pakistan

Pakistan has a long history of gender discrimination. The rapid urbanization of some large cities has caused many problems including female infanticide. Ramzan Chhipa, the founder and leader of the Chhipa Welfare Association in Pakistan, says that because the government has "failed to provide jobs for a majority of the population, the state of education is abysmal, and law and order in the country is almost nonexistent." He is a part of the organization that sets up safe places for unwanted babies and extracts corpses from garbage dumps.

The cause behind this infanticide is shown to be largely economical. Females are considered a financial liability in Pakistan, and males are responsible and able to provide for the family. The women and girls often are not even permitted to obtain work, and therefore become the financial responsibility of their fathers and husbands whether they want to or not. Because of the fast urbanization, the high levels of poverty have left many families unable to care for children, especially ones that cannot contribute to the economic stability of the family. Many people in cities live in densely populated housing establishments and struggle working underpaid jobs with little to no education. Sexual education is often lacking with little knowledge or access to proper birth control. In a desperate situation, many turn to infanticide.

In Pakistan, one woman's story exemplifies the horrors of female infanticide and how it can tragically destroy families. The husband of the woman killed their daughter only days after she gave birth, because she was a girl. The woman is in an arranged marriage, and was not surprised to learn about the fate of her daughter. When she was first pregnant she did not tell her husband because she knew the dangerous financial state they were in. Praying for a son, she was

very unhappy with the birth of her daughter because she knew of the financial burden she would become. Her husband quickly "took care of it" and disposed of the baby girl.

Later on the woman watched as a man picked the tiny corpse from the garbage dump outside of her home. She had seen three others bodies removed from the same fate as her daughter in the short six months she had been living there.

Specifically in South Asia, people have become numb to the killing of girl babies which is often done to help feed sons, and save money. The danger of this practice has steadily increased by 20 percent each year since 2010. (edhi.org) Estimated to keep rising as the cost of living increases, the danger of gender imbalance is in Pakistan's future.

Another reason behind the female infanticide in Pakistan is simply children born out of wedlock. The socially conservative and patriarchal society has illegitimate children referred to as "harami" in some places, which is an Arabic word for "forbidden under Islam". This ties itself to the religious female prejudice that exists in the country.

An example of this is a 17 year old girl who shares how she gave birth to a child out of wedlock and her mother suffocated it with a pillow shortly afterwards to avoid shame. Waiting 10 minutes to make sure the baby was completely dead, they covered the body with kerosene and lit it on fire in a garbage can outside. Abortion was considered but then decided against because the illegalization means that abortions are often performed by untrained practitioners in less than sterile conditions. Around 200,000 women are hospitalized each year for complications due to illegal abortions in Pakistan, according to the Guttmacher Institute. (guttmacher.org)

The birth was never reported and serves as an example of the many cases of female infanticide that go untold. The statistics do not lie, however, and even though many individual

cases are unreported the large statistics hold truth. The mother who killed the baby said she feels no guilt as she feels that she saved her daughter from a life of shame and her daughter from a life of misery and pain. This is understandable and illustrates the almost nonexistent female rights that exist preventing a woman from wanting her child to experience the same problems she has faced. The mother is now married in an arranged marriage and her husband does not know about the pregnancy.

During the pregnancy, the girl sometimes considered giving the baby to the Edhi Foundation which, as well as disposing of corpses found in the trash, has buildings set up that encourage mothers to drop off unwanted infants instead of murdering them. Despite the 400 sites that have been established, only 18 babies were dropped in 2013, while Edhi says it buried "more than 1,300 babies last year." ([america.aljazeera.com](http://america.aljazeera.com))

One of the main reasons for the failure of such programs is the fact that many sites for babies to be left are located on major streets and public places that make it difficult to discreetly abandon the baby. Also, the program was condemned by religious leaders that say it "encourages promiscuity and immorality." ([america.aljazeera.com](http://america.aljazeera.com)) A child that is illegitimate and born out of wedlock is looked upon as an embodiment of sin and that is another reason why these infants are disposed of, so perhaps the parent will be forgiven by god. These religious ties make female infanticide hard to combat.

The combination of low employment rates, low education rates, and law and order which is almost nonexistent has created an optimal environment for the practice of female infanticide. Until the deaths of the infants are taken seriously by the police and highlighted on social media to bring awareness, the situation isn't likely to change. The police force in Pakistan has been

accused of being corrupt, poorly trained, and lacking political will and is unlikely to spend the limited resources they are given on finding the culprits of the infanticide. A police officer in charge of investigating crime stated that "in the past three years, the city's police force has never investigated anyone for infanticide. No one has ever reported such a crime."

(america.aljazeera.com)

A report on a local resident who had in fact reported the killing of a baby girl near her house became unimportant as there was no further investigation on the incident. Despite having clear rope burn marks on the baby's neck, because the woman did not see the murder herself the police officer refused to open an investigation. The lack of police control is evident and it is unfortunate that the practice has become so common it is hardly reacted to.

A very small yet clear move has been made by Pakistan's religious council who designated September 20th, 2013 a day for "recognizing girls' value." After the report of the gang rape of 5-year-old twins who had been abandoned by their parents.

The event sparked an outcry among the Pakistani population and many demanded stricter adherence to Pakistan's existing child-protection laws. Imams across the country on this day were "encouraged to use their Friday sermons to praise daughters." (america.aljazeera.com) This process was an important start to the recognition of the dangers for women in Pakistani society, but there has been little change since.

## International Organizations

Although governments are responsible for providing a safe environment for their people, non-governmental organizations often step in to aid in regards to different world issues that ignore borders. Female infanticide is a world issue that deals with inequality and prejudice against women, and directly and indirectly effects the whole world. This has led the I Am A Girl organization to step in and battle the female prejudice worldwide. The by-product of this issue, gender imbalance, has encouraged an organization by the name of Population First to help create a balanced, planned, and stable population. There are various ways to contribute to the solution, and together, among others, these two organizations battle to reduce female infanticide.

Population First's initiatives include helping to eliminate the falling sex ratio in the population (specifically in India), help the youth and media become educated on gender issues, and improve the health and standard of life for India's women and youth, especially in the rural population. It was first registered in 2002. In the first year of existence, it focused on gaining support from institutions and individuals of considerable influence, to create awareness and provide hope and support.

It recognizes the real issue behind the face of the falling sex ratios which is the "unequal social development and gendered mindsets." (populationfirst.org) These cultural mindsets are found responsible for the maternal mortality, child mortality and falling sex ratios. It was then observed that Indian states with deprived social development and gender prejudice indicators were also the same States having poor demographic indices. Similarly, States with high-quality economic social development which have been very successful in promoting a small family

mindset have been continuously facing the problem of falling sex ratios because, despite this, the basic gendered mind sets which promote son over daughter preference remained the same.

The NGO looked deep into the statistics of the population in India and found that 60% of the population is below 35 years of age. Considering this, they found that this large population of young people that will shape the future could either be an advantage or a danger depending on how they are educated. They have a direct connection with the population growth and country development because of the decisions they make in terms of their reproductive behaviour, and how they educate the next generation of children.

"Population First, focuses on the gendered mindset catalyzing the above issues, which undermines the value of girls and women, promotes discrimination against them and justifies gender based violence. The challenge is to change those mindsets." (populationfirst.org). Within the organization, a field based intervention has been implemented called "Action for Mobilization of Community Health Initiatives" (AMCHI) which focuses on communication to create an environment where the health and gender issues are approached from a perspective of gender equality. Another program is LAADLI which uses advertising influence to change the way women and gender issues are portrayed in the media.

Population First approaches the issue of female prejudice in a number of ways. For one, workshops and discussion forums use theatre and activity based youth initiatives. Providing a non-judgemental space, these forums allow students to discuss gender discrimination, stereotypes and gender based violence. As well as the workshops, training programs are organized for poetry, film making, street theatre, and song development in hopes of encouraging different mediums for communication.

Another is in the format of curriculum based activities which involve integrating gender sensitivity into classroom curriculum. Also, in colleges there have been a number of youth fests and competitions related to gender violence and discrimination. Some of these activities include Wall painting, quiz competitions, and walkathons. To make these programs run as effectively as possible, workshops are also provided for teachers that educate and regulate important gender based discussion topics.

A specific competition that was organized by Population First is called the “One Minute Movie (1MM)”, and involves both youth and media - two of the most important agents involving social change. The students are encouraged to raise controversial topics related to gender discrimination and present them in a one minute movie.

The female prejudice worldwide has sparked an outrage among both genders. This enormously general issue has fed the female infanticide that occurs at an alarming rate. By tracing the specific issue down to the logic of evil and cause, it has been discovered that elevating the status of women in society would contribute to the solution to female infanticide. The I Am A Girl organization is one of the NGO's that has recognized and begun to address the dangers of a violently patriarchal society.

Founded by Plan International (one of the largest international charities in the world), it has supported gender equality among children and families specifically in the developing world. The focus on girls exists because it is known that they are more likely to live in poverty, be denied access to education, be denied medical care, and to be malnourished than boys in the same situation. ([becauseiamagirl.ca](http://becauseiamagirl.ca)) Because of this, the organization and initiative has been launched globally.

Progress has already been made after a successful campaign which was led by Plan Canada and resulted in the United Nations officially declaring October 11th International Day of the Girl. As well as this, many smaller accomplishments have been made as a result of a wide range of programs that run to improve the status of girls and give them equal access to health care, education, protection, and independence. A report series titled "State of the Worlds Girls" is an ongoing investigation that discusses specific barriers that still exist and are detrimental to the development of girls in society, and has brought attention to the ongoing struggles that are faced daily worldwide.

Working with communities and individuals around the world, I Am A Girls strives to ensure that:

- Girls' education be prioritized by world leaders
- Girls complete at least nine years of quality education, and support the crucial transition to secondary education
- Funding for girls' education be increased
- Child marriage is abolished
- Gender-based violence in and around schools is put to a stop
- Girls and boys participate equally in decision making and are able to inspire those with power to take action

In areas where this does not happen, the entire population of females is at risk. The case of the "disappearing daughters" is a major issue that occurs mainly in Asia and affects the entire world. The I Am A Girl organization believes that the low status of the female gender, and therefore a

preference for boys, is at the root of the issue of lost girls. To battle the issue of the decreasing female population, the Let Girls Be Born campaign was created under the I Am A Girl organization. The main objective of the campaign is to "realize a gender balance in society by eliminating female foeticide and infanticide and ensuring girls' rights to an identity, name and citizenship." (planindia.org)

By raising awareness, supporting families, and striving to uphold the law, I Am A Girl and Let Girls Be Born have worked towards a healthy relationship between genders. Spreading the word about female infanticide and the negative impact it has on women's health and wellbeing as well as the danger of the gender imbalance has informed the world on an issue that many have not known would indirectly effect them. As well, because of the gender imbalance and the effect it has on men in the patriarchal societies where it exists, change may be accepted more quickly than before. In places where it is not, Let Girls Be Born has support systems set up for women who want to keep their girl babies against the wishes of their husband and family in hopes it will make a difference.

## Canadian Connection

In Canada, everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

- (a) freedom of conscience and religion;
- (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
- (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and
- (d) freedom of association.

(laws-lois.justice.gc.ca)

Canada is a country which embraces many different cultures and provides a safe environment for different beliefs and expressions. This results in a multitude of religions existing in the same place. Unfortunately, trying to incorporate freedom of religion with a safe environment does not always work because a mosaic of cultures also invites the existence of violent and degrading beliefs. Women and girls are often targeted by different patriarchal societies and when people come to Canada they bring with them their patriarchal views. Freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression in Canada protects patriarchal views and sometimes makes it difficult to support different problematic issues. It is known that:

Canada is a world leader in the promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality. These issues are central to Canada's foreign and domestic policies. Canada is committed to the view that gender equality is not only a human rights issue, but is also an essential component of sustainable development, social justice, peace, and security. (international.gc.ca)

Canada is ranked the most women-friendly G20 country, and female rights are not an issue. (theglobeandmail.com) However, as more immigrants enter the country their cultural views enter with them and Canada becomes home to gender discrimination. This is by choice, and in Canada that choice and freedom is given. The dowry system and honour killings fill the news on a fairly continual basis country-wide and are always dealt with legally but continue to exist nonetheless. This patriarchal system that has been brought into the homes of some creates an atmosphere that continues to suppress women and girl children.

In Canada abortion is legal and so are sex determination tests because the country has yet to show a gender imbalance or any serious or large signs of gender discrimination. This creates a situation in which it is easy for someone who does not want a daughter to simply abort her, but so far there has not been an issue which lends itself to prove that a society in which women are treated as equals is society in which female infanticide is not a problem.

Even though sex determination has not become a major problem, pregnancy specialists in the country have used Asia as an example to learn from. In Canada "the strongest evidence of sex selection is among people from India, China, Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines." (news.nationalpost.com) Instead of waiting until a problem appears, the nation is working on stopping ultrasounds used specifically for gender determination. (news.nationalpost.com) The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada and the Canadian Association of Radiologists are discussing the dangers of sex selection and possibilities of preventing them. One option that is being discussed is not revealing the gender of a baby before the 30 week mark when abortion is nearly impossible to perform in any safe manner. (ourbodiesourselves.org) Some feminism activists have shown disapproval toward this law, suggesting instead the education of equality between genders should be the focus.

Because the situation of female infanticide has resulted in a major gender imbalance that has led to an increase in child brides and the sex trafficking industry, women in Canada are also at risk of being targeted. The victims are "typically recruited through a betrayal of trust or the promise of a better life, then manipulated, intimidated, confined, threatened, and beaten."

([canadianwomen.org/trafficking](http://canadianwomen.org/trafficking)) The danger that it provides to women worldwide should spark an international support system to invoke change. Canada can be a part of this process, leading by example and continuing to provide refuge for women worldwide.

## Solutions

“No amount of education, rules and punishment can stop female feticide, it will stop only when the status of girls and women will be raised high in our society. In fact, her status should be more than that of the men. Only this will bring about a vigorous change.”

(womennewsnetwork.net)

Female infanticide is a problem that is simply just a sub category of the non existence of female rights in certain places around the world, and can be solved by the improvement of these rights. By examining why the issue exists, it is proven that female infanticide connects directly to female rights, prejudice against women, and gender roles that have been prevalent for centuries.

There have been many solutions that have been attempted around the world, but many of these are simply "band-aids" used to temporarily provide relief to the country's serious problem. Others are only solutions provided to some of the effects that the gender imbalance has had on the country: one of which is a shortage of brides. Some of these include abortion and sex-selection bans, illegalization of dowry, monetary rewards for female children, and selling brides. The problem resides in the fact that female prejudice is plainly a part of certain culture, and therefore requires a cultural shift in order to provide change in regard to infanticide. This cultural revolution will be very difficult, but it is not impossible. In comparison, slavery has been almost completely eradicated from the American culture. Diverse culture is very important, but not when it is harmful. The Ministry of Women & Child Development for the Government of India states that:

Culture cannot be a justification for any malpractice or harmful practices. If child marriage is our culture, so were slavery, casteism, dowry and sati. But we do have laws now to prohibit such harmful practices. These laws have come into existence as and when there has been a demand from within the society. Clearly then, Culture is not static. ([wcd.nic.in/Teachershandbook.pdf](http://wcd.nic.in/Teachershandbook.pdf))

As governments have been overwhelmed with the problem of gender imbalance as a result of female infanticide, they have turned to what they believe to be the most effective and obvious solution: legalize murder, abortion, and sex selection. This is logical and would be successful if the female prejudice was not integrated so deeply into societal norms. Unfortunately, making something illegal does not always prevent it from happening. Of course murdering an infant is already illegal, but clearly still occurs - and at very high numbers. This is also the case when dealing with abortion and sex selection.

In certain countries including Chile, illegal abortions result in imprisonment, and abortion is not even allowed in cases of rape or when the birth would endanger the life of the woman. Approximately 25% of the world's population resides in countries where abortion laws are highly restrictive; these countries are mostly in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. ([womenonwaves.org](http://womenonwaves.org)) Sex Selection is also illegal in many countries where unbalanced gender ratios have shown to be prevalent. One example is shown in India where anyone who seeks a prenatal sex determination test, whether it be the pregnant woman herself or someone on her behalf, is liable up to three years in prison as well as a fine of 50 000 rupees (\$1130 US). Crimes even more severe are subsequent convictions which result in five years in prison and a fine double the original amount. On the other side, medical practitioners who perform sex determination tests are punished with a fine of up to 10 000 rupees (\$225) and three years in prison. Also, the State

Medical Council removes the medical practitioners name from its register for five years after the first offense, and the name will be removed permanently after a subsequent conviction.

(womennewsnetwork.net) This is a huge risk for either party, and yet it still happens very frequently. There are loopholes that are used to reveal the gender of the baby without actually saying anything, such as the wink of an eye. Often these loopholes are used along with bribery provided to the doctor. In a poverty stricken country it is not easy to refuse money. The government knows this, and "admits legislation has been ineffective." (womennewsnetwork.net) Despite the laws that have been put in place, "Unfortunately, the existing provisions and current implementation mechanisms have failed to make any significant impact on the rising trend of female feticide," according to Girl Child in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan 2007-2012, a report by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. This is clear as the sex ratio has not changed drastically since the law has come into existence.

Illegalizing abortion also does very little to improve the situation of female infanticide and foeticide. Abortions are still performed but in a much more dangerous situation for the pregnant woman. Often they are forced to undergo abortion by their husband or family, and are therefore put into a life-threatening situation. Illegalizing abortion because of the fear of gender imbalance also prevents women who want an abortion (for reasons other than gender) from attaining a safe abortion. Estimates say that one woman dies every two hours from health effects related to abortion. (populationfirst.org) Someone pro-choice in regard to abortions can still oppose gender specific abortion. Although, the reality is that there is no way of always truly knowing why a woman wants an abortion. The "grey area" of this topic is enormous. The fact is, illegalizing gender specific abortion will not end the problem, the same way that illegalizing dowry has not ended or even lessened its existence."Making sex selection illegal did not change

the viciously misogynistic conditions in which sex selection took place, and so sex selection did not stop." (newstatesman.com) It is a solution that ignores the true problem that lies behind the face of female infanticide. Rather than focusing on the illegalization of abortion or other mechanisms to stabilize the gender imbalance, it is important to focus on the prevention of misogynist traditions and events that lead to female infanticide and give alternatives.

If the people want change, there will be change. It is necessary to change the misogynist traditions, stop dowry and give alternatives. As the governments work on various initiatives to reduce these rates, doctors say the only solution is "elevating the status of girls in society." One cannot simply educate women and girls on their value and importance in regards to equality and then have them return home to an abusive husband and be engulfed in a patriarchal society that has not been educated on women's rights. It is essential to educate both genders if any change is to be made.

Some other programs that have been put into place by governments in attempts to eradicate female infanticide and balance genders are monetary rewards. People respond to incentive, and if poverty is a main contributor to the desire for male children then this could be very helpful. Although, it does not stray from patriarchal tradition or attempt to make females any more desirable. Basically, it is agreeing with the fact that females are less valuable and so the money is compensating for the gender of the child. In Haryana, India, the state government provides free education for girls and also grants money to families on the occasion of their daughter's wedding if they live below the poverty line. In India:

The leaders of Tamil Nadu are holding out a tempting carrot to couples in the state with one or two daughters and no sons: if one parent undergoes sterilization, the

government will give the family [U.S.] \$160 in aid per child. The money will be paid in instalments as the girl goes through school. She will also get a small gold ring and on her 20th birthday, a lump sum of \$650 to serve as her dowry or defray the expenses of higher education. Four thousand families enrolled in the first year. (gendercide.org)

For families where poverty is the issue, this incentive may help with keeping and caring for a girl child. Another interesting idea that has been discussed is providing support for single mothers who cannot support themselves. Giving women the strength to refuse a husband's demand for abortion is vital to having women become independent. The fear of being beaten, killed, or left by their husband can convince a mother to listen to their demands for a son. By learning to make decisions for themselves, many lives could be saved.

One option that is provided around the world are baby hatches, a safe place often attached or nearby a health centre that serves as a safe place for parents to leave their unwanted children without fear of punishment. Usually these children are female or have special disabilities preventing the parent from raising it properly. The children are given to adoptive families who then take care of them. These baby hatches exist worldwide, and were taken from a concept derived from much of central Europe in the 18th century called foundling wheels.

(bbc.com/news)

Not just strictly in Asia, these baby hatches exist all around the globe. Many countries have set up their own systems: Italy, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Japan, the Philippines, and South Africa, to name a few. In America, many states now have laws to designate safe drop-off locations where parents can leave unwanted infants. When giving birth in France, a woman can choose to leave her baby at the hospital without any questions. A hospital in Vancouver became

the first baby hatch in Canada. In Germany there are around 200 places where a pregnant mother can leave her baby, and in Pakistan, the Edhi Foundation works to provide safe places that accept abandoned babies. China has been practicing this for years, and Australia has recently began the program. ([theatlantic.com/international](http://theatlantic.com/international)) It stands as a beacon of optimism for the future of abandoned children, but unfortunately does not address the reasoning behind the abandonment, which needs to be dealt with.

There is one nation that remains as hope for the future of the abolition of female infanticide. South Korea's birth ratio was shifted to 115 boys born for every 100 girls when sex selective technology became accessible. However, the country recognized this major issue and began to educate both genders on the importance of female rights, passing equality laws, and revising the patriarchal family laws that were in place. In 2007, South Korea regained a normal sex ratio of 107 :100. (Guilmoto, 2009, p. 524, 536) Many countries can learn from the success of South Korea and it can start by recognizing the real problem behind female infanticide, which is not the missing women, but rather the logic of evil and reasons behind why these women are missing. By combining both short and long term solutions, the ideal solution to eradicate female infanticide is created. Although it will take time, a safe environment for the girl child is always possible.

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