

Female Gendercide

A Crisis of Global Magnitude



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Female Gendercide: A Crisis of Global Proportions

Abstract

Female gendercide is the deliberate killing of a female child by her family, either before birth through sex-selective abortion, or after birth by killing, abandonment, and deliberate neglect. It is a complex issue in which poverty, culturally ingrained preferences for a male offspring, societal gender violence, government policies, and lack of education, lead to a devaluation of the girl-child and therefore the cavalier decision to terminate a life. Previously seen in Asian countries, gendercide is now happened in Western nations due to global migration and shifting cultural norms. This shows that no culture or country is immune to gender discrimination in the form of female infanticide and feticide. Rather, it is a human global problem.

My paper reviews the insidious spread of gendercide, its global prevalence, multifactorial causes, societal repercussions, and considerations for action and prevention. Female gendercide is an unspoken and quietly ignored topic, the darker underbelly of many countries. The unchecked killing of baby girls has serious consequences, leading to declining female populations, increase in crime and trafficking, social and biological instability, perpetuation of illiteracy and poverty, and labor market economic distortions. In 1990, Nobel Laureate and economist Amartya Sen alerted the world to the phenomenon of “missing women” – women that were simply not allowed to be born or to live. The United Nations estimates that over 200 million females are missing in the world today, and most all of these are a result of female gendercide.

It is important for all of us, no matter what part of the globe we live in, to be concerned about female gendercide. It passes under the radar because it is a silent crime that happens against a victim who is voiceless and defenseless. It constitutes one of the worst forms of human rights violations, where a girl is denied her most fundamental right - “the right to life”. In terms of the sheer size of the atrocity, the number of victims claimed by female gendercide exceeds the number of deaths in World War I and World War II combined. It has eliminated more people than all the genocides of the 20th century, malaria, the AIDS and flu epidemics, and creates a mountain of corpses equivalent to the Jewish Holocaust every three years.

The consequences of gendercide are adverse and far-reaching. In populations with skewed male-female ratios, the very fact that many millions of girls have been deliberately eliminated simply because they would have been female establishes a social reality that colors the whole realm of human relationships. Sex-selective termination tears at the very fabric of liberty by denying equal protection under the law to one half of the population. The elimination of girls and the lowered numbers becomes even more alarming in light of the currently declining birth rates in many countries, which are falling below replacement stability levels.

Gendercide is a complicated multi-factorial issue that has been years in the making and is embedded in societal and cultural consciousness. It thrives in communities where there is a power imbalance and girls are considered inferior to boys. The preference for boys and the gender inequities will not change without outside intervention. It is critical to not only counter the gender inequality that drives son preference and raise to societal consciousness of gendercide, but also invest in multifaceted initiatives geared towards promoting social justice and long term progress for girls and women. Working to eradicate gendercide means ensuring education and health for the girl-child so that she can survive and thrive, and introducing

legislation against sex-selective fetal abortion and gender-based violence, as well as developing socioeconomic policies for women's political participation, inheritance rights, workplace equal opportunity, and gender equality on all fronts.

Gender equality lies at the very heart of each country's successful progress and development. It is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future. No nation striving to be progressive can afford to eliminate half of its population on a consistent basis and be able to thrive socially or economically. Sustainable long-term development requires fundamental participation from women. Girls are powerful catalysts for world change. When girls are empowered to lead their lives, speak their minds and determine their futures, everyone benefits. History shows that when we fight gender inequality, societies have better educated families, healthier children, and are more stable.

Failure to address female gendercide is a failure to address the role of women in society. If the movement to end female gendercide is to gain momentum, then "the world needs to get involved." We must stop female gendercide, no matter where we live, and join forces to ensure that sex-selection is understood as discrimination against girls and must end. One person, one action, and one small step at a time can make a huge difference. But we must not find ourselves on the wrong side of history for failing to take any action at all. The global crisis of "missing" girls is a tragedy of great lost potential. It is the loss of the girl child in society simply because she happens to be a girl.

I. INTRODUCTION

Female gendercide is the deliberate elimination of a female child through infanticide or feticide. Infanticide is the killing of a baby girl immediately after birth or within the first year of the girl's life. It happens by drowning, smothering, poisoning, strangulation, burying the child, or abandonment after birth. Another method of infanticide is by deliberate neglect of the girl-child and not providing essential nutrition or medical care in the early years of life, so the infant does not survive.

Female feticide happens before birth. It is the deliberate sex-selective abortion of a female fetus using prenatal sex determination to prevent a girl child from being born, and has replaced female infanticide in bigger cities. Using modern diagnostic technologies like ultrasounds and amniocentesis, families try to find out the sex of a child early on, so they can abort the pregnancy if it is a girl and then try for another child, this time a male. Since many countries ban the right to know the sex of a child before birth, this is often done illegally and has become a profitable business racket.

The scale of female infanticide and feticide collectively called gendercide, is staggering. Gendercide has silently claimed the lives of over 160 million girls in the world. The grave issue has had serious reverberations across the globe. In 1990, Nobel Laureate and economist Amartya Sen alerted the world to the phenomenon of "missing women" in his widely referenced article, "More than 100 million women are missing" (Sen 1990). These women are considered "missing" because they should have been in the world population but were not allowed to be born or to live. Sen said that more than 100 million women were missing from the world due to a deepening crisis of gender inequality that had led to the widespread practice of sex selective abortion, female infanticide, and neglect of girl children. The number of 'missing women' has now climbed and almost doubled from his initial estimate.

In the two decades since Sen's analysis, the phenomenon of missing women have been researched and debated worldwide. Policies and laws have been put in place in countries where distorted sex ratios have been documented. But in spite of this, change has been slow and the increase in imbalanced numbers continues, fueled by the continual development of newer technologies which are able to determine child's sex even earlier on. It can be challenging to obtain accurate statistics about birth and death rates related to gendercide because they are not reported. However, according to World Bank's report *The World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*, female deaths account for an estimated 3.9 million women each year in low- and middle-income countries. About two-fifths are not born due to infanticide and feticide, a sixth die in early childhood, and over a third die in their reproductive years. Female gendercide is clearly responsible for the majority of large numbers of girls that have been eliminated from the world population.

This review traces the development and prevalence of female gendercide in different countries across the globe and examines its causes and consequences. It concludes with an analysis of why we must all be collectively concerned about female gendercide, especially in light of the modern-day declining birth rates. Strong concerted action must be taken to eliminate the practice globally.

II. PREVALENCE OF FEMALE GENDERCIDE

Female infanticide and feticide can be viewed from the lens of the male-female sex ratio and the sex ratio at birth (SRB). This is the comparison of the number of boys born versus the number of girls born in a given period. The World Health Organization states that the natural sex ratio at birth is about 105 boys to every 100 girls. It is best to have equal numbers of men and women in a society and a few extra boys are needed for balance because men die earlier. When many more boys are surviving than girls, it is a clear sign that infanticide and fetal sex selection is taking place.

Male Female Sex Ratio - This is defined as the ratio of males to females in a population and is generally expressed as the number of males per 100 females. An exception is India, where the sex ratio is expressed as the number of females per 1,000 males.

Sex ratio at birth (SRB) – This is the number of boys born alive per 100 girls born alive. In most countries, the normal SRB varies between 102 and 104 males per 100 females.

Child sex ratio (CSR) – Since the SRB can be affected by many factors and female births due to infanticide often remain unregistered, the childhood sex ratio which is the ratio of boys to girls in a defined age group (typically 0-4 or 0-6 years) is used often as a proxy. (Ganatra, 2008)

Source: adapted from “Preventing gender-biased sex selection, an interagency statement. OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO, 2010

Female gendercide is predominantly seen in Southeast Asian countries, particularly India and China, which are two of the world's most populous countries. For several decades in China, the SRB's have been much higher than 105, exceeding 120 boys for every 100 girls and even climbing as high as 130. In India, the second most populous country, the SRB's have also been significantly higher than 105 for decades. The resultant consequence is that in both countries combined, which account for 36% of the world's population, there are now 80 million extra men.

Similarly skewed SRB's are also being seen in many other countries globally (Chao 2019) but the effects have been seen most prominently in India and China because of their population size. Female gendercide and imbalanced sex ratios are also seen in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cyprus, and Qatar; in Albania and Liechtenstein in Eastern Europe; the post-Soviet countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and countries on the African continent including Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, and Tunisia. The problem has now insidiously infiltrated to the western nations of the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States because of global immigration which has transported cultural preferences for a male child across the globe.

China

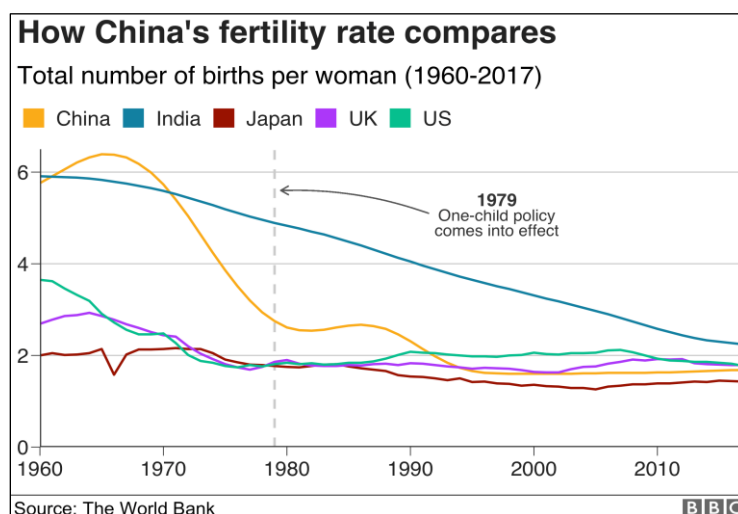
In China, parents have historically favored large families and gave preferential treatment to sons at the expense of daughters within the family unit (Ebenstein 2009). This is perpetuated by traditional Confucian philosophy which supports the concept of female subordination to men. After the death of Chairman Mao Zedong, who was the founder of the People's Republic of China, in 1976, Chinese policy makers became concerned with the rising population numbers. They instituted a One Child Policy to control population growth in 1979. As a result, patriarchal cultural preferences led to girls gradually being exterminated over the years to make way for boys.

Under the One Child Policy, expectant parents were allowed to undertake sex selective abortions if the fetus was female, and according to the Health Ministry of China, 9 million abortions were performed between 2000 and 2014 to contain China's burgeoning population, the majority of which were female.

Sex determination before birth was eventually banned in 1994 and China changed its laws to allow couples to have two children in 2016, and then three children in 2021. However, the country now has a serious female deficit and faces among the world's most severe gender imbalances. The sex ratios at birth increased from 107 in 1982 to 120 in 2005. Since China is a closed society, it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics, but it is estimated that there are currently 60 million more males than females in China, and in a population of 25 million babies born each year, there are 750,000 more males than females. Academicians say that there are between 40 and 60 million "missing girls" in China. These represent girls who were killed in the womb or immediately after birth due to a combination of male child preference and the repressive one child policy.

Tiefenbrun and Edwards (2008) have studied how the enforced practice of having only one child emerged as a glorified expression of duty towards one's country and how interconnected historical, legal and cultural features resulted in discrimination against girls in Chinese society and led to China facing a demographic crisis. Analyses of trends in the rise of imbalanced sex ratios at birth in China have highlighted the key role of the One Child Policy (Bulte, Heenrik, & Zhang 2011) and found that when government policies restricted the size of families, the incentive to terminate the "wrong gender," in this case female, increased. Census data pre and post the One Child Policy confirms this discrimination.

Data from the 2020 census indicates that China has entered a new demographic era which is vastly different from the decade before. China's population grew at a pace significantly slower than that had been anticipated by the Chinese government, averaging 5.7 per thousand over the 10-year period since the 2000 census. This is below the 8–9000 that were the official projections and is significantly lower than the preceding two decades, when it was 14.4 and 11,000. The new census data presents a panoramic picture of China's demographic changes during the first decade of the twenty-first century: characterized by low fertility, elevated SRB's, an aging population, and massive urbanization, which have taken place during China's historical decade of economic boom. These demographic challenges will have profound implications for China as well as the world's social and economic future. (Cai 2015)

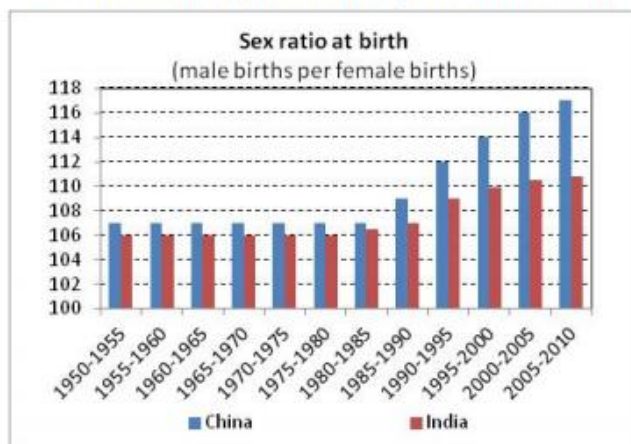


India

India also has an age-old male preference. In the first official census of 1871, there were 5.5 million fewer females than males. This was attributed to poverty and the ingrained neglect of women which led to higher natural death rates. In the absence of reliable data, it took decades for statisticians to decipher this apparent imbalance. In 1981, it was found that the sex ratios at birth had shifted significantly in favor of males. This was due to the fact that in the preceding decades, India strongly increased its recommendations for a two-child per family policy to contain its rising population and this increased female infanticide. It is estimated that due to cultural preferences for boys, over 3000 girls are killed every day in India and 700,000 are aborted every year. According to a study “*Children in India 2012 and 2018 - A Statistical Appraisal*” conducted by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, fewer and fewer girls were born in India between 1960-2011 and this trend is continuing. There are now only 914 girls per 1000 boys between the ages of 0 and 6, and in some states, the sex-ratio has fallen as low as 848 girls for 1000 boys (Jha et al. 2011).

India was very close to the natural sex ratio at birth from 1950 to 1985. However, the SRB's started to increase in the mid-1980s. The last 2011 population census showed that the sex ratio of the child population ages 0 to 6 rose from 108 males per 100 females in 2001 to 109 in 2011, showing a continued preference for sons, and masking the fact that many statistics of female gendercide do not show up in official reporting and there is considerable regional variation in numbers and some areas have SRB's that are much higher. The United Nations estimates that over 50 million girls are now missing from India's population, similar to China. Future estimates paint a grim picture of this imbalanced demographic slide, the effects of which will spill far beyond India.

: Sex Ratio at Birth (male births per female births), 1950-2010

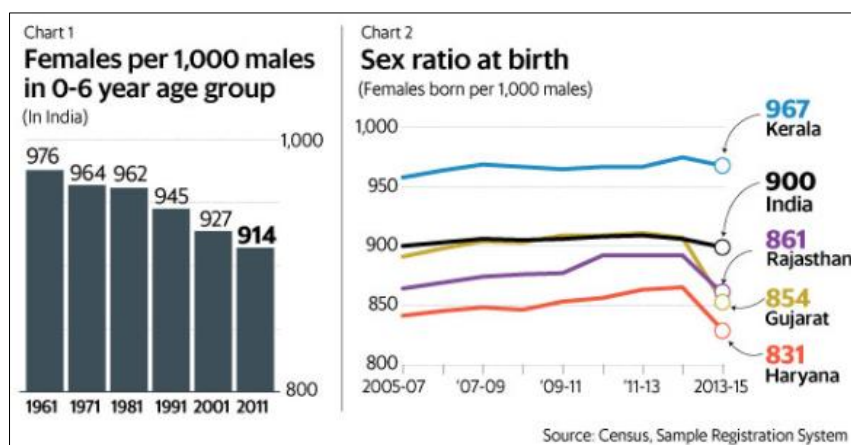


Source: Created by author based on United Nations (2013).

The 2011 population census also shows a more skewed sex ratio in different states. Since India is a large country with state, regional, and religious variation, SRB statistics vary accordingly (Bhalotra 2010). The male to female ratios are more severely imbalanced in rural compared to urban areas and in North India compared to South India. Five of the worst affected states are the northern states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab which have higher bias against female children compared to southern states like Kerala and Karnataka where the literacy rate is higher (John et al 2008). The states of Haryana and Punjab are particularly notorious for their exceedingly disparate sex ratios, at 830 and 846, respectively, and some districts have fallen

into the 770s. The 0-6 year sex ratio is very high and stands at 125 males per 100 females, respectively. There are also notable differences in SRB's among different religious groups, with Sikhs and Hindus having more skewed sex ratio values, while Christian and Muslim groups have SRB's closer to normal. This is because Christians are often pro-life and anti-abortion while Muslims believe in large families and that children are the blessing of Allah.

Also evident through India's two child policy is that the birth ratios of 2nd and later born children are more imbalanced. The sex ratio of the second child if the first was a girl was 716 girls per 1000 boys but if the first child was a boy, the sex ratio skewed more favorably towards girls, at 1140 girls per 1000 boys (Sahni et al 2008). This clearly indicates a preference for a male child if the first is a girl. Part of the reason for this is that India has experienced tremendous economic growth in recent years. People are limiting the size of their families because the cost of raising a child has increased substantially. Cultural discrimination against girls can be intense and feticide allows urban families to preferentially choose the gender of their child.



Other Asian countries

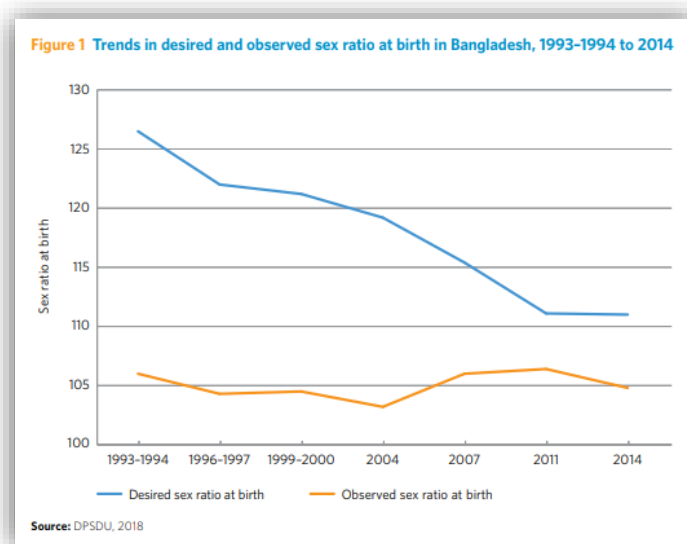
The “masculinization” trend with increasing proportion of males in the population is also being seen in other Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam since the late 1970's (Guilmoto 2015). The trend was not immediately apparent because of lack of reliable data. The gender gap was attributed to the mortality conditions that have overall been more unfavorable towards women in the past century. But it gradually began to emerge that female gendercide was tilting the sex ratio at birth towards boys in a way that had never before been recorded in demographic history.

Vietnam: Vietnam had a one-child or two-children policy in the 1960s to check its rapid population growth. The problem of gender imbalance was first highlighted in 2004 and has rapidly worsened since then with the main cause being people's cultural preference for boys over girls. Vietnam is still heavily influenced by the Confucian values of patriarchy which favors males over females in family matters and social and economic settings. In a study carried out by the General Statistics Office (GSO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), it was found that over the last 35 years in Vietnam, the sex imbalance at birth increased from 106.2 boys per 100 girls in 2000, to 112.8 boys per 100 girls in 2015 and is expected to reach 125 boys per 100 girls by 2020, according to the General Office of Population and Family Planning and Ministry of Health. The SRB gender imbalance was the highest in the Red River Delta area at 115.3 which is a rural area that relies on farming and has

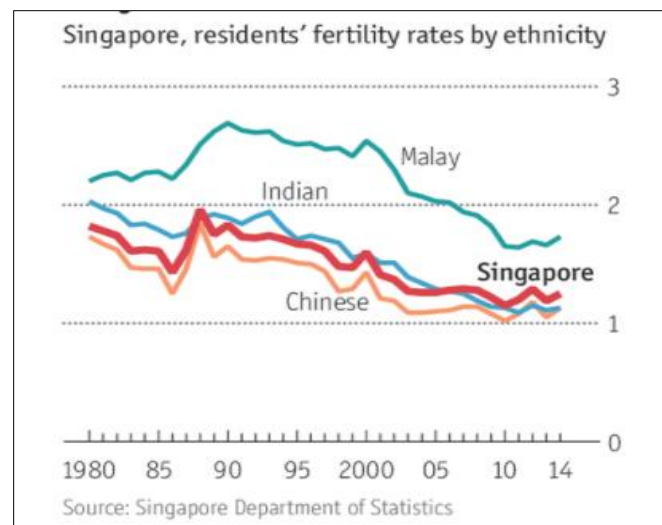
high poverty. According to demographic estimates, Vietnam will have 1.5 million more men than women aged 15-49 by 2034 if the sex ratio at birth imbalance remains unaddressed and by 2050 its population will have a surplus of 12 percent of men under the age of 50.

Pakistan: Pakistan currently has more males than females. In its 1998 census, Pakistan showed an overall sex ratio of 108 males to 100 females. Stephan Klasen, the Chair of Development Economics at the University of Goettingen in Germany who has studied missing women in Pakistan says the numbers are far higher because Pakistan has not had a census in 14 years which typically provides the most current data. "If you look at the world, India and Pakistan and China really stand out," he says. This is because census data from India and China have allowed experts to closely monitor the sex ratios and watch how they change by region and over time. Pakistan rarely faces the same scrutiny as India or China and its lack of concrete data and international reporting has left the problem largely hidden. Pakistan is also an unstable country which is in the news for many other unfavorable headlines so female gendercide gets overlooked. In an academic article from 2003, Klasen estimates that 7.8 percent of Pakistani women are "missing" and in a country with an estimated population of 177 million, those "missing" women and girls probably number in the many millions.

Bangladesh: As the eighth-most populated country in the world with almost 2.2% of the world's population and one of the highest population densities, Bangladesh also shows high numbers of missing women with SRB's as high as 110. Compounding the issue of female gendercide is that women also experience among the highest rates of gender based violence and inequality in the world. The number of cases of infanticide and feticide are underreported because of police inaction against domestic violence. Justice very rarely meted out against the perpetrators because female gendercide is considered a private family matter. In addition, infanticide silently perpetrates due to neglect and insufficient sex-selective healthcare provided for young girls, according to economist Amartya Sen. Bangladesh is one of the Asian countries that shows higher girl malnutrition due to maternal preference for sons and higher resource allocation to them over daughters. As a result, 36% of girls under five years are growth-stunted, while 41% of girls aged 15-19 are undernourished. Infant girl mortality is high and women's health outcomes remain compromised. (Pillai 2015). The total fertility rate in Bangladesh has declined dramatically, from 6.3 children per woman in the mid-1970s to 2.3 children per woman in 2014.



Malaysia and Singapore: In Southeast Asia, Malaysia and Singapore offer an instructive study in contrasts. Gendercide has not occurred in Malaysia because the country holds girls in high esteem and abortion is illegal unless there is official approval. Even though women's rights groups and Planned Parenthood object to government involvement in abortion, the Malaysian government plays an authoritative role—and this is perhaps why Malaysia does not have millions of “missing women.” The stark difference is seen in Singapore, which was once a part of Malaysia (Ziganto 2011). Singapore gained its independence from Malaysia in 1965. It immediately tried to lower its fertility rate because the small size of the country could not handle excessive population growth. Abortion was sanctioned and even encouraged. Parents who had more than two children were punished with no paid maternity leave and higher hospital charges. Couples were encouraged to volunteer for sterilization, and parents who did were reimbursed for the medical costs of delivering their previous babies and their children were given preference in registering for the best schools. Eventually, the Singapore government saw the irreparable damage the falling fertility rates had caused but the damage was done. Singapore now has declining fertility rates which it has been unable to change. The birth rates fell gradually from 22.7 per 1,000 people in 1971 to 8.5 per 1,000 people in 2020. Malaysia, in comparison, has a birth rate of 16.4 per 1,000 people. Though there have been declines since 1971, its economy is thriving, and under current Prime Minister Najib Razak, who is steadfast in his support for women, it hopes to achieve high-income status by 2025. The sobering reality of the majority of countries across South and East Asia is that there are extremely high numbers of missing women that has been caused by female infanticide and feticide.

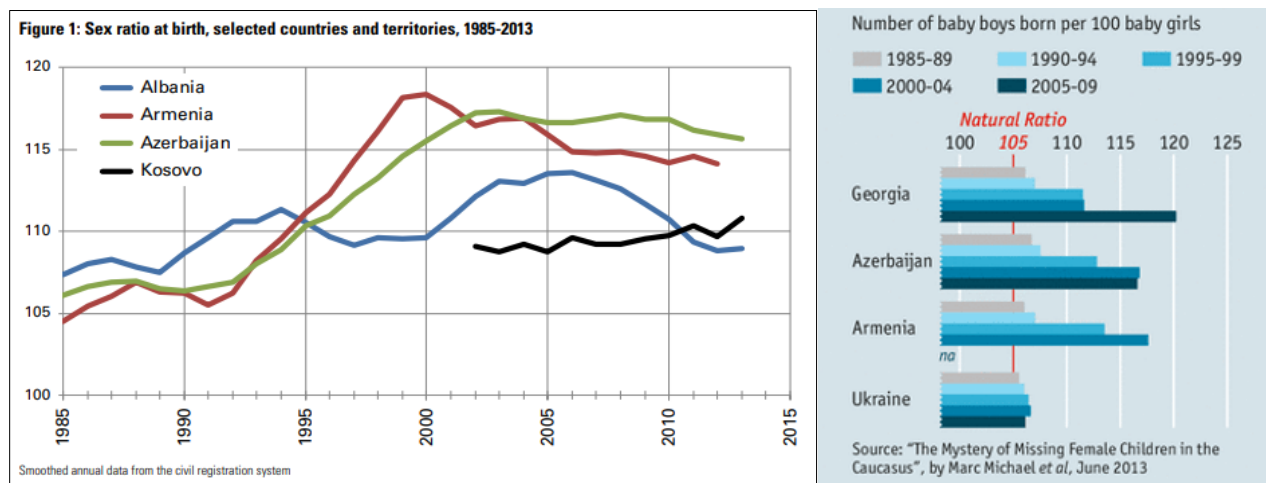


Eastern Europe

Gender imbalances have emerged since the early 1990s in Southeast Europe and the South Caucasus and now constitute a significant challenge to the countries affected (Michael et al). In the South Caucasus, the sex ratio at birth was normal during the socialist period; it was only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 that birth masculinity started to increase in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The SRB's crossed 115 in less than a decade. A critical reason for this was family access to ultrasonography which provided a convenient method to determine the sex of a fetus. Although introduced in the West in the 1970s, ultrasound machines were not widely available in Soviet countries because of a lack of manufacturing capacity and Western restrictions on

the export of technology. Also, under Stalin, access to contraceptives and abortion were strictly limited in the Soviet Union, as part of an effort to increase the birthrate in a country recovering from war and famine. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the skewed sex ratio at birth in the Caucasus coincided with the importation of cheap portable ultrasound machines and the expanded use of diagnostic technology. The Eastern Europe region is especially vulnerable, because in spite of advances from the socialist period, women are still far from achieving equal gender economic standing and political participation.

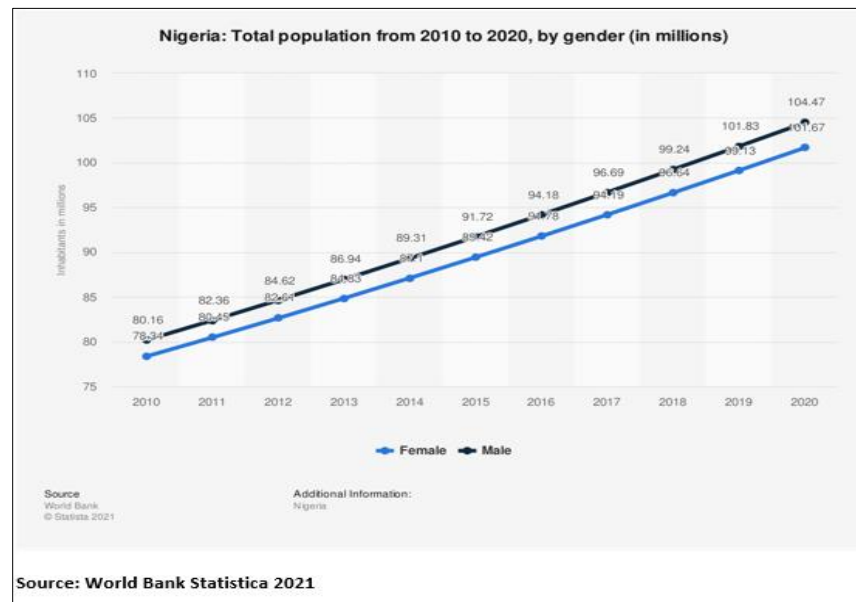
An interesting phenomenon is that there has been a revival of patriarchal family systems in Eastern Europe (Longman 2009). This is happening because of the low fertility and declining birthrates in many countries. Patriarchy is not only a value system in which men dominate but it also reinforces the traditional societal unit of marriage for men and having children, which serves to keep the birthrates high. Many countries also realize that high population is still a powerful method in sustaining their power control in the world. The revival of patriarchal family systems in Eastern Europe coupled with the international migration of male youth for jobs outside their communities, has led to a preference to have more sons. This has quietly increased sex-selective feticide of girls.



The small country of Liechtenstein in Eastern Europe has the world's most imbalanced male-female sex ratios in the world. The western Balkans constitutes a second SRB hot spot, with Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. While there is currently no statistical evidence of gendercide in other countries of Eastern and Central Europe like Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (Stump 2011), an estimated 171,000 girls are already 'missing' in the region, and there has been a growing surplus of men. A challenge in this area is identifying and acknowledging the rise in birth sex ratios due to the lack of adequate statistics and socio-political unrest. Unlike Asia, no comprehensive research or census attempt has been made thus far to assess the issue of female population decline and prenatal sex selection is seen as a minor problem reflecting private family decisions rather than wider social objectives. The numbers of missing women are likely to grow quickly in future and this requires rapid intervention before the demographic impact becomes unmanageable.

Africa

Sub-Saharan African countries also show declining female populations and statistically higher proportions of missing women as observed by Anderson and Ray (2010). Nigeria and Tunisia have experienced a rapid increase in their SRB's. Nigeria has three major tribes – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, and they all have male preference. A woman will often keep having children until she produces a male heir because her husband can marry another woman due to the polygamous system. Nigeria witnessed a change from 103 boys per 100 girls in 1996-2008 to a rise to 106 boys per 100 girls in 2009-2014. Moreover, about 1.2 million abortions occur annually in Nigeria despite restrictive abortion laws. Similarly, Tunisia has 107 boy births to 100 girls and has the highest SRB among all of the countries in Africa.



While gendercide is lowering the numbers of girls, the higher mortality is also compounded by poverty and severe health inequalities for girls and women, their deliberate neglect, and a higher incidence of HIV/AIDS, malaria, maternal mortality during childbirth, and post female genital mutilation infections. It can often be difficult to demonstrate a direct link between the numbers of missing women in these countries due to medical illnesses or infanticide. Also, countries like Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya follow Islam as their official religion and gendercide reporting is clouded by the severe gender inequality and restricted women's rights. The notable finding in Africa is that "missing women" are spread over the entire age spectrum. Injuries account for a suspiciously large total of female deaths due to the high gender-based violence against women and girls. Gendercide is being quietly practiced and noted in lower number of female children compared to males, but is under-reported (Egbetayo 2019).

United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States

There is only a small body of literature, but in examining the statistics of developed countries, disturbing trends emerge about female gendercide. Global immigration is carrying cultural norms across the world and gendercide is quietly happening in industrialized and developed nations, but not receiving the same highlighted attention as

Southeast Asia. In the United Kingdom, a census survey of data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that the sex ratio of second and third-born children was biased in favor of boys in Asian communities. The SRB's were skewed. Dubuc and Coleman (2007) did a focused study among immigrant populations in the UK and documented the upward trend in SRB's among India-born mothers from the 1980s, from 1.04 during 1969–1989 to 1.14 for third and later births after 1990. These figures closely mimic the numbers in India and coincided with the increased availability and affordability of prenatal gender-selection technologies.

Further research done by Adamos et al (2013) comparing Indian and Pakistani immigrants and English households showed that gendercide was taking place on a large enough scale to account for between 2500 to 4700 “missing girls” annually within the ethnic groups of Pakistani, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indian, China, and Nepal who were living in England and Wales. A BBC investigation published in September 2018 revealed evidence that new NIPT pre-natal tests were being used on a widespread basis to determine the sex of babies. It found several websites offering baby gender tests for around £170 and women discussing the intense pressure they faced to undergo testing and then sex-selective abortions if the fetus was female.

The research from Canada confirms gendercide is happening there as well. Since the 1950's, there has been a lot of immigration. Boroughs which have Asian cultural communities are registering fewer numbers of girls being born. In Ontario, a 2016 study of the variations in male–female sex ratios among births between Canadian and Indian mothers found that by the third birth, 138 boys were born to Indian-born mothers for every 100 girls, and by the fourth birth, 166 boys were born to every 100 girls. The SRB's are so distorted that they cannot be explained by natural causes and the reason for these skewed numbers is sex-selective abortion due to cultural norms. Over the past 20 years, there are 4,472 missing girls in Canada as a result of a preference for males amongst Indian immigrants (Kennedy Institute of Ethics 2014).

Sex-selective abortion and gendercide is happening in the U.S. as well. In the first child, male-female sex ratios are 1.05 for Caucasian-Americans and 1.08 for Asian-Americans, both of which are in normal range. However, in subsequent children, Columbia University researchers found that if the first child was a girl, the sex ratio for the second child was 112 favoring males, and if the first two children were girls, the ratio for the third was 130 favoring males. In contrast, the sex ratios for white Americans in the United States stayed normal (Almond and Edlund 2008). What is significant about these statistics is that these SRB's are comparable to the highly skewed rates that are found in India, China, and Korea. The percentages are consistent with over 2,000 “missing” Chinese and Indian girls in the United States between 1991 and 2004 and the numbers are continuing to steadily climb (Abreyava 2009). Missing women is clearly becoming a phenomenon of the developed world.

The United Nations statistics reveal that globally there are significantly fewer females than males and there are at least 61 million fewer girls than boys under the age 14. The populations of girls between the ages of 0 and 4 are rapidly decreasing in almost every nation at much higher rates than those of boys and the decrease is projected to continue until 2050 (Inglehart 2003). In India alone, selective abortion could lead to 6.8 million fewer girls being born by 2030 (Dhillon 2020). What is of mounting concern is that the true statistics of gendercide can never be fully accurate – partly due to old census counts and mostly because the deaths from infanticide and feticide happen quietly and are not reported. Mounting evidence suggests that the problem of female gendercide is not abating on its own, it is spreading globally and significant cultural, communicational, ethical, and legal pressure is needed to ensure that no girls' life continues to be taken simply because she is perceived to be of the wrong gender.

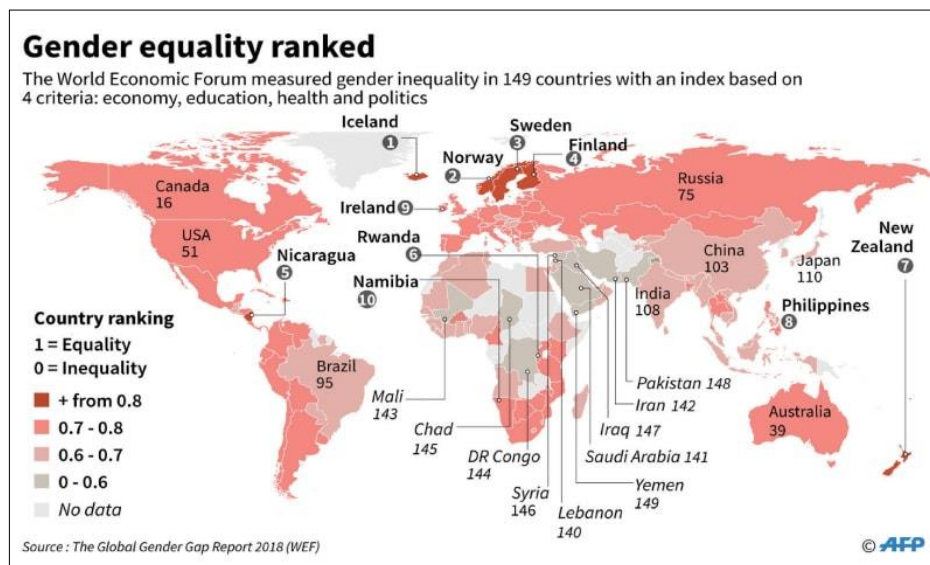
III. CAUSES OF FEMALE GENDERCIDE

Female gendercide is a complex issue in which patriarchy, poverty, societal problems like dowry, government family restriction policies, lack of education, and culturally ingrained preferences for a male offspring lead to a devaluation of the girl-child and therefore the decision to terminate a life. Gendercide is linked to a broader culture of gender inequality and discrimination against women, and is rooted in the belief that a girl offers less to her family in terms of social and economic advantage while a boy offers more.

A) Patriarchy

Many communities across the globe have patriarchal societies in which the males have higher status, political leadership, property rights, social privilege, and power. Patriarchy originated in the earliest times when the men went out to hunt while the women nurtured the home. With advancement of society, men gravitated into dominant roles of economic and political life while women remained excluded. In a patriarchal set up, a man is considered central while a woman is peripheral. These cultures traditionally place great value on producing a male heir because there is a perception that a son has more value and recognition (Singh 2016). The primacy of male children is woven into the cultural and religious structure and the birth of a son is considered to elevate a family's social standing. Patriarchal belief systems place the roles of women in a position of disadvantage. They feed gender inequality, spill over into unequal treatment of girls and women, and are a causative factor in domestic violence.

Patriarchy refers to male domination in both the private and public arena. Within the home, it reflects in girls receiving unequal treatment, nutrition, healthcare, and education, and women doing all the household labor, having limited say in financial matters, facing domestic violence, or not receiving inheritance and owning property. State policies also affect equity of sexes reflecting in imbalances in pay and lack of representation in government and public policy. (Das Gupta 2004) When male-dominated family power is doubly reinforced by a country's male-dominated social systems, laws, and resource allocation, the control over women becomes part of public patriarchy. This combination creates a dominant system which keeps women firmly in a subordinate position. (Chow and Berheide 2004) Communities rooted in patriarchy are more often linked to female gendercide because of the devaluation of girls and the perception that their status of girls is lower than boys.



i) Patriarchy in China: In China, women's subordination is deeply ingrained and was propagated by Confucian philosophy and teachings which were compiled in the book *Analects* and impacted the design of Chinese social structure, government, culture and values throughout history (Hinton 2016). The focus was on the traditional role of the father as being the primary leader and decision maker of the family. In the hierarchy of traditional Chinese cultural family life, the father and sons take prominence over the mother and daughters.

During the Mao Zedong era (1949-1978) the Communist Party sought to challenge Confucian beliefs and improve the social position of women and promote their entry into the work force. But inequities prevailed because women worked mostly in low-level jobs as factory workers; jobs which were prone to exploitation due to lack of scrutiny and which provided inexpensive labor essential to the success of China's free-market economy in the global manufacturing market. Men kept the privileged higher-paying primary jobs while women had low-paying secondary jobs and also the "double burden" of looking after the home.

Women in China also face significant pressure from their families to marry and those who do not marry by their late twenties risk being perceived as flawed, and stigmatized as *sheng nu* - leftover women (Zhang et al 2014). Once married, women often leave the workforce because of traditional expectations to look after the home. When the One Child Policy came into force, ingrained societal patriarchal mindsets and lack of female economic empowerment set the stage for female gendercide.

ii) Patriarchy in India: A distinctive form of patriarchy unique to India has been caste patriarchy with different classes of people and rules formulated by the Brahmans who form the highest caste in the social hierarchy. Caste patriarchy is interlinked with gender patriarchy. It propagates the constructed ideology of *pativrata wives* and *stridharma* (womanly duty) in which high caste women aspire to virtuosity, fidelity, and motherhood as the highest form of self-expression. They have the responsibility of maintaining the honor of the home which headed by men. The influential Indian film industry also feeds patriarchal values and typically portrays female characters as "good" only if they have submissive qualities.

The patriarchal mindset that Indian women face feeds into gender inequality. Often, social conditioning leads women to accept this as the norm. Over the centuries, efforts to promote the rights of women have included abolishing *sati* which was a wife's death by burning on her dead husband's funeral pyre, abolishing child marriage, ending the ostracization of widows and the requirement that they wear white, establishing that girls are not impure during menstruation, and promoting women's education and their legal rights to own property (Nair 2020). While the situation is improving in bigger cities, Indian women still have a long way to go in fighting the social systems that prevent them from establishing parity with men (Nair 2020)

iii) Patriarchy in Eastern Europe: Europe and many Western nations have traditionally been patriarchal. Part of this stems from Biblical patriarchy, a set of Christian beliefs that emphasize that the husband and father is the head of the household, that there are distinct gender roles for men and women as part of the created order; that male leadership in the home carries over into the church and civil spheres; and that women are created to be a helper to her husband, keeper of the home, and bearer of children in the God-ordained command "to be fruitful and multiply." (Vision Forum Ministries 2007).

From the origins of patriarchy in religion and antiquity, there was an institutionalization of father-centered patriarchy during the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. In the later Middle Ages and early modern times, patriarchy in Europe involved economic development and the rise of capitalism. Industrialization created craft guilds and opportunities for work and income for women. Though they were paid less than men, it gave women greater independence which was unacceptable to political institutions. They began passing laws to control women

by restricting their working conditions to be under males and changed tax laws. Essentially capitalism and patriarchy worked together and heightened gender distinction, a process termed a "dual-systems approach" (Duncan 1994). Religious institutions also worked to reinforce patriarchy and emphasized that God had created marriage and families as the best way to provide moral discipline. Men were to lead these families while women were to be pious and obedient. This served to make patriarchy appear both a God-given and natural part of life.

During the seventeenth century, some thinkers began to question the basis of patriarchy. In his book *On the Equality of the Two Sexes* (1673), François Poulain de la Barre argued that men and women have equal capability and any differences are inherited prejudices. The nineteenth century saw the beginning of social movements to dismantle patriarchal structures; women were given rights to vote and divorce. While authoritarian regimes such as Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and Stalin's Soviet Union kept patriarchy perpetuated by making use of father imagery in their role as head of state, it continued to decline after these leaders died.

However, despite advances from the socialist period, women in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region are still far from achieving equal economic and political participation. With the declining birthrates and rising inequalities in income, patrilineal families have traditionally proved to be society's most solid institutions. This has led to a revival of patriarchy in recent times and has fueled the rise of female gendercide due to preference for boys.

iv) Patriarchy in Africa: Sub-Saharan Africa has historically been patriarchal for centuries. Gender inequity is pervasive in numerous facets of life. The traditional subordination of woman in Africa was exacerbated by the European colonization of Africa in the 1800's. They wanted to gain the economic resources of Africa and brought their patriarchal value systems along. Africa also has endemic practices of Female Genital Mutilation which has affected over 200 million girls and reinforces male domination. It is seen as a source of honor and can lead to social exclusion, if not performed. The practice is rooted in gender inequality, control of women and girls, and traditional ideas about purity, modesty and beauty. Though condemned as a human rights violation, it still continues and affects 3 million girl annually, leaving them scarred and with ongoing medical problems. (Mpinga et al 2016)

In Africa, agriculture represents a major area of female economic activity. The United Nations data indicates that 60-70 percent of food production and 50 percent of animal husbandry is carried out by rural women. But while women provide the largest portion of agricultural labor, they do not benefit from an equitable land tenure system or have land ownership rights and only 13 percent of African women 20-49 years have sole land ownership. (Ghebru 2019) This leaves women dependent on men and limits their economic and political progress. If they look for employment opportunities in cities to improve their life, opportunities are restricted because women do not receive or have the same education levels as men. In Africa, the gender gap in education for women is very wide - of the 18 countries with fewer than 90 girls for every 100 boys enrolled, 13 are in sub-Saharan Africa and 16.7 million girls do not attend school.

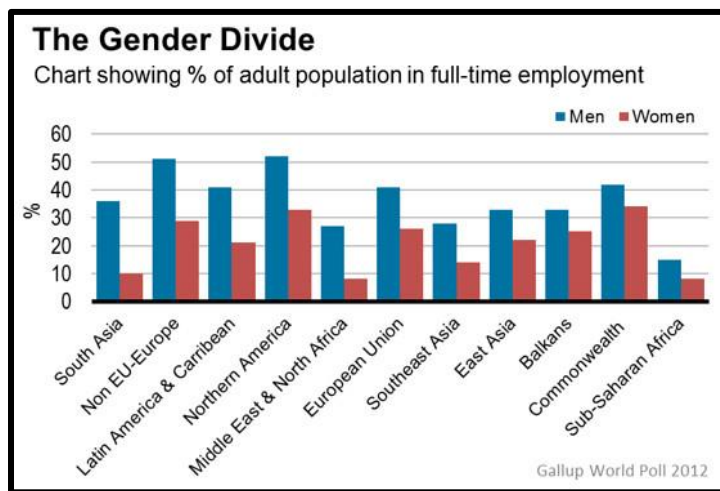
The state of women's health in Africa is also dismal. Almost half of the women die after childbirth, the highest of all maternal mortality statistics in the world. As of 2005, Africa had the highest maternal mortality ratio at 78 deaths per 10,000 births, twenty times greater than in Europe. As many as 3,000 African women die every week from treatable complications of pregnancy and childbirth (World Bank, 2008). They also face higher rates of HIV, AIDS, malaria, and other infections and their medical treatment remains sub-par. There is fundamental interconnectedness between lack of women's education and healthcare and gender inequality. Overall, African rural women face patriarchal subordination and their ability to fully realize their potential is hampered due to lack

of access to employment, productive resources, education, health status, and male-dominated family control. These factors feed into female gendercide.

B) Poverty and economic preference for sons

Poverty is another major determinant of female gendercide. In poor countries with huge populations and limited means, another child is an expensive burden and another mouth to feed. Families, especially impoverished ones, kill their baby girls to not only spare them a life of misery and starvation, but also to save themselves from further impoverishment. Boys are considered an economic asset because they contribute to the family income financially while girls do not. In many communities, males are the primary breadwinners and bring in higher income. There are large gender gaps in workforce representation of women and lower pay (Ufret 2014). Also, in rural households which make up almost half of the Chinese and Indian populations, farming is the major source of income and males are valuable for performing agricultural work and manual labor. Poverty forces families to choose and place an economic asset value on children: males represent a potential positive financial gain for the families while females do not. This leads to a preference for boys over girls.

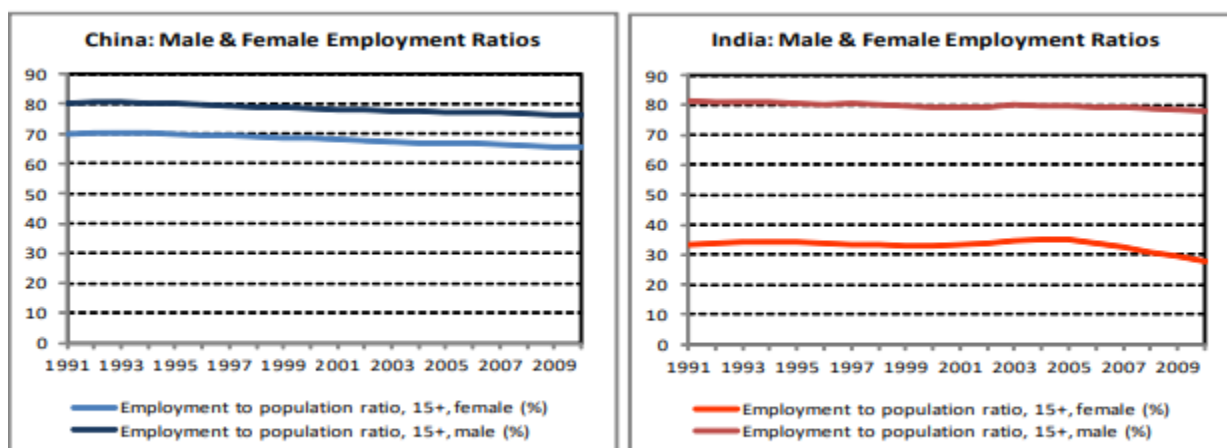
Poverty and gender are concepts that have historically been treated in an independent fashion. However, gender can be a strong factor in influencing poverty and increasing women's vulnerability to it. From a gender perspective, unpaid labor is a key concept in the analysis of poverty. By assigning the domestic sphere to women, they face an inequality of opportunities: of education and training, access to high-paid employment, and restricted participation and decision making in political, economic and social policies. This jeopardizes their autonomy, keeps them dependent, perpetuates gender inequality, and further devalues the importance of women. When the cultural and financial issues collide, gendercide perpetuates.



i) Poverty in India and China: In 2012, a documentary "It's a Girl: The Three Deadliest Words in the World" explored the problem of gendercide in India and China. In poor and rural areas, girls are found buried or discarded in fields, suffocated by wet towels over their mouths, or poisoned by plant sap. Mothers shared their stories of poverty which had caused them to kill their female children. The announcement of a child's birth should be a reason for joy and celebration, but in many countries it becomes a death sentence. India has a population of more

than 1 billion, of which 20 percent have been deemed undernourished and impoverished. Understandably, poverty then not only becomes a leading dynamic in female infanticide, but with India's current demography will also make its eradication difficult (Gray 2010). Similarly, in China, at least 82 million people live below the poverty line. While China has made significant progress in recent years in reducing poverty, and three-quarters of global poverty reduction between 1990 and 2005 happened there, it still has significant strides to make. One in ten Chinese earn an annual income of only 2,300 yuan (\$376), and over 6 million Chinese do not have access to fuel to heat their homes and cook. Additionally, men have greater education and employment opportunities compared to women in both India and China, which makes male offspring far more desirable to parents.

Male and Female Employment Population Ratios for China and India, 1991-2010



Source: Created by World Bank (2013)

ii) Poverty in Europe: Over the last decade, the term 'feminization of poverty' is being more frequently used because the proportion of women in poverty is increasing. Gender inequalities are monitored in the EU through the Gender Equality Index and it will take at least 60 years to reach gender equality. According to the 2020 Index, with a score of 67.9 out of 100 points, the equality index score has increased by only 4.1 points since 2010 and 0.5 points since 2017. This gender gap in poverty is present in all countries except Finland. While Europe is indisputably one of the world's leaders when it comes to women's rights, the rate of progress towards achieving gender equality has been slow. The reasons are numerous, such as lower employment of women, wage gaps, intra-household distribution of resources guided by patriarchal values, unequal access to property, career interruptions due to lack of childcare, and less access to education. (European Institute for Gender Equality 2020)

Factors that generate higher poverty of women are also rooted in unequal power relations and these are prominently displayed in the key institutions of societies: political institutions (the EU share of women in national parliaments is only 22%), economic organizations (there are only 16% of women among EU companies' board members), and private households (women perform 77.1% of all domestic activities in the EU). These power relations are reflective of the societal norms and result in discrimination (Malgesini et al 2017). With the revival of patriarchy in Eastern Europe, female gendercide has increased sex-selective abortion. This is slightly different from India and China where female infanticide prevails in rural areas. This is much harder to get away with in the Europe Union, so feticide done quietly after ultrasound determination happens more frequently.

iii) Poverty in Africa: The incidence of women poverty is particularly marked in Sub-Saharan African countries. It is rooted in the interaction of three major factors: weak governance, traditional restrictions on women property rights, and violent civil conflict which has had a severe negative impact on the welfare of women in Africa in contemporary times. While African women's contribution to economic development is substantial, their quality of life is worse, especially in rural areas. The economic vulnerability of poor African women lies in weakly defined property rights to productive assets like land or cattle, even though women are the main cultivators and workers. In the event of divorce, women are stripped of the right to use their husband's land in most African countries, which they may have cultivated for years and which is their primary source of income. Weak governance interacts with traditional patriarchal structures to perpetuate female poverty by denying women equal rights. (McPherson 2010).

C) Family Balancing

Conversely, even though poverty is a factor in female gendercide - gendercide is disturbingly also prevalent in educated and affluent families. China and India are the two fastest growing economies in Asia. They have had average annual GDP growth rates of about 10 percent and 8 percent over the last few decades and have flourishing economies. This has led to a growing middle class. However, it is still mostly lower middle-income because both countries still have a long way to go in reducing poverty. With the high costs of living and women being more educated in cities, there is an emphasis on small families, fewer children, and better quality of child rearing, because the cost of raising a child and providing for education are substantial. Studies show that parents try to select and balance the sex composition of their family, especially if the first born is a daughter. The societal son preference shows up prominently in successive children (Zhu, Lu, Hesketh 2009). In South Korea, SRB's for second order births soar to 120 and in further higher orders it is 185. These abnormal SRB's are skewed by behavioral factors rooted in parental preference for at least one son. (Cole and Banister 1994)

In larger cities, feticide replaces infanticide because affluent families are able to afford ultrasound diagnostics and manipulate sex selective terminations. Poverty does not act as an instigator for gendercide in the upper and middle class, instead culture acts as an instigator. Ultrasounds, which have a 99% accuracy in determining the sex of a baby, have played a large role in propagating female feticide globally. As more women have careers and enter the workforce, families are opting to have children later in life and infertility is increasing. Assisted reproduction technologies (ART) are being used to combat this issue and some families are turning to ART not just to circumvent infertility, but to consciously to shape their families and the sex of their children.

Sex selective feticide cuts across borders. It happens not just in Asian countries but also in Europe, Canada, the UK, and United States. Pre-natal sex detection techniques are continually improving and technologies like chorionic villus sampling (CVS) and Pre-Implantation Genetic Screening (PGS) can detect the sex of a child as early as 9 weeks, leading to even sooner terminations without guilt. In nations where gender selection is banned, people travel to places where it is legal to do Pre-Implantation Genetic Screening and where cost is cheap and laws are too weakly enforced to prevent use of ART for sex selection. People from Australia, Singapore, India, and China are traveling to fertility clinics in Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam to choose their babies' gender through in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD). The Fertility Institute located in Los Angeles claims to run the largest sex-selection program in the world. The medical director of its gender-selection program, Dr. Jeffrey Steinberg, states that half of the patients come from international countries for the procedure. A dark form of "reproductive" tourism is emerging. It is spreading the global reach of gendercide and will increase the number of "missing girls" as affluent families try to balance their families through sex-selective abortion. (Macklin 2010)

D) Old Age Support

In many Asian cultures, particularly India and China, a boy looks after his parents in their old age and is considered an old age support and investment for aging parents. Sons are the equivalent of a 401K retirement plan while daughters are not because they leave parents after their marriage to join and care for their husband's family. There is a saying in South Asian cultures, "bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another's courtyard." Investing in daughters is perceived to be investing in assets for another family.

Sons not only provide financial support, but they also provide the day-to-day basic physical assistance that elderly parents require as they age. Unlike Western nations, retirement homes are not common in India and China. It is considered a dishonor of filial duty if sons do not look after their parents. Asian families have strong family bonds and families live together as large extended families. This encourages family operations to thrive as multiple members participate. Also, with increasing urbanization, rising house prices, and cost of living, it allows families to help each other - women do not have to work and if they do, grandparents take care of the children, and in return, as grandparents age, there is familial support for them (Biswas 2020). However, traditionally parents live with sons and never with their daughters, which is considered an unnatural social norm.

Sons also carry on the family name and extend the family lineage. In the Indian traditional system, the bloodline passes from father to son while a daughter's lineage mingles with her husband's family after she marries and is lost. In many cultures, having a boy in the family is mandatory to carry the legacy of the family line, otherwise it is lost. There is also a religious component. A son or a male must kindle the funeral pyre and fulfill the last rites for a parent so the soul can pass to heaven and achieve salvation (Jalan 2017).

Similarly, China has a strict patrilineal family system in which the child belongs to the father's lineage and there is responsibility on male offspring for cultural and religious functions (Li 2007). Son preference in rural China is also affected by traditional folk religion and Confucius philosophy and it is considered that sons honor the ancestors. There is emphasis on filial piety, parental respect and care, and continuing the family line. It is considered that a family's genealogy ends if there are no sons (Teon 2016)

"May you be blessed with a thousand sons" is a common saying in India, and "With one son you have a descendant, but even with 10 daughters you have nothing" is a popular Confucian saying in Chinese society. This tacitly feeds into the greater importance that is placed on producing a boy. The predominance of boys in providing old age support for parents feeds the devaluation of girls which in turn perpetuates female gendercide.

E) Dowry

Dowry is a transfer of parental property, gifts, or money upon the marriage of a daughter. The custom is most prevalent in cultures that are strongly patrilineal and is seen in Asian countries, the Middle East, and Africa.

i) India – the custom of dowry began because girls traditionally do not inherit family wealth. Instead, families give gifts as compensation when a girl is married. The custom originated in pre-colonial British India and was a mark of love and type of inheritance to help the bride start her new life. However, over time, dowry expectations have set in and demands have increased from groom's families. Now dowry extortion in the form of cash, cars, gold, a house, and expensive gifts is a huge expense when a girl is married (Monani et al 2017).

The dowry system was made illegal in 1961 but the custom still prevails and is seen as too entrenched in the Indian culture to be unchangeable. Boys have an unofficial rate card which is their worth measured by the amount of dowry that can be commanded in the marriage marketplace. Dowry has morphed into a system that barterers

women and promotes violence and oppression. Harassment and murders happen when grooms and their families are unhappy with the amount given and the incidents are difficult to prosecute because they are disguised as accidents or suicides. Over 20 dowry deaths are reported each day in India and many more go unreported (Gupta 2020). A girl is considered a huge liability for this reason. It costs a family money first to raise her and then provide a dowry later when she marries. Many abortion clinics have a sign, “spend 3000 rupees now but save 300,000 later,” as a way to encourage feticide and prevent having to pay a dowry.

ii) China: Dowry called *Jiàzhuāng* was common in different historic periods and continued through modern history. It ranged from land, jewelry, money, and household items, and was an inheritance for daughters because family property was reserved for son (Brown 2010). However, with the declining females and increase in unmarried males who are facing a marriage squeeze and unable to find wives, dowry has undergone a change now. Males, especially in rural areas, are having to pay a bride price to gain a wife.

iii) Pakistan: Its Muslim community considers dowry as an obligatory Islamic practice and over 95 percent of marriages involve dowry. With 2000 dowry-related deaths annually, Pakistan has the highest number of dowry death rates per 100,000 women in the world (Afzal 2009). The pressure among Pakistanis to provide a large dowry results in brides' families going into debt. Sometimes, marriages are arranged between first cousins to keep dowry within the family.

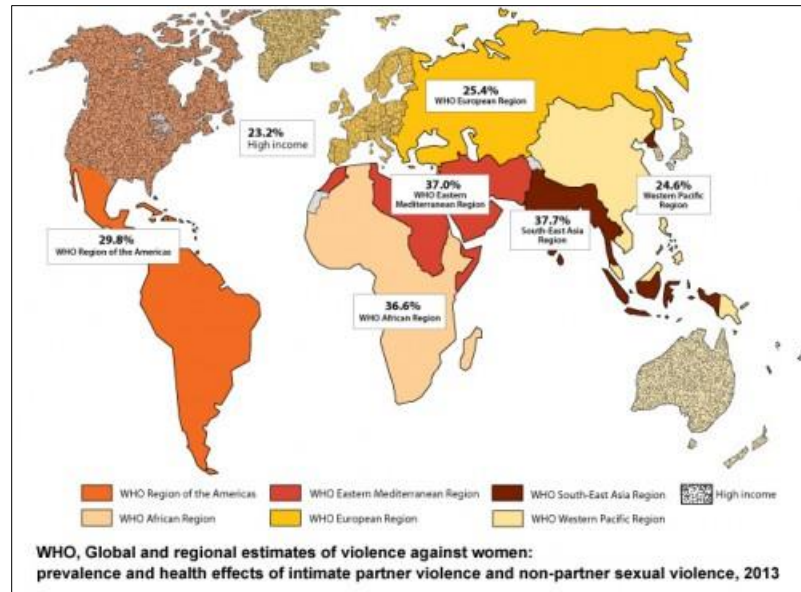
iv) Bangladesh: The original custom was bride price, called *pawn*, where the groom's family made a payment to the bride's parents. This was gradually replaced by dowry *joutuk* in the 1960s as the middle class grew. It is now a growing extortion problem in Bangladesh. Between 1-3 brides per 100,000 women die annually because of dowry violence, and the police receive thousands of complaints about domestic abuse related to insufficient dowry. While in India, dowry killings happen by burning, in Bangladesh, it is frequently by stabbing, poison, or acid attacks which leave women scarred physically and psychologically for life. Sociologist Sarah White says that dowry is no longer a gift, it is a means to support groom's family advancement and their greed. (White 2007).

v) Other countries: Dowry is also seen in Afghanistan *jehez*; Persia *jahīzīeh*; Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan *çeyiz*; Bosnia, Serbia, and the Caucasus *oprema*; Egypt *gehaz*, and Africa. While it has different names in different countries, the underlying tenet of barter remains the same. The value of dowry varies according to social class, family wealth and regional customs, but it cuts across strata and can be a major cause of conflict – weddings can be cancelled if groom's families are unhappy with the amount given; it can affect how girls are treated in their new marital homes; parents frequently arrange marriages early and for under-age daughters to end their economic responsibility; and government agencies report significant domestic violence due to dowry disputes. Dowry is a major source of stress for parents of girls and is a large contributory factor to female gendercide.

F) Gender based violence (GBV)

Girls are also considered more vulnerable to social evils. Gender-based violence is a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime. It is considered to be one of the most rampant human rights violations against women and girls in the world according to the United Nations Population Fund Report (2016). Gender violence can take different forms in different parts of the world based on cultural perspectives on gender equality. Manifestations include beatings, acid attacks, honor killings, sex trafficking, female genital mutilation, war-related sexual assault crimes, dowry deaths, and marriage abuse and are all common problems in patriarchal communities. Gender violence can be so deeply embedded in tradition that millions of women consider violence as their normal lot in life, especially if it is domestic home related. GBV is prevalent in all countries and is an tremendous obstacle to the achievement of equality and development and peace in nations.

The demographic deficit of 150 million women implies that every year 1.5- 3 million girls and women are killed through gender-based violence. Globally, women are more likely to die due to male violence than cancer, accidents, malaria, and war combined, and for each female killed, there are scores more left physically and psychologically maimed for life. Malala Yousufzai is a glaring example of gender based violence.

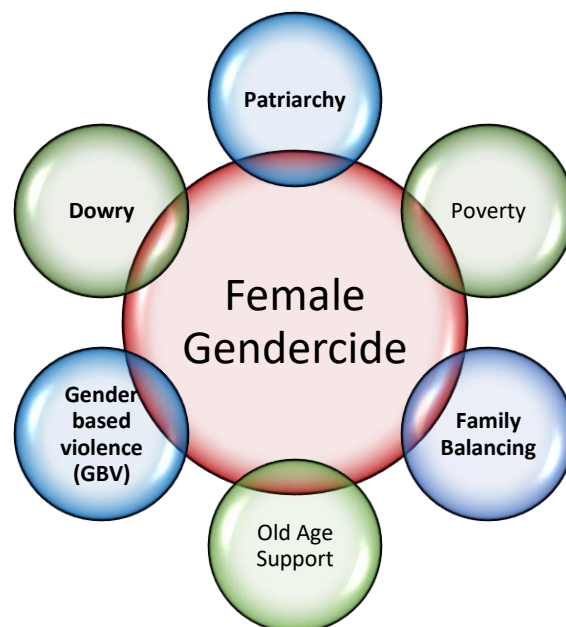


- The most common form of GBV is domestic or intimate partner violence and over 40-70 percent of female murders happen by husbands or boyfriends within ongoing abusive relationships. Women are often made to feel inadequate if they give birth to a daughter rather than a male heir. They resign themselves to oppression, being demeaned, or facing the threat of divorce, or their husband seeking a second wife.
- In India and Pakistan, thousands of women are victims of dowry deaths; killed by groom's families because of insufficient dowry.
- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that 5,000 women die every year in honor killings. These are girls or women who are killed because they are considered to have dishonored their families, even through no fault like being raped, falling in love with a boy of a perceived wrong community, or wearing modern clothes like jeans and skirts.
- Acid attacks by spurned men leave thousands of women disfigured for life. Acid attacks also happen to girls going to school in an attempt to prevent them from gaining an education and achieving independence.
- The World Health Organization estimates that globally one in five women will be the victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. In many countries, agriculture accounts for 70 percent of employment and since rural women and girls are responsible for fetching water, fuel and fodder, and carrying produce to markets, this compromises their personal safety and places them at increased risk.
- UNICEF statistics indicate that 100 to 130 million women around the world have been genitally mutilated, and 3 million more girls face female genital mutilation every year.
- The number of women sold into prostitution annually is staggering. Profits from the flourishing sex slavery market are US\$ 7-12 billion per year. Sex trafficking worldwide grew by 50 percent between 1995 to 2000 and the United Nations Population Fund estimates that 2 million new girls between 5-15 years are brought into the sex market every year.

- HIV and AIDS affects women and girls harshly. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women are three times more likely to be HIV/AIDS infected than men, due to their inability to refuse unwanted sex and becoming victims of sexual trafficking and prostitution. Over 60 per cent of HIV positive youth between the ages of 15 and 24 around the world are women.
- The feminization of poverty due to denied education and healthcare opportunities contributes to women's economic vulnerability to gender-based violence because a woman cannot leave a violent situation if she has no means to support herself.
- During global armed conflicts and political civil unrest, women face marginalization, threats to their personal safety, and the burden of ensuring their own survival and caring for their children. Refugee and displaced women are particularly at risk of gender-based violence, and abduction, exploitation, poverty, and illness. Women become vulnerable to violence from outside the family when their traditional community protection is disrupted. Gender-based violence is seen perpetrated in war and conflict-ridden political situations, especially in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Sudan (McPherson 2010).

The realities of poverty and gender inequality result in “diminished citizenship” of women and leads to gender-based violence. GBV has a power dimension, stemming from unequal power relationships between men and women. It is violence directed specifically against a woman because she is a woman. Female gendercide forms a component of gender based violence. It happens in communities where there is gender inequality and women are regarded as inferior or powerless.

Parents worry about bringing a girl into the world for the reasons of gender-based violence, and the life of misery and suffocation that she may experience because she is female. They would much rather prefer to have a male child. When all these factors are taken as one big whole, it creates a society where a girl child is devalued. In many South Asian countries, the birth of a daughter is usually regarded as an unwelcome event, an occasion of sorrow and mourning. A male child carries more value and is given higher preference and it is when all these circumstances collide that a cavalier decision is taken to exterminate one gender over the other.



IV. CONSEQUENCES OF GENDERCIDE

The unchecked killing of baby girls has serious consequences in the countries where gendercide is happening. Newton's Third Law of Motion states, 'that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.' Blinded by the desire for male offspring, people are often ignorant of the disaster they are unwittingly creating by indulging in female infanticide and feticide. The after-effects have been fatal and far-reaching. Thousands of "missing girls" from populations is not a singular event that can remain in isolation. Entire communities and nations face the brunt of the repercussions.

A) Imbalanced sex ratios: The ongoing killing of girls changes the normal ratio of males to females and causes their sex ratios to become imbalanced. The effects of gendercide are seen most starkly in India and China because of their large populations but other countries are also showing similar declining male-female sex ratios. With each passing decade in India, the number of girls per 1000 boys has steadily fallen. In 1981 there were 962 girls for 1000 boys, but in 2011 the sex ratio had plummeted to a low of 914 girls for 1000 boys. In some states, it is below 858 girls per 1000 boys. In China, the ratio is much worse: 848 girls for 1000 boys. Studies have pointed out that a significant adult male surplus after 2020 is unavoidable because of the previous excess of male births since 1980. These excess men are likely to constitute 12-15% of the adult male population in India and China, which amounts to almost 30 million young surplus males (Ebenstein and Sharygin 2009)

B) Increased crime and trafficking: With fewer available females, the surviving ones must fend off unwanted attention from other males. Crime and violence against women and girls increases. Although there is not always a direct relationship, it is found that increased numbers of young unmarried males who lack stable social bonds plays a crucial role in the prevalence of violent crime within society (Hvistendahl 2011). This in turn creates a threat to societal stability and national security. Many crimes against women are not reported to the police because of system apathy, fear of retaliation, loss of family reputation, and a police and legal system that offers little protection.

With less numbers of girls, there is an increase in men turning to the sex trade and female trafficking and HIV rises. Human trafficking is one of the most profitable businesses in the world, earning US\$ 7-12 billion annually. Each year, two million new girls between 5-15 years are brought into the sex market. Local orphanages in China and India have many discarded healthy young girls whose families did not want them and these innocent victims become caught up in trafficking rings involving a corrupt web of politicians and government agencies. Sub-Saharan Africa is a major global player in trafficking because traffickers target and exploit countries with high incidence of armed conflict, unstable societies, and refugee populations (Rickard 2019).

Trafficking of girls is a serious human rights violation that is amplified by cultural traditions that devalue women and treat them as transactional objects. A study by Chen and others (2007) analyzed HIV rates among a sample of patients being treated at 14 China Guangxi clinics for sexually transmitted infections and concluded that "China's imbalanced sex ratios have created a generation of poor, unmarried male youth of low education who have contributed to the rise of HIV."

C) Bride trafficking: With the shortage of marriageable women in India and China, there are many communities with so few women that men are unable to find a wife. In India, entire villages have not seen a girl born in decades. In China, unmarried men are termed "bare branches" *guanggun* and combat ridicule and depression. Since China faces one of the largest gender imbalances in the world, it is estimated that almost 50 million males (1 in 5 men) will be bare branches by 2030. The female deficit in the 20-49 age group will rise to 26 million in

China and 23 million in India (Guilmoto 2015). To meet the demand for wives, brides are being imported from neighboring countries. Trafficking of women from Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, and Myanmar has increased. Men resort to paying high bride prices to brokers as they try to find wives. Women are lured with the promise of jobs, a better life, or sold by their poor families. This has become a profitable racket that is unlikely to end any time soon as the demand for brides continues to increase.

In areas where men cannot find brides, girls are kidnapped and forced into marriage. They are sometimes shared between multiple males in the home facing ongoing sexual assault, oppression, violence, and risk of HIV. Bride-trafficking is a profound expression of gender discrimination and criminal abuse of women. It starts with female gendercide skewing the gender birth ratios and setting the stage for an oversupply of marriageable men, and is driven by entrenched social norms that accept, even promote, the concept that women can be treated as transactional commodities to be bought and sold.

D) Child Brides: When there are not enough women to marry, young girls become targets for men seeking a spouse. Child marriages increase as men who are unable to find wives try to claim brides early. In India and sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 4 girls is married before the age of 16. In young girls, who have only just crossed the threshold of puberty, child pregnancies result, a devastating consequence since a girl is forced to give birth before her body is ready. Many women die in childbirth in villages. There is also pressure on women to produce sons. This can have debilitating effects on their mental and physical health due to repeated pregnancies and unsafe and clandestine abortions if they have multiple daughters. Women who are child brides are more likely to be uneducated and live in poverty. Child marriages are often characterized by spousal age gaps, power imbalances, and increased intimate partner violence (Kidman R 2017).

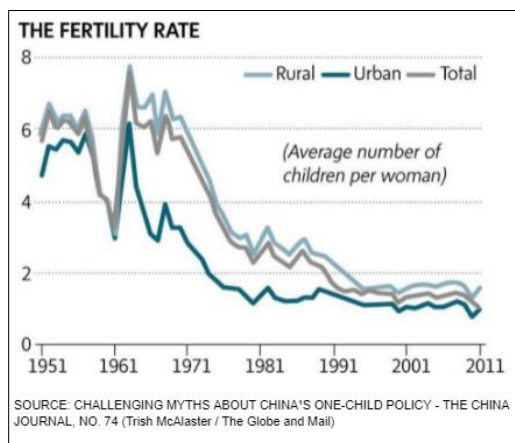
E) Forced Abortions and Harassment: In China, during previous government-mandated restrictions on the number of children, women were pressured into abortions, often in late stages of pregnancy. Sometimes they were forcibly dragged off the streets and strapped down to tables by police to enforce compliance with family planning policies. 300 million Chinese women were fitted with intrauterine devices modified to be irremovable without surgery, and there were over 100 million sterilizations and 300 million abortions. The Chinese Communist Party has boasted that it "prevented" 400 million births through its One Child Policy, a mind-numbing statistic. Most of these were female. There are also second children called heihazi (black child) who have no official identity in the national household registration system because they were hidden for fear of reprisal. In a similar vein, India's Emergency saw 11 million sterilizations, many of which were forced on people without their consent.

The 2019 movie "One Child Nation" which was nominated for Best Documentary at the Academy Awards showed a harrowing expose of the devastation caused by the womb police who enforced China's One Child Policy. Homes were destroyed, heavy fines were levied, and jobs were terminated if families did not comply. Mounds of corpses were dumped in trash cans and female infants were abandoned after birth. The one child policy had tremendous social and economic repercussions. Generations were forever shaped by this social experiment. Though it was officially ended in 2015, the repercussions continue till today, both in China and internationally. Also, in a report released in 2020, the Congressional Executive Commission on China stated: "Local-level officials continue to enforce compliance with family planning policies using methods including heavy fines, job termination, coerced abortion, and sterilization." Though the one-child policy has been discontinued, pressure to contain family sizes and harassment persists, and China has among the world's highest depression and suicide rates for women.

F) Population Decline: For perpetuation of any species, the process of reproduction must be continuous and there must be a balance between the sexes. The expectation is that successive generations will constantly keep a steady replacement population. However, birth rates are falling below replacement stability levels in many countries. In the US, the birth rates fell to 1.6 in 2021, which is well below the 2.1 needed for replacement stability, and European countries are showing similarly declining birth rates.

In a world population of 7 billion people, India and China contribute 36.9%. It is a matter of serious concern that in both countries the population of females has declining rapidly. After decades of gender selection, the makeup of the population in these countries has been distorted. In China, there are 66 million “missing” women, which amounts to 10 percent of the current female population. By 2100, the population of China according to predictions could plummet to 700 million from its current 1.3 billion. In India, in 2000, the fertility rate was still a relatively high 3.3 children per woman, but by 2021, the number had fallen to 2.1 children. The declining birth rates will have serious consequences.

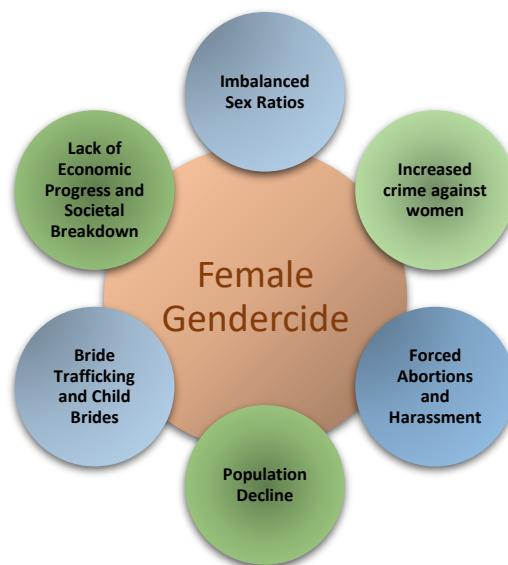
The number of elderly over 65 are projected rise dramatically during the 21st century coupled with a generation of unmarried and childless men. There will not be enough youth to support a population that is aging and now living longer. In 2021, China relaxed its family planning policy to allow couples to have three children because the 2020 census results showed that China's population grew at its slowest rate since the 1960s, and annual birth rates had plummeted to a record low of 12 million in 2020. This is precipitating a demographic crisis: a third of Chinese are forecast to be elderly by 2050, placing huge pressure on the state to provide pensions and healthcare. China's fertility rate stands at 1.3 — well below the level needed to maintain a stable population. The below-replacement fertility rate coupled with sex-selective abortion for preferential male selection is a ticking time bomb. While China is one representative example, similar declining birthrates are being seen globally – in Southeast Asia, the UK, Eastern Europe, and the US.



G) Lack of Economic Progress and Societal Breakdown: Women and girls represent half of the world's population and, therefore, also half of its potential. The development and progress of every nation depends on female participation. If girls are eliminated or suppressed by the systems of patriarchy and not provided education, healthcare, and opportunity, families are unable to progress economically and the poverty and illiteracy

cycles perpetuate. There is a positive relationship between gender equality, women work-force participation, and long-term GDP growth of nations.

When females decline, there is less productivity in terms of human resources and human capital from one gender. There is a biological imbalance in the natural environment which creates labor market distortions, economic shifts, and social instability because one gender dominates while the other is gradually being eroded. The increasing globalization of the world means that certain actions transcend boundaries. In the context of female gendercide, migration of people and transportation of their cultures poses new challenges. Because China and India contain nearly 40 percent of the world's population, the gender inequality expands in an increasingly interconnected world and spreads far beyond Asia. Killing one gender and giving preference to the other is a threat to basic human rights. It leads to degenerative societies and a compromised world. Gender equality is essential to societal progress. Sustainable and long-term development is not possible without the contributions of women. It is only when they participate, that the full potential of a country is realized.



V. ACTION BEING TAKEN BY COUNTRIES TO COMBAT GENDERCIDE

Female gendercide is a difficult issue to assess objectively because statistics are underreported and accurate data is unavailable. However, countries are realizing its magnitude and implications and are trying to take action to contain it. Developed countries like Europe, UK, and Canada are realizing that they cannot afford to ignore problems happening in other countries because they affect their own. However, eradication of gendercide is not easy. It is a complicated multifactorial issue that has been years in the making and is embedded in societal and cultural consciousness. Working to eradicate female gendercide means not only raising social awareness, but also working to empower the girl-child and ensuring her education and health so that she can survive and thrive. Ending gendercide and establishing gender equality go hand in hand.

The United Nations has in the past successfully brought global awareness to the condition of women and to the violation of human rights. For example, many countries responded positively to U.N. initiatives to stop female genital mutilation. Unfortunately, a similar effort to gather international cooperation on feticide has not met with universal success. In 2007, the United States and South Korea jointly sponsored a resolution at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and called for the elimination of infanticide and gender selection. But the resolution was withdrawn due to opposition from China, India, and several other countries (Singson 2007). China and India lobbied against the resolution fearing that their country's failure to control gendercide would be highlighted in a global arena and their image would be negatively tarred but in their individual capacities, both countries have attempted to work for change.

China

To tackle female gendercide and promote gender equality, the Chinese government has introduced laws and regulations on equal rights in economic and political participation, education, property inheritance, marriage, and old-age support. In 1995, China outlawed sex-selective abortion, and in 2000, it began a “Care for Girls” campaign – a government-led public policy initiative by the National Population and Family Planning Commission to promote a fundamental change in people's attitudes and weaken son-preference (Shuzhuo 2013).

“Care for Girls” is a 15-year program with defined goals for each five-year period to reduce and stabilize SRB's by 2020. It began in five districts of Chaohu City, and after three years of implementation, the SRB's fell from 125 in 1999 to 114 in 2002 (Li 2006), a landmark for China. The program was then extended to 24 provinces which had extremely high SRB's, selected from the 2000 census, and they declined from 133 in 2000 to 119 in 2005. This set the stage to expand the “Care for Girls” campaign across the whole country as a national strategy. The government provides promotional media about gender equality, monitoring of ultrasound sex-selective abortion, ethics training for medical professionals, reproductive health services at the grassroots level, and mandatory newborn birth registration to give the government real-time SRB data for policy decision-making about gender imbalance.

Through the National Program for the Development of Women (2001-2010), there has been an improving environment for gender equality: promoting women's participation in administrative decision-making, increasing literacy and vocational and agrotechnology training for rural women, and developing internet applications for entrepreneurship to alleviate poverty and encourage economic empowerment. There is focus on improving the health of women and girls through financial subsidies and social agencies, and in recent years the health of

females in China has improved steadily with maternal mortality rate reducing from 88.9 per 10,000 in 1990 to 36.6% per 10,000 in 2007.

US-based organizations and international NGO's like "All Girls Allowed" and "Women's Rights Without Frontiers" are trying to address the infanticide and sex imbalance issues in China but operating in the country is challenging due to bureaucratic infrastructure. While government policies have achieved some success and the SRB's of China have declined to 117, which suggests that a turning point has been reached, there are still many challenges to overcome. The incipient declines will not filter through to the reproductive age group for another two decades and it is likely to be several more decades before the SRB in countries like India and China even come close to normal limits. Also, in some counties, campaigns was introduced without local support and their policies contradicted existing social policies relating to land and inheritance rights which led to friction with local authorities. There is fragmentation and lack of coordination and co-governance between departments in the government, making policies difficult to implement. There is need for a more unified system of social policy in China, to make gendercide eradication a feasible reality. (Gupta, Chung et al. 2009).

India

India has also taken steps to curb female gendercide. The national Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act was implemented in 1996. It banned sex-selective abortion and its provisions were further expanded in 2003. The government has worked to improve law enforcement of feticide. But skepticism about the efficacy of the well-intended PNDT Act prevails. The main challenge is that the people seeking (prospective parents) and people offering (physicians) the illegal service of determining the sex of a female fetus have no incentive than moral conscience to comply with the PNDT Act. Despite the reservations, however, studies suggest that the PNDT Act has been successful in preventing further worsening of the sex imbalance, which would have declined by another 13-20 points in the absence of the Act. (Nandia and Deolalokar 2011).

Other programs have also been instituted to combat gender imbalance and promote gender equality. The Balika Samriddhi Yojana and Dhanalakshmi Scheme were started in 1997 to provide monetary incentives for education of girls of poor families. The Cradle Baby Scheme was instituted in 1992, which encourages families to place a baby at an orphanage or hospital for safety rather than killing the child. The *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* (Save the girl child, Educate the girl child) scheme was introduced in 2015 to promote education for girls as a tool for economic empowerment and gender parity. The Hindu Succession Act was passed in 2004 which was a big step forward. It established equal property rights for female children and allows them inherit family property on a par with sons. Although these regulations do not by themselves change behavior, they constitute a major shift in mindset, and send out a clear message that the legal rights of women are to be recognized as equal.

The National Old Age Pension Scheme was instituted for the elderly to provide old age support and reduce the motive for son preference. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act passed in 2007 requires both sons and daughters to be responsible for the care of parents in proportion to the share of property to be inherited (ICRW 2009). Daughters are often prevented from caring for their aged parents and bringing them into their marital homes and regulations like this provide reinforced support. India has promoted a strong awareness campaign through TV and media which has highlighted gendercide and depicted the SRB trends and the missing number of girls not being born due to sex-selective abortion. It depicted the consequences and gave the campaign a meaningful slogan: "Love and cherish your daughter," a simple message that everyone could emotionally connect with. The campaign was juxtaposed with female role models and the reinforcement of

women's success in society and has met with success. India is taking steps to curb gendercide and to bring numbers down but it will take a lot of time for deeply entrenched cultural mindsets to change.

Pakistan

The Edhi Foundation, Chhipa Welfare Association, and the Aman Foundation are working to prevent infanticide through public awareness. The Edhi Foundation, which is Pakistan's largest welfare agency, says that the number of dead babies its ambulances pick up have increased by almost 20 percent each year since 2010. It created 400 safe havens to encourage families to drop off unwanted infants rather than kill them but the program has had limited success. Only 18 babies have been dropped off at sites in Karachi in 2018, while Edhi says that it buried more than 1,300 discarded babies. However, there is also some hope. Edhi's orphanage has helped almost 20,000 girls and educated them to independence.

Through the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) and Convention on Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Pakistan has made international-level commitments to protect rights of children and women but despite these conventions, harmful traditional practices prevail and Pakistan has been ranked in top five countries most dangerous for women. The Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2015 has sought to create an institutional infrastructure and train a women's force at district levels to respond to women's complaints of physical abuse. While this has been hailed as a mechanism for redress, it has run into problems with religious groups who are unhappy about how the new law seeks to empower women. They say that it will increase the divorce rate and destroy the country's traditional family system. Since Pakistan is a Muslim country, clerics and religious fundamental groups carry a lot of weight in manipulating patriarchal societal mindset and resisting change to the existing status quo.

Vietnam

Vietnam has instituted strong legislative and policy framework to prevent gendercide but the enforcement of these policies is often weak. Detailed provisions on gender equality, prevention of discrimination against women, and equal rights and responsibilities of sons and daughters are included in the revised Law on Marriage and Family (2014), the Population Ordinance (2003), the Law on Gender Equality (2006), and the Law on Prevention and Control of Domestic Violence (2007). The 2003 Population Ordinance bans sex selection in any form and the Regulation of Administrative Sanctions on Population and Children levies fines of three to five million *đồng* for the act of aborting a fetus because of its sex. The National Strategy on Population and Reproductive Health aims to substantially reduce the SRB increase to the normal levels by the year 2025 and Vietnam has a nationwide system of population collaborators *cộng tác viên* that are playing key roles in the implementation of interventions. However, despite the official ban on sex-selection, ultrasonography and abortion services continue to be misused for purposes of sex selection. The existing sanctions have helped but are still not strong enough for behavior change.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is in accord with the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) declaration in 1994, to "eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which result in harmful and unethical practices regarding female infanticide and prenatal sex selection." There is a Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010–2021 which includes strategic plans to combat gender inequality. In

addition, it has passed other laws like the Dowry Prohibition Act 1980, Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, Prevention of Oppression against Women and Children Act 2000, Domestic Violence Act (Prevention and Protection) 2010, and National Women Development Policy 2011, which are all geared towards uplifting the status of women and girls in society. Like other countries, change will take time because it is difficult to bridge cultural mindsets. Singapore, Nepal, Malaysia, and other Southeast Asian countries also have laws restricting sex-selective abortions and female infanticide, but while policies are in place, their implementation remains a constant challenge.

Eastern Europe

Sex imbalances at birth in the EECA region have received increased attention following a 2011 resolution on the issue adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe along with efforts by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to assist in data analysis and policy dialogue. The governments of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have supported the primary research and findings on female gendercide, and advocacy and policy initiatives have followed. The experiences from Asian countries provide important lessons for them and allow governments in EECA to develop approaches that are better suited to their specific social and demographic situations. Many EECA countries are already part of an international mobilization to protect women's rights. At the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994), a Programme of Action was adopted by 179 countries which aims at eliminating all forms of discrimination against the girl child, and the root causes of son preference which result in harmful and unethical practices of female infanticide and prenatal sex selection. Several European countries have also signed the 1997 Oviedo Convention prohibiting sex selection except for medical reasons.

Africa

Attention to gender-based violence and female gendercide has been brought up through grassroots women's movements and feminist organizations. Many of these groups have created regional and national networks and played a leading role in raising awareness and bringing change in existing norms, policies, and laws. But since Africa is large and these groups are operating piecemeal in the midst of political instability and unrest, change has been slow and discriminatory practices persist. In Africa, female genital mutilation has received more national and global attention than gendercide which tends to be overlooked and is considered to be more of a family's private business. Much action is required in Africa to improve women's health, education, and social policy in order to promote gender equality and eliminate violence against women and girls.

United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States

In the UK, a Stop Gendercide Movement is calling upon the Government to bring forward legislation that will make sex-selective abortion illegal. However, there are concerns that this may lead to racial profiling. Also, while the Government agrees that abortion for reasons of gender alone is illegal, the problem is that other major stakeholders in this issue interpret the law differently. The British Medical Association (BMA) has outlined situations in which they believe sex-selective abortion to be permissible. The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) which performs more than 60,000 abortions per year in the UK claims that abortion for gender should not be illegal. But polling by Savanta ComRes, a market research consultancy in London, and one of the UK's best known polling companies, shows that 89% of the general population and

91% of women agree that gender-selective abortion should be explicitly banned by the law. The two opinions are at odds.

In New Zealand, Stop Gendercide has called on the Parliament in 2020 to support an amendment to the Abortion Legislation Bill, which currently allows abortion on request in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy, to ensure that sex-selective abortion does not become prevalent in New Zealand.

Canada has no restrictions on sex selective abortion. The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada has issued a position paper on sex selection, arguing that “we cannot restrict women's right to abortion just because some women might make decisions we disagree with.” There is legal and cultural tension between abortion rights and the Commission On The Status Of Women’s theme for 2007 which is seeking to prohibit sex-selective abortion. The conflict between preserving reproductive autonomy while containing the spread of gendercide is challenging. Resolution of the issue will require considerable effort and political diplomacy.

Developed countries like the UK, US, and Canada are vulnerable to female gendercide perpetuating within their communities because the laws are not as stringent as Asian countries where gendercide is an openly acknowledged problem. In the US, only eight states specifically prohibit sex-selective abortion. These include North Carolina, Kansas, Oklahoma, North Dakota, South Dakota, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Arizona. There is a drive to include other states. Steven Mosher, President of the Population Research Institute, in his testimony before the Constitution of the Committee on the Judiciary has warned that “other countries have bans in place and if the U.S. does not institute them as well, the country runs the risk of becoming a magnet for those who wish to procure sex-selective abortions” (Citro et al 2014). Most recently, in 2007, Joe Biden and Richard Lugar introduced the International Violence Against Women Act. It provides US \$175 million of foreign aid to prevent honor killings, bride burnings, female genital mutilation, acid attacks mass rapes, and domestic violence globally.

The Republic of Korea – a success story

The example of South Korea stands as an exemplary model and a beacon of hope. Many years ago, female gendercide was a problem there and the sex ratio in South Korea shifted in favor of boys, with 115 boys born for every 100 girls. About the same time, however, South Korea began educating girls and their families, passing equal opportunity laws, encouraging greater participation of women in the workforce, revising its patriarchal family laws to give girls more rights, creating an old-age pension system for parents thereby reducing dependence on male children, and instituting a “Love Your Daughter” media campaign. In addition, the health system in the South Korea was able to effectively regulate sex determination tests. Attitudes gradually changed, in no small part because it sparked a national conversation of conscience about the practice of female feticide which was instrumental in stigmatizing the practice. By 2007, South Korea registered a perfectly normal birth rate of 106 boys for every 100 girls. Although South Korea is still missing women due to its past practices, it points the way for other countries to make similar changes that can eventually lead to permanent change.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The prevention of infanticide and gender-biased sex selection requires major commitment and sustained efforts by governments, civil society, international agencies and local communities, all working towards the goal of gender equality. It requires taking a multi-pronged approach to an issue that has complex variables: eliminating ignorance and raising social awareness, actively working for empowerment of the girl-child, and ensuring her education, health, economic independence, and social and political participation so that communities can thrive. These are some factors that must be considered.

A) Social awareness: It is imperative to raise social awareness and educate society about gendercide. It cuts across all strata and happens in poor and affluent communities equally, and disturbingly also in educated families who should know better. People are ignorant about the issue and do not realize that it is silently happening around them or the magnitude and scale of the problem. Also, when a family kills or aborts a girl child, they believe that it is only “one” child gone or one child “less” and believe it will make no difference. Families lack an understanding of gendercide implications on society and the future problems it brings. They think of the act from a local level rather than from a global perspective and do not understand that it is changing the biological and social dynamics and landscape of entire countries. Education is a fundamental aspect in stigmatizing the practice of infanticide and sex-selective abortion. It leads the way to opening up national discussions to prevent gendercide. It enables families to understand that girls should not be considered as liabilities, and that they provide great contribution in promoting the well-being of communities when their growth and development takes place adequately.

B) Advocacy and community mobilization: Awareness-raising campaigns and communication aimed at behavioral change are crucial instruments for addressing sex selection. The social norms that govern son preference have to change within social networks, and the patriarchal cultural mindsets that place men at the fixed central points in the social order and women as the moving appendage points must be systematically dismantled to break the gendercide cycle. Advocacy and sensitization programs by both governments and nongovernment organizations are needed to change attitudes and must be a central part of work to redress gender inequalities and sex-ratio imbalances. Advocacy initiatives should use social media, television, radio, and internet which provide valuable avenues for spreading messages and raising debate about the existing status quo and awakening national conscience. It is important to give high visibility to leaders and influential groups that oppose prenatal sex selection and who stand for gender equality. Curriculums should be implemented within the education system on gender equality issues and sexual and reproductive health. Campaigns must also reach out to the professionals of the medical community to promote the ethical use of reproductive technologies and curtail abortion and reproductive tourism.

C) Promote value for girls: Female gendercide continues because of the lack of value that is placed on the life of a girl. This creates the feeling within a girl herself that she has no premium in the world. It is common for women in patriarchal societies to accept violence from their husband as their fate and be resigned to doing all the work of the home, and to receiving no education, having limited role in decision making, and being subservient to males in the household. While the work that a man does outside the home is valued, the work that a woman performs at home tends to be discounted and is invisible. It is a form of unpaid labor that is taken for granted. It is important to enable the girl child to feel she is important within the overall framework of society so she can believe in herself and strive for her own education, upliftment, and progress.

D) Legislation and Support of Gender Equality: Gendercide thrives in communities where there is a power imbalance and girls are considered inferior to boys. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future. When girls are empowered to lead their lives, speak their minds and determine their futures, everyone benefits. Girls are powerful catalysts for world change. History shows that when we fight gender inequality, societies have better educated families, healthier children, and are more stable and progressive. Laws and policies are important tools required for sustainable gender equity. Female populations are marked by distinctive patterns of economic inequality in almost every nation. The barriers to women's economic engagement go beyond work and salary and include property ownership, capital, credit, and markets. When considered as a whole, these barriers constitute economic exclusion, not just economic inequality.

One part of tackling imbalanced sex ratios at birth requires states to develop legal frameworks and socioeconomic policies that will improve women's rights, increase participation in education, politics, and the workforce, address inheritance rights, dowry practices, and child marriage, finance old age pensions for the elderly, and provide incentives for low-income parents of girls. Legal and policy frameworks must ensure robust implementation and monitoring of initiatives that help meet established targets for gender equality, strengthen existing laws around women's development, reform institutional practices around social security for older people and start pension schemes to shift social norms so children are less financially responsible for their parents and they in turn are less dependent, and reform property laws to promote equal inheritance rights for women and men

E) Laws governing sex selection: Laws must be put in place to prohibit the use of technology for sex selection, any advertising relating to prenatal sex determination, and disclosure of the sex of the fetus. Sex ratios at birth started rising sharply around 1985 when sex-selective technology became widespread. This is of note because it was separate and did not coincide with the inception of the one-child policy in China which began in 1979. Despite legal measures, it can be difficult to prove that an ultrasound has been used to determine sex for termination because it is also used for monitoring fetal healthy development. Restricting access to technology without addressing social norms can result in greater demand for clandestine procedures. There must be careful screening for the reasons behind a prenatal termination of pregnancy. In rural areas, social workers must monitor pregnancies closely, strengthen data-collection, and monitor efforts on SRB trends through birth registration. Without good statistics, it is difficult to monitor the effectiveness of programs aimed at curbing son preference.

In developed countries, the rise in Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), sperm sorting, and noninvasive prenatal testing (NIPT) for choosing the sex of offspring present serious ethical dilemmas. Developed nations that include UK, US, and Canada must join the ranks of countries that prohibit sex-selective abortion and must closely monitor the trends in prenatal sex selection and birth rates within Asian cultural communities, with support from statistical bureaus, medical associations, and society organizations.

F) Literacy for girls: For a girl to survive and thrive, she must develop a strong body and mind. It is imperative for her to receive education. Globally, girls are faced with far greater barriers to education, a pre-cursor to economic independence, than their male counterparts. The World Bank reports that of the 960 million illiterate people in the world, two-thirds are women, and out of the 130 million children who received no primary education in 1990, 81 million were girls. Lack of education for the girl-child devalues female output in economic terms and prevents them from the earning potential of males, further increasing the economic risk-benefit trade-off exhibited by parents who participate female gendercide.

Government initiatives supporting free education for girls are required because girl literacy is often compromised compared to boys. There is a belief that for girls, the home is ideologically the focus of their everyday lives. This limits their roles rather than focusing on the pursuit of a career or greater economic independence. An educated woman changes the course of her family by adding an income. Paid work is valued much more highly than work in the home and economic contribution increases a women's decision-making power within the household. She is able to stand up against ill-treatment or against the pressure to abort an unborn female baby because she has been empowered and has choices. Also, educated women raise healthier children because they are more aware of the need for vaccination and investing in education and enrichment that develops their children's growth and development in a more positive direction.

G) Healthcare for girls - Female infanticide often happens through deliberate negligence after birth by inadequate medical care, uneven food allocations that cause nutritional deficiencies, and minimal survival needs being provided. It has been found that when the baby is a female, failure to attend antenatal clinics and withholding vaccinations accounts for 15% of neonatal mortality. Overall, the infant girl mortality in Asian countries is extremely high and many girls do not live past puberty. Support of medical camps providing free health checkups and vaccinations and increasing Medicaid access for underprivileged girls will enable their development and empowerment.

VII. CONCLUSION

Female gendercide is an unspoken and ignored topic. It passes under the radar because it is a silent ongoing attrition rather than a sudden eruption of visible violence. It happens in the privacy of the home against a victim who is completely voiceless and defenseless and constitutes one of the worst forms of human rights violations in which a girl is denied her most basic and fundamental right - "the right to life." In terms of the sheer size of the atrocity, the number of victims claimed by female gendercide exceeds the number of deaths of World War I and World War II combined. It has eliminated more people than the genocides of the 20th century, malaria, HIV, the flu epidemics, and creates a mountain of corpses equivalent to the Jewish Holocaust every three years.

Starting from pre-determination of a baby's gender, to sex-selective abortion, to infanticide, to deliberate wilful neglect causing death, female gendercide has serious legal, ethical, health, and human rights implications. It carries long-term consequences that are tremendously damaging to the societies where it is being practiced. It is important for all of us, no matter what part of the globe we live in, to be concerned about female gendercide and to take strong action to prevent it from happening. More than 160 million girls are missing from Asia alone (Willingham 2011) and there are 61 million fewer girls than boys under the age of 14 in the world today. The number of girls between 0 and 4 years is continually decreasing in almost every nation and projected to keep falling until 2050.

The euphemism "missing" hides one of the most shocking crimes against humanity. The Washington Post in a 2018 article wrote "Nothing like this has been described in human history and it is curious that such a ubiquitous crime has left so little mark on historical records." Because infanticide is mostly women's business, and specifically a poor family's business, very few first-person accounts are described. It is an unspoken, ignored topic, the darker underbelly of many countries, which passes silently under the radar. People are now waking up to its magnitude and implications but it still continues unchecked.

Female gendercide cuts across all strata and happens in both poor and rich families equally. Infanticide happens mostly in rural areas and among poor families because they do not have easy access to diagnostic technology or the money to pay abortion clinics. In urban areas, feticide replaces infanticide because of easy availability and affordability of ultrasound diagnostic testing, and the prevalence of richer families who can afford the procedures of diagnostics and sex-selective termination.

In my research of female gendercide, an incident stood out starkly. It happened in Cumming, a city in North Georgia adjoining Johns Creek, the area where I have grown up. A live news report was published.

"The Forsyth County Sheriff's office in Cumming released a police bodycam video showing a newborn baby found wrapped in a plastic bag and discarded in the woods. It was an Indian baby girl. Residents of the area stumbled upon her when they heard cries coming from the secluded wooded area. The baby was just hours old when she was discovered. Police authorities have taken the baby to a hospital for treatment. She is now thriving and in the care of Georgia Department of Family and Children Services, according to the Sheriff's office. Police authorities are still looking for the baby's mother."

This sobering incident happened in the United States, considered the most developed country in the world. Not coincidentally, the cluster of Cumming, Johns Creek, and Suwanee has a large South Asian population, a mix of Indian, Chinese, and Korean patriarchal communities in which gendercide is known to be prevalent. Ironically, this area is one of the wealthiest cities in Georgia with the median family income of about \$150,590. It is

considered one of the most sought-after places to raise children because of its excellent educational system and was ranked 16th among the top 50 best cities to live in America by the US Money Magazine rankings of 2019.

This incident reinforces that female gendercide is a problem that has crossed global borders and its tentacles are spreading across the world. With immigration, the same communities that believe in gendercide in their home countries also practice it when they come to new ones. Families who have had previous daughters and who are from communities that traditionally favor sons feel the pressure to give birth to a male child even if they reside in free societies like the US, UK, and Canada (Higgins 2016). Pregnant women carrying daughters face social, economic, and personal pressures that can be crushing. The economic dependence, estrangement from the extended family, threat of divorce, and domestic violence can overpower women who would otherwise choose to keep their daughters, even if they live in free and modern societies. Ironically, the persecution is because of a biological process that a woman has no control over because it is the father's genetics that determines the sex of a baby. However, heritage and deeply ingrained cultural preferences still permeate the lives of people in prosperous countries and are not easily discarded. Female gendercide is something that is quietly happening in developed countries but is being kept secret. It is however, being observed in the imbalances in sex ratios at birth of males when compared to females.

Ultrasounds which have a 99% accuracy in determining the sex of a baby, raise serious ethical questions about sex selective abortion and its role in propagating female gendercide globally. In 2012, the non-profit Live Action conducted a secret video of abortion clinics in Texas, New York, Arizona, Hawaii, and North Carolina and found them willing to perform abortions even when the reason given openly was a sex-based preference. In Canada and United States, there are less restrictive laws against prenatal sex determination, and unlike their Chinese and Indian counterparts where the law expressly forbids sex-selective abortion, American doctors are left to decide on a case-by-case basis whether to perform these procedures without any policy guidelines they can consult regarding the ethics of these procedures. The business of sex determination followed by sex selective abortion is worth almost US\$100 million per year and prenatal sex selection is profitable for both the suppliers of ultrasound scanners and private medical practitioners of abortion.

The ethical questions surrounding sex selective abortion increase when it is realized that ultrasound diagnosis requires several months of pregnancy prior to the test. This makes sex-selective abortion late-term. It carries the implicit expectation that a woman must put her body through the rigor of four or five months of pregnancy only to be expected to terminate it if the baby is determined to have the wrong sex. The question mark surrounding this termination can be hard to distinguish in developed countries because of a woman's reproductive "right to choose" versus the "Roe versus Wade" debate. It is hard to demarcate the line between a woman's right to reproductive freedom versus the preservation of an innocent life that is being snuffed out to sex selective abortion. It is imperative that a female embryo must not be considered a commodity to be casually discarded, but an equally worthy human being worthy of respect, care, and the right to life.

Pre-natal sex detection techniques are continuously improving and technologies like chorionic villus sampling (CVS) and Pre-Implantation Genetic Screening (PGS) can detect the sex of a child as early as 9 weeks, leading to even earlier terminations. In nations where gender selection is banned, people travel to places where it is legal to do Pre-Implantation Genetic Screening, and where cost is cheap and laws are too weakly enforced to prevent use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) for sex selection. People from Australia, Singapore, India, and China are traveling to fertility clinics in Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam to choose their babies' gender through in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD). The Fertility Institute located in Los

claims to run the largest sex-selection program in the world and the medical director of its gender-selection program, Dr. Jeffrey Steinberg, has stated that half of the patients come from international countries for the procedure. A form of “reproductive” tourism is emerging which has the potential to spread the global reach of gendercide and increase the number of “missing girls.” This is of grave concern. The ethical, legal, and cultural issues will only increase in difficulty as assisted reproductive technologies continue their rapid evolution and proliferation. Experiments in fertility-promoting measures, such as uterus transplants, artificial wombs, and cloning are underway, and have already provoked controversy (Stenson 2003).

The devaluation of girls lives does not stop with sex selection prenatally. The State of World Population 2020 report emphasizes that sex selection can distort the composition of a country’s population for generations. Over time, these skewed ratios translate into missing girls, missing women and missing elderly women (Ochab 2021). The effects of imbalanced sex ratios ripples throughout societies and perpetuates the gender inequality that created them in the first place. They exacerbate problems of gender-based violence, sexual trafficking, and child marriage—all of which are human rights violations.” It does not stop at sex selection, gender inequalities against girls continue to perpetuate throughout their lives.

The sobering reality is that female gendercide has crossed the ocean divide and is happening in developed nations and gradually spreading its magnitude and influence. The preference for boys among immigrant populations is showing up in gender inequities and will not change without outside intervention. By highlighting the fact that countries outside of Asia are demonstrating a propensity to eliminate females at high rates, we must conclude that no culture or country is immune to gender discrimination in the form of female feticide.

The United States is one of the world’s most influential free societies. We have a moral duty to lead the way in protecting girls from all forms of gender discrimination even if the U.S. never sees gendercide on the scale of India and China. It is believed that since the United States counts as one of the most powerful countries in the world, once it speaks up, the “collective conscience” of the world is raised. As the problem of imbalanced sex ratios grows globally, we must take strong steps to act. We must foster an attitude of ‘zero tolerance’ for discrimination and harmful attitudes against girls, and unethical practices such as prenatal sex selection. “Zero tolerance” implies that even one girl discriminated or aborted for the purpose of sex selection is one too many (Higgins 2016)

The vast numbers show that female gendercide is an issue not just associated with borders, specific cultures, or races. Rather, it is a human global problem. The consequences of gendercide are adverse and far-reaching. In populations with skewed male-female ratios, the very fact that many millions of girls have been deliberately eliminated simply because they would have been female establishes a social reality that discolors the realm of human relationships. Sex-selective termination and female infanticide tears at the very fabric of liberty and freedom by denying equal protection under the law to one-half of the population and must end.

The millions of “missing women” and the consequences of the resulting sex imbalance in countries including China and India have been recognized and documented in literature. But because of lack of current census data and reliable monitoring of births and child mortality in countries with distorted sex ratios, it is difficult to estimate the real-time scale of girls going “missing” due to son preference and sex selective practices.

It has been cautiously suggested by recent findings (Das Gupta et al. 2009) that an overall decline in national child sex ratios may be happening in both China and India. According to their review, the data indicates that

current child sex ratios in some regions are beginning to trend toward lower, more normal values. This suggests that with continuing economic and social development, and vigorous public policy efforts to reduce son preference, the "missing girls" phenomenon could eventually lessen in Asia. Globally, gender based sex selection (GBSS) has become a serious concern among policymakers and researchers because of its implications for human rights, as well as its socioeconomic and demographic implications.

But much still remains to be done, especially in China and northwest India where skewed child sex ratios remain very high, and whose large populations have global implications for the rest of the world. Even if sex ratios do eventually normalize, it will take years for the adverse effects of the past discrimination to play themselves out, for example in the marriage market. There are also newer disturbing trends developing, like higher SRB's among second and higher order births, and the fact that improving education levels among women seems to have increased the likelihood of using sex selective practices, along with the disturbing trend that the modern-day assisted reproduction technologies is enabling more sophisticated sex-selection and increasing gendercide.

Governments seeking to reverse the gender imbalance have mostly prohibited sex detection tests and sex selective abortion and have imposed sanctions, but such policies have been difficult to enforce and have met with limited success. The historical lesson to policymakers in family planning, as has been seen with the detrimental effects of One Child Policy in China, is that enforcing people to change their reproductive decisions without focusing on the reasons and preferences, leads to damaging consequences. The focus to end gendercide must address the root causes and circumstances that drive the son preference and must promote equal value for both sexes.

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women" said Jawaharlal Nehru, the past Prime Minister of India. The concluding questions are - which nation can claim to be a free and prosperous society where half of its population is being oppressed or eliminated? And which nation striving to be progressive can afford to eliminate half of its population? The answer is: none! Sustainable and long-term development of any nation is not possible without the participation and contributions of its women; for it is only when they are actively involved that the full potential of a society unfolds and is realized.

Failure to address female gendercide is a failure to address the role of women in society. If the movement to end female gendercide is to gain momentum, then "the world needs to get involved." That is when change will take place more rapidly. We must join forces to ensure that sex-selection is understood as discrimination against girls and must end. One person, one action, and one small step at a time can make a huge difference. But we must not find ourselves on the wrong side of history for failing to take any action at all. We need to do our bit to stop female gendercide, no matter where we live. The global crisis of "missing" girls is a tragedy of great lost potential. It is the loss of the girl child in society simply because she happens to be a girl.

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“A Woman is the full circle.
Within her is the power to create,
nurture and transform.”

--- Diane Mariechild

