

Curbing **Sex Selection**; Expanding Access to **Safe Abortions**complementary or contradictory?

Bela Ganatra
Ipas

ICMA, London, March 31st 2007

What is Sex selection?

Pre and peri conception techniques

Sex Selective abortion

Post birth selection – infanticide

Differential treatment in nutrition, care, health that results in excess mortality

Sex Selection

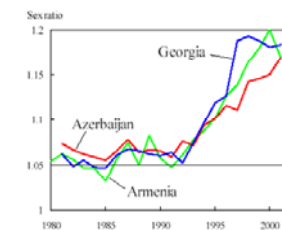
- Gender neutral environments eugenics
- Cultures with strong son preference discrimination
- Mixed scenarios e.g. immigrant communities

Changing sex ratios

| India | Juvenile Sex ratio (0-6yrs) girls /1000 boys |
|-------|---|
| 1991 | 945 |
| 2001 | 927 |

| China | Sex ratio at birth (boys /100 girls) |
|-------|---|
| 1990 | 114 |
| 2000 | 117 |

Caucasian Countries



Mesle et al 2004

Other Asian Countries

S Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam,

Son preference +
Decrease in fertility +
Easy availability of ultrasound



Prenatal sex detection followed by 2nd
trimester abortion (14 -18weeks)

Legal / Regulatory Responses

- Pre implantation Sex selection
Almost all West European countries;
Georgia; Latvia
Canada
Australia; New Zealand;
Israel
- Prenatal Sex detection
India; S Korea; Norway; S Africa (MRC
guidelines)
- Prenatal sex detection and abortion
Nepal, China, Vietnam (though abortion is
available on request)

- MTP Act (1972, amended 2002)
- Medically driven
- Assumption that law would translate into on ground access
Implementation
No continued advocacy / monitoring
- PNDT (1994, amended 2002)
- Feminists /broad spectrum –'gender justice"
- Continuing vigilance by civil society
- Promoting awareness part of law

- Abortion more visible than the sex detection test
- Its difficult to know which abortions follow a sex detection test

The response Increasing pressure on 2nd trimester abortion ...

- Limited services, limited training, more stigma
- Pressure to increase restrictions (e.g. one province in china reduced gestational limits to 14 weeks) or at least not consider any rationalization of regulations (e.g India)

Strategic way forward...

- Recognize both as forms of discrimination against women - look for via media
- Move the focus away from the abortion and to the discrimination
- Regulations have a role in the short term
Bring more and more providers within the accountability / monitoring systems
- Emphasize legal indications for abortion as much as the publicity around sex selection

What then??

- Fetal DNA in maternal blood can be detected as early as 5- weeks
Blood test already available
- The links with medical abortion (e.g Henan province in China banned the sale of these drugs because of possible links to sex selection)

- Long term gains
- Focus on son preference /discrimination
Attitudes
Imbalanced laws ..e.g. property
Better enforcement of pro women laws –
e.g. on dowry

Choice ...what's that??

“My mother-in-law used to say: ‘I won’t say anything but tomorrow if my son starts feeling that he should have a son and he thinks about remarrying, then don’t blame me at that time. You manage that.’ After such things, I have fear in my mind so I thought I will try and go for checking (the sex).’

21 year old woman with two daughters.

(Ganatra, Hirve, Rao 1999)