

Amartya Sen's nightmare: female foeticide practised by British Indians

One in 10 girls conceived by Indian-born women in Britain as their third or fourth baby is missing in what could be the result of scaled-up female foeticide, say new research findings broadcast Monday.

The results of research conducted by an Oxford University population expert echo Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's findings in his 1991 study of 'missing women' in Asia and Africa - and new findings shocked Indian doctors in Britain.

While gender-scans and female foeticide are widespread practices in India despite being banned, they are rare in Britain - although not completely unknown among those who were born in India. However, the scale of gender selection took researchers by surprise.

According to Sylvie Dubuc of Oxford University, nearly 1,500 fewer girls were born to Indian mothers in the provinces of England and Wales between 1995 and 2005.

This represents one in 10 girls 'missing' from the birth statistics for Indian-born women having their third or fourth child, the BBC Asian Network radio reported.

Ramesh Mehta, president of the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, expressed shock.

'We are aware that it does go on in India. We are surprised and shocked that it's possibly happening in women of Indian origin who are living in this country. We think this is very unfortunate in this day and age - it's frankly shocking.'

The findings resonate economist Sen's landmark research, in which he found a female deficit of 44 million in China, 37 million in India and a worldwide total 'easily exceeding' 100 million.

In a follow-up editorial written for the British Medical Journalist in 2003, Sen noted the situation had worsened since 1991 because 'the availability of modern techniques to determine the sex of the foetus has made such sex selective abortion possible and easy, and it is being widely used in many societies.'

In her remarks researcher Dubuc said, 'What I have found is that the proportion of boys over girls has increased over time... it's increased in a way that's not normal.'

'The most probable explanation seems to be sex-selective abortion by a minority of mothers born in India.'

However, the bias against girls also appears to afflict British-born women of Indian ethnicity.

Meena, a British-born woman, told the programme, 'I have three daughters. Me and my husband decided to go to India to try and find out what we were having... unfortunately it was another girl so we decided to terminate.'

In an undercover investigation, the Asian Network report also exposed one of India's top gynaecologists who it said was prepared to break the law by arranging for a couple to find out the

sex of their baby and agreeing to suggest someone to do an abortion.

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