

Gill, Aisha and Mitra-Kahn, Trishima. 2008. "From Preference to Prejudice: daughter devaluation and the missing women phenomenon in South Asia and the UK." *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan* 15(1):29-46.

Research and Theoretical

Missing women is considered to be the deficit of women in the sex ratios of countries. In the mid-1990s it is estimated that from 60 to 101 million women are missing in Afghanistan, 40 million in India, 3.8 million in Bangladesh, and 4.9 million in Pakistan. Son preferences alone cannot explain sex ratios, but the devaluation of women and the desire to intervene to avoid having a daughter are the driving causes. The researchers found that the increase of the education level of women in Bangladesh does not decrease the strong desire women have for sons, but even with an education level above primary school the strong desire to have a son persists. Dowry devalues women because it is considered to be required in places like India, because the women are considered to be a non-productive dependant. The dowry is considered a payment to the family of the husband since their son will provide for her. The researchers found statistical evidence shows that migrants to the UK from South Asian community are practicing sex-selective abortions more than the natural born citizens. This shows that assimilation on birth preferences are not being internalized by the migrants, but later generations may be assimilating.

Policy Implementations

The policy implementations must address the underlining determinates of the devaluation of women in South Asian cultures. Making sex-selective abortions illegal does not stop families from getting them illegal in the country they are in, and it does not stop them from going to another country to have an abortion. Investment in programs to increase equality between men and women in South Asia will increase the value of women, and the elimination of practices that devalue women such as the dowry will increase the value of women. Education can be used to improve the status of women, but as seen in Bangladesh education has not been shown to increase the value of women, so strategies will need to be tailored to the cultures of each country.

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