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India's lost female generation

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11 January, 2006

THE ARTICLE

India's lost female generation

A survey from Canada's University of Toronto and India's Institute of Medical Education suggests that at least ten million female fetuses have been aborted in India over the past two decades. The findings were based on a census covering more than one million families. It analyzed the period for which ultrasound, a technology that can determine the sex of a fetus, has been available. Researchers say there appears to be a trend among middle class families to abort female fetuses to ensure they have male heirs. Researcher Prabhat Jha says: "We conservatively estimate that prenatal sex determination and selective abortion accounts for 500,000 missing girls yearly." This suggests female feticide has replaced the more traditionally practiced infanticide.

Selective termination of pregnancy on the basis of sex has been illegal in India since 1994. However, statistics from the Indian National Survey censuses indicate couples have been circumventing the law. The number of girls in India has been steadily falling for the past 20 years relative to the number of boys. The female fetus abortion rate is twice as high among educated mothers compared with those who are illiterate. Figures indicate that for every 1,000 boys up to the age of six the number of girls dropped from 962 in 1981 to 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. Many couples believe a family is unbalanced without a male to continue the family name and bloodline, financially support the family and take care of his parents in their old age.

WARM-UPS

1. BOYS & GIRLS: Which are better? Talk about this with your partner. Would you prefer to have all boys or all girls? Are brothers better than sisters? Are pink baby clothes better than blue? Are girls more expensive? Do parents have to worry more about boys?

2. GENERATIONS: In pairs / groups, talk about the following generations. Speculate about the ones you are unsure of (and look them up on the Internet for homework).

- India's ultrasound generation
- Generation X
- The chemical generation
- Generation Y
- Baby boomers
- The digital generation
- The lost generation
- The "everything now" generation

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Surveys / medical education / abortion / two decades / ultrasound / male heirs / middle class families / infanticide / pregnancy / boys / girls / couples / bloodline

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. OPINIONS: How far do you agree with the following opinions on abortion?

- Abortion is murder.
- A mother has the right to choose whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.
- The father should be allowed to prevent the mother from having an abortion.
- A fetus is a legal being and has the right to life.
- Abortion is OK in very special cases.
- All abortions should only take place after court hearings.
- Abortion is for weak-willed people who want an easy life.
- If a baby is unwanted, it'll have a miserable life and add to society's problems.

5. ABORTION: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "abortion". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

6. QUICK DEBATE: Students A think abortion is the same as murder. Students B think otherwise. Change partners often.

7. ~ICIDE: Talk with your partner(s) about the following words:

- patricide / matricide
- infanticide / parenticide
- suicide / pseudocide
- spermicide
- pesticide / insecticide
- homicide / genocide
- linguicide / cybercide
- verbicide

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. Millions of Indian women have claimed they have no direction in life. | T / F |
| b. A survey looked at figures covering a million Indian families. | T / F |
| c. Ultrasound is a technology used in recording songs to put on the Web. | T / F |
| d. A researcher says feticide is common in India. | T / F |
| e. It is legal in India to have an abortion based on the sex of the baby. | T / F |
| f. The number of girls born in India is declining year by year. | T / F |
| g. Educated mothers abort more baby girls than do illiterate mothers. | T / F |
| h. Indian couples prefer boys so that they continue the family bloodline. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| a. aborted | slid |
| b. census | inclination |
| c. determine | soberly |
| d. trend | dodging |
| e. conservatively | demographic study |
| f. sex | uneducated |
| g. circumventing | establish |
| h. illiterate | provide for |
| i. dropped | terminated |
| j. take care of | gender |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. that at least ten million female | twice as high among educated mothers |
| b. based on a census covering | traditionally practiced infanticide |
| c. abort female fetuses to ensure | pregnancy on the basis of sex |
| d. selective abortion accounts | more than one million families |
| e. feticide has replaced the more | has been steadily falling |
| f. Selective termination of | male to continue the family name |
| g. couples have been | for 500,000 missing girls yearly |
| h. The number of girls in India | they have male heirs |
| i. The female fetus abortion rate is | fetuses have been aborted |
| j. a family is unbalanced without a | circumventing the law |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

WHICH WORD? Delete the incorrect or least likely word from the pairs in bold.

India's lost female generation

A **survey** / **surveyor** from Canada's University of Toronto and India's Institute of Medical Education suggests that at least ten million female fetuses have been **aborted** / **abhorred** in India over the past two decades. The findings were based on a census covering more than one million families. It analyzed the period for which ultrasound, a technology that can **determine** / **undermine** the sex of a fetus, has been available. Researchers say there appears to be a **trendsetter** / **trend** among middle class families to abort female fetuses to ensure they have male **heirlooms** / **heirs**. Researcher Prabhat Jha says: "We **conservatively** / **liberally** estimate that prenatal sex determination and selective abortion **subtracts** / **accounts** for 500,000 missing girls yearly." This suggests female feticide has replaced the more traditionally **practiced** / **condoned** infanticide.

Selective / **seductive** termination of pregnancy on the basis of sex has been **illegal** / **legal** in India since 1994. However, statistics from the Indian National Survey censuses indicate couples have been **circumventing** / **ventilating** the law. The number of girls in India has been steadily falling for the past 20 years **ancestor** / **relative** to the number of boys. The female fetus abortion **rate** / **pro rata** is twice as high among educated mothers compared with those who are **illiterate** / **alliteration**. Figures indicate that for every 1,000 boys up to the age of six the number of girls **drooped** / **dropped** from 962 in 1981 to 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. Many couples believe a family is unbalanced without a male to continue the family name and **blood group** / **bloodline**, financially support the family and take care of his parents in their old age.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

India's lost female generation

A survey from Canada's University of Toronto and India's _____ of Medical Education suggests that at least ten million female _____ have been aborted in India over the past two decades. The findings were based on a _____ covering more than one million families. It analyzed the period for which ultrasound, a technology that can _____ the sex of a fetus, has been available. Researchers say there appears to be a trend among middle class families to abort female fetuses to _____ they have male heirs. Researcher Prabhat Jha says: "We conservatively estimate that prenatal sex determination and _____ abortion accounts for 500,000 missing girls yearly." This suggests female _____ has replaced the more traditionally practiced _____.

Selective termination of pregnancy on _____ sex has been illegal in India since 1994. However, statistics from the Indian National Survey censuses indicate couples have been _____ the law. The number of girls in India has been steadily falling for the past 20 years _____ to the number of boys. The female fetus abortion rate is twice as high among educated mothers compared with those who are _____. Figures indicate that for every 1,000 boys up to the age of six the number of girls dropped from 962 in 1981 to 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. Many couples believe a family is _____ without a male to continue the family name and _____, financially support the family and take care of his parents in their old age.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**boy**' and '**girl**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. WHICH WORD? In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "ABORTION" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about abortion.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|------------|-----------------|
| • survey | • basis |
| • findings | • circumventing |
| • period | • steadily |
| • trend | • illiterate |
| • heirs | • dropped |
| • feticide | • unbalanced |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What were your initial thoughts on this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. Do you think there are any special cases in which abortion is acceptable?
- d. How does the law regard abortion in your country?
- e. How does your religion or others treat abortion?
- f. Do you think the morning after pill is the same as abortion?
- g. Some people think doctors who carry out abortions are murderers. What do you think?
- h. Is it important to have a male in the family to continue the bloodline?
- i. Do you think the practice of female feticide will cause social problems in India?
- j. What would you want to tell the unborn child?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you sympathize with the pro-life argument?
- d. Do you sympathize with the "right to choose" argument?
- e. If a woman wants an abortion, what rights does the father have?
- f. Is having an abortion a selfish choice?
- g. Do you think abortions should be encouraged for girls of 12, 13 or 14 years old?
- h. When is the fertilized egg a human being?
- i. What do you think of back-street abortionists?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

ROLE PLAY: Should all abortion be made illegal?

Team up with classmates who have been assigned the same role to develop your roles and discuss ideas and "strategies" before the role play begins. Introduce yourself to the other role players.

Role A – Pro-abortionist

You believe abortion is a necessary part of society. There are many situations in which terminating a pregnancy will result in a better situation for all concerned. For example, in cases of rape, where a mother does not have the capacity to look after the baby or where the mother is too young.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY ABORTION IS ACCEPTABLE.

Role B – Anti-abortionist

You believe abortion is the same as murder. Human life starts at the moment of conception. You believe no one has the right to end that life. You think mothers should be more responsible and compassionate. You also think governments should do more to help mothers with problems.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY ABORTION IS UNACCEPTABLE.

Role C – Citizen

You are not sure what to think. You can see all sides of the argument and they all sound good. You want to know the answers to lots of questions.

THINK OF MANY QUESTIONS TO ASK THE "EXPERTS".

Role D – An unborn child

You're not really sure about the issue on the outside, in the real world. Listen to what is being said and agree or disagree. You can get angry.

THINK OF REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD SEE THE WORLD.

Change roles and repeat the role play. Comment in groups about the differences between the two role plays.

In pairs / groups, discuss whether you really believe in what you said while you were in your roles.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on this news. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. LETTER: You are an unborn child. Write a letter to the world. Express your thoughts hopes and concerns regarding the world that awaits you. Tell the world what you think of abortion. Read your letters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

4. BOYS 'N' GIRLS: Make a poster about the pros and cons of having a boy or a girl. Show your poster to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all think of similar ideas?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. F d. T e. F f. T g. T h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| a. aborted | terminated |
| b. census | demographic study |
| c. determine | establish |
| d. trend | inclination |
| e. conservatively | soberly |
| f. sex | gender |
| g. circumventing | dodging |
| h. illiterate | uneducated |
| i. dropped | slid |
| j. take care of | provide for |

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| h. The number of girls in India | has been steadily falling |
| i. The female fetus abortion rate is | twice as high among educated mothers |
| j. a family is unbalanced without a | male to continue the family name |

WHICH WORD?

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