

DISCUSSION + ACTION GUIDE



it's a girl



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Friends,

I want to sincerely thank you for taking the time to learn more about gendercide. Awareness is the first step towards ending gendercide. As a second step, once you've seen the film, I encourage you to learn about our action campaign for ways you and your community can join the fight on behalf of women and girls. (See the following pages of this guide or watch the video in the extra features on the DVD.)

The war against girls is particularly heartbreaking to me because it is so often waged within families and communities where a girl should find the greatest level of protection and provision. But centuries-old traditions, sustained by deeply ingrained cultural mores that say women are worth less than men, have robbed millions of women of the safety and security they should find at home and in their community.

The completion of *It's a Girl* has left me with more questions than answers: How can husbands and mothers perpetrate such violence against their own daughters and wives? How can the government of China, responsible for protecting its citizens, justify the coercive and destructive One Child Policy? How can doctors in India, trained to save life, participate in the taking of life on such a massive scale? How can the elected officials and judges in India stand by and refuse to enforce the laws that are in place to protect girls from such widespread abuse and neglect?

And, one of my greatest puzzles: how can the world community stand by and allow gendercide to continue? As members of that world community, we are obligated to act; to know is not enough. As we release *It's a Girl*, I ask myself whether or not the world will respond to our call and rise up in defense of the innocent. My deep hope and desire is that the stories of *It's a Girl* will capture the hearts of audiences globally and compel us all to rise up and fuel a movement to end gender-based violence and killings, as well as resoundingly affirm the worth and dignity of girls and women in India, China and the rest of the world.

Sincerely,



Evan Grae Davis
Director, *It's a Girl*

GENDERCIDE FAQ

What is gendercide?

Gendercide refers to the systematic elimination of a gender group, usually female. It is especially prevalent in India, China and other regions of Southeast Asia. This gender-based killing takes several forms, including selective abortion, infanticide, severe malnutrition, medical neglect, abandonment and dowry-related murders. Because this type of crime generally takes place within private households, it is often not widely recognized or acknowledged.



Where does gendercide occur?

The gendercide occurring in India and China is of particular concern because of the sheer size of their population. However, gendercide has been recorded as occurring in the following areas:

EAST ASIA – China, Vietnam, Singapore, and Taiwan

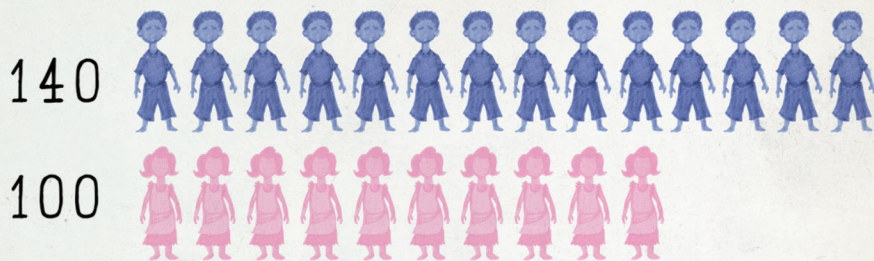
SOUTH ASIA – India, Pakistan, Syria, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia

EASTERN EUROPE – Albania, Romania, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Macedonia

NORTH AFRICA – Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA – most countries

NORTH AMERICA/WESTERN EUROPE – primarily within Asian-expatriate communities



What are the ratios of men to women in India and China today?

INDIA: In 1986, Dr. Amartya Sen used census data to estimate that 37 million women were “missing” from the Indian population. Today the number is closer to 50 million. The most recent Indian census data from 2011 shows the situation is only getting worse. There are now 914 girls aged 0-6 years old for every 1,000 boys of the same age, which is down from 927 in the previous census in 2001). In some regions in India like the state of Haryana, the number is as low as 830.

CHINA: Statistics show that for every 120 males born in China today, 100 females are born. This figure becomes even more troubling in some provinces with ratios over 140 males to 100 females in the 1-4 age group. To put this ratio in perspective, we can compare it to the normally occurring rate of 105 males for every 100 girls.

INTERNATIONALLY: Estimates of the total number of “missing” women vary, but many demographers cite 117 million women “missing” today. Others quote a figure as high as 163 million. Some UN sources have cited as many as 200 million.



What does India's gendercide entail?

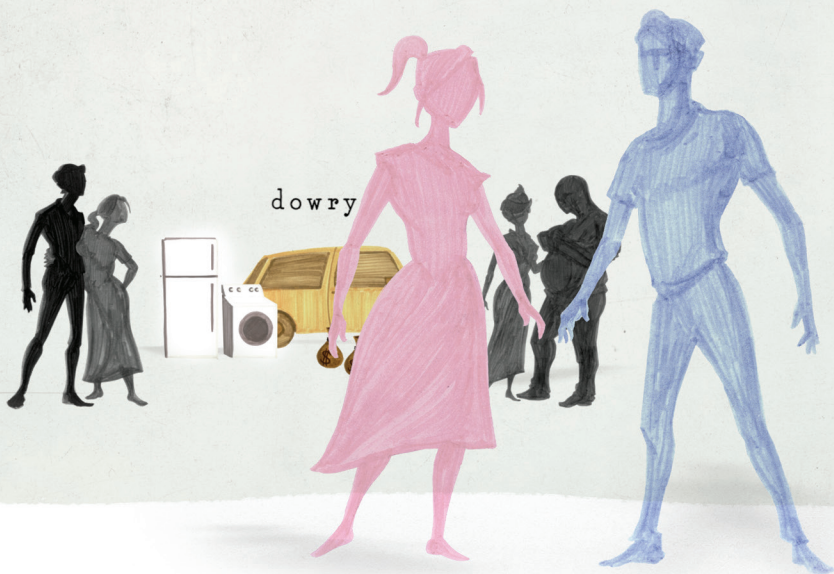
The top culprit is a reported 1 million sex selective abortions annually. This method of gendercide is followed by female infanticide, which is the intentional killing of a newborn child because she is a girl. Midwives in certain states within India have admitted to being paid to kill almost 50 percent of the baby girls they delivered. These two causes are followed by dowry-related murders and preadolescent mortality. Finally, there are maternal mortality rates, for which India ranks the highest in the world. This can be attributed to the large quantity of young girls who are forced to give birth when their bodies are underdeveloped, thus ensuing complications and death at childbirth.



What does China's gendercide entail?

Prior to China's One Child Policy, China's gender ratio was 106 boys for every 100 girls, just slightly skewed from the naturally occurring 105 boys per 100 girls. Since the launch of the policy in 1979, most families are limited to only one child. In combination with son preference, this policy has deadly consequences for girls as many families will go to extreme lengths to make sure their one child is a boy. Some regions do allow two children under certain circumstances, but these regions still experience a significant gender imbalance. Ultimately, the coercive enforcement of the One Child Policy dramatically increases the occurrence of gendercide by forcing families to sacrifice their daughters in the pursuit of a son.

As a result today, many Chinese families abandon, abort, hide or kill their girl children, resulting in China's current gender ratio of 120 boys for every 100 girls. This gender imbalance has led to an increase in sex trafficking, child brides and prostitution as a growing number of men are unable to find women to marry.



What is the difference between gendercide in India and China?

While son preference is deeply ingrained in both Indian and Chinese culture, there are differences in the gendercide taking place in these two nations. Overall, the sex ratio is worse in China than in India. However, China's sex ratio seems to have plateaued, while the sex ratio in India is widening with each census. Dowry and dowry-related deaths are a major factor in India's gendercide, whereas dowry is not practiced in China. Forced abortion and coerced abortion are a major part of China's gendercide, and both practices result primarily from the Chinese government's One Child Policy.

Both nations need government action, but in different ways. China must end its coercive family planning policy, whereas India's government must be pressured to enforce its existing laws against dowry, sex selection and infanticide.



Why is gendercide an issue of international concern?

Above all, gendercide is perhaps the most serious human rights violation happening on earth today. The number of victims exceeds the number of deaths in WWI and WWII combined. It surpasses the number of people killed in all the genocides of the 20th century combined, and it has eliminated more people than HIV/AIDS or the great flu epidemic of early 20th century.

Beyond the sheer scale of gendercide, experts also see this epidemic as a threat to global security, with some suggesting that the decline in marriage rates may lead to a drop in consumption, thus diminishing trade with China. In addition, historical trends indicate that an abundance of males and a shortage of females leads to a more violent and aggressive population.



= wealth + daughters



= ~~wealth + daughters~~

Does gendercide happen in the
West too?

Yes. Although the sex ratios in Western nations are not as extreme as in India or China, gendercide does take place in all countries in the West to a varying degree. In particular, some studies have shown that Asian immigrant communities in the West have similar sex ratios to that of their home nations, indicating that gendercide (and in particular, sex selection) may be happening at a similar rate among immigrant communities.

New Zealand, Australia and most countries in Western Europe prohibit abortion on the basis of a fetus' gender - the notable exceptions in the West are the United States and Canada.



What role has the West played in creating the problem and in helping to end gendercide?

The gender imbalance in India, China and other nations in Asia was fueled by pressure from Western governments and NGOs for population control, which in many cases exploited the existing cultural preference for sons on behalf of the “greater good” of population control. Learn more about this in Mara Hvistendahl’s excellent book, *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men*.

Isn't poverty the root problem of gendercide in India? And isn't education the solution?

The 2011 census of India shows that the highest disparity in the sex ratio is in fact in the wealthiest states and cities, not the poorest. The census also showed that money and education increase people's knowledge of and access to various means and newer technologies to eliminate daughters. The better off a family, the more education they give to their daughter, the more they have to pay for her dowry. Conversely, the more educated their son is, the bigger the amount the family expects in dowry for marrying their son. So while educating girls is certainly a good thing, education alone will not stop female gendercide.



one child
policy

Isn't China's One Child Policy an unfortunate but necessary policy to control China's exploding population?

China's growing population is not as large of a problem as many believe it to be. China ranks 78th in the world for population density, with the 1st place position having the highest population density. Over-population in China is not a legitimate concern. More importantly, though, coercive measures to control a woman's reproduction can never be justified.

it is illegal to determine a fetus' gender.

It is illegal to abort a child because she is a girl.

What are the possible solutions to gendercide?

One of the first steps that many people cite as pivotal in ending gendercide in China is the elimination of the One Child Policy. There is evidence that clearly shows a correlation between the implementation of the One Child Policy and more severe distortion of sex ratios. Furthermore, in areas where there are more aggressive fines and enforcement, the ratio is even more skewed. Thus, the Chinese government would need to find a way to address population growth without brutal regulation of its citizens' fertility patterns.

In India, laws already exist which ban sex selection, infanticide and dowry. But the Indian government, police and medical community must be pressured to enforce these existing laws, both from within India and from the international community. There is a lack of accountability and rampant corruption that results in laws being overlooked.

Of course, in both India and China, the root issue of son preference must also be addressed. Changing deeply ingrained cultural preferences is a very difficult and long-term process. It involves education, media awareness, and a wide variety of approaches to have a broad impact on a cultural mindset.

There is no overnight solution to ending gendercide, but the *It's a Girl* Action Campaign provides several initial steps you and your community can take to start to make an impact. Learn more in the following pages, and at www.itsagirlmovie.com/action.



What results from the distorted sex ratios?

Sex trafficking is on the rise in Asia due to the shortage of women. Increasing numbers of girls are kidnapped, lured or sold into prostitution to meet the demand. In some cases, poor families may buy one girl to serve as a bride to all of the men in a given household.

With an increasing shortage of females, men are turning to younger girls as brides. These **child brides** do not go to school, cannot get jobs, and are often forced to give birth before their bodies are developed. All of these factors contribute to high incidences of **suicide among women**, with China having the highest rate of female suicide in the world.

The surplus of men occurs primarily in the lower classes. In China, these men, called “**bare branches**,” have shorter life expectancies and higher rates of depression. History shows that this surplus of drifting, low paid workers with strong proclivities towards violence leads to increasing amount of crime.



Has there been an official response to gendercide from the UN?

The United Nations monitors missing women and sex ratios at birth through its population fund, development program, and issues reports on a regular basis. The United Nations Women program works to achieve gender equality and prevent violence against women. However, gendercide has historically received little attention within the UN, with one recent and important exception.

In November 2012, a special symposium on femicide took place in Vienna inspired in part by the *It's a Girl* documentary. The symposium produced the Vienna Declaration on Femicide and UN member states are being urged to sign the declaration. Austria, Italy, Peru, the Philippines, Slovenia and Norway are among the first signatories. Learn more about the declaration and related research at

www.femicidenews.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Dr. Puneet Bedi, a gynecologist in India and one of the experts featured in the film, has said, "You can choose whether to be a parent, but once you choose to be a parent you cannot choose whether it's a boy or girl, black or white, tall or short." Do you agree?
- 2 How do you think gendercide can affect the international population beyond skewed gender ratios? What are possible social or economic repercussions? How might the resulting testosterone imbalance from an excess of men impact relations between countries?
- 3 Manufacturers of ultrasound machines have the potential to earn enormous profits exploiting the desire to determine the gender of a fetus in cultures with strong son preference. What would ethical business practices be for ultrasound manufacturers and search advertising companies like Google who may display advertisements for ultrasound machines?
- 4 Female feticide (or sex selective abortion) is one of the primary means of eliminating females in both India and China, yet some in the human rights community are hesitant to actively work against female feticide because it relates to abortion rights. Is there a contradiction between supporting abortion rights in general and trying to restrict or ban abortions based on sex?
- 5 While the gender imbalance is most extreme in India, China and other parts of Southeast Asia, gendercide does occur to a varying degree in most regions of the world. What is being done in your country or region to prevent gendercide, and what more could be done?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men

by [Mara Hvistendahl](#)

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide

by [Nicholas D. Kristof & Sheryl WuDunn](#)

Gender Equal: A Global Blog by the 50 Million Missing Campaign

genderbytes.wordpress.com

Mitu Khurana's Blog: Fighting to Save her Daughter's Lives

mitukhurana.wordpress.com

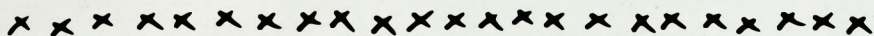
TEDx Talks by Director Evan Grae Davis

www.itsagirlmovie.com/ted

Femicide: A Global Issue that Demands Action

www.femicidenews.com

TAKE ACTION



As many as 200 million females are missing because of gendercide. Now is the time to stand up for girls and women everywhere.

The *It's a Girl* Action Campaign, developed with our partners working in India and China, outlines three immediate steps you can take in the fight against gendercide.

www.itsagirlmovie.com/action



1

Petition World Leaders.

INDIA: Join *It's a Girl* and the *50 Million Missing Campaign* in demanding that the Indian government take action and enforce laws against female feticide, female infanticide and dowry murders.

sign the petition

www.causes.com/indiapetition

CHINA: We are joining our partners *Women's Rights in China* and *Women's Rights Without Frontiers* in demanding that world leaders commit to helping end forced abortion and sterilization in China under the One Child Policy, and take action against China's gendercide.

sign the petition

www.causes.com/chinapetition



Save a Girl.

INDIA: Help keep a girl in India alive by donating to the *Invisible Girl Project*, whose programs encourage Indian mothers to keep their girl children alive and provide the orphaned girls with food, shelter and education.

donate now

www.causes.com/indiadonation

CHINA: Pregnant women at risk of sex-selective abortion, women being pressured to abandon their newborn girls and women at risk of forced abortion or sterilization can all receive support through *Women's Rights Without Frontiers'* network of fieldworkers in China.

By donating to *Women's Rights Without Frontiers*, you can provide food, shelter and protection for these mothers and their newborn children.

donate now

www.causes.com/chinadonation



THE THREE DEADLIEST WORDS
IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD ARE

— **IT'S A GIRL.** —

BUT I BELIEVE WE CAN CHANGE THAT.

I STAND FOR THE GENERATION WHERE THE FULL RIGHTS OF
GIRLS AND WOMEN WILL BE FULFILLED EVERYWHERE BECAUSE
WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS &
HUMAN RIGHTS ARE WOMEN'S RIGHTS.

**BECAUSE OF GENDERCIDE,
200 MILLION GIRLS ARE MISSING.**

THAT'S 200 MILLION FEWER CHANGEMAKERS.
LEADERS. MOTHERS. DOCTORS. TEACHERS. WIVES.
THEY'VE BEEN ABANDONED. NEGLECTED.
ABUSED. MURDERED. UNWANTED.
THIS HAS CREATED AN INCREASE IN
VIOLENCE, SEX-TRAFFICKING AND CHILD ABDUCTION.

A GIRL HAS THE RIGHT TO LIVE NOT JUST BECAUSE SHE
IS A GIRL, NOT JUST BECAUSE SHE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO
SOCIETY, AND NOT JUST BECAUSE SHE COULD

— **CHANGE THE WORLD** —

BUT BECAUSE IT IS HER MOST
BASIC HUMAN RIGHT.

I STAND FOR GENDER EQUALITY. I STAND FOR JUSTICE.
I STAND AGAINST INDIFFERENCE.
I STAND FOR HER. I STAND FOR CHANGE.
STAND WITH ME AGAINST GENDERCIDE.

ITSAGIRLMOVIE.COM



Tell Everyone You Know.

Spread the word about gendercide to everyone you know. Please join us in using the power of Facebook, Twitter and email to tell your friends, family and the world that gendercide is real, is happening right now, and must end!

spread the word

www.itsagirlmovie.com/share



A number of creative and engaging messages about gendercide like this “Manifesto” are available at www.itsagirlmovie.com/share for you to easily share with your friends and family.

