

Femicide:

Why is it so wrong?

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Femicide is the killing of women, girls, babies and those unborn who have been murdered only because of their gender. Imagine a young couple in their early twenties living in a city in South America. The young woman just found out that she is two months pregnant with her first child. As her pregnancy goes along, she discovers she is having a girl. She has two options. She can decide to move away to the country side and have her baby girl or stay in the city, abort her pregnancy and try to conceive a boy. She along with many others in the world will abort their pregnancies and try again until they are pregnant with a boy. This is one of the many scenarios in which femicide is evident in the world. There are many situations in which femicide can occur. These include dowry-related femicides and female infanticides. Overall, the practice of femicide is morally wrong and unjust.

### **Here comes the bride...**

Dowry-related femicide is one of the many situations in which this type of homicide takes place. The practice of dowry has deep cultural roots in the majority of the world, going back to the ancient Greek and Roman times. In present day, Dowry is most common in the Indian subcontinent (Garcia-Moreno, Guedes, & Knerr, 2012 p.3). Dowry is the money, goods or estate that the bride and her family gives to the groom and his family. When dowry was first introduced the intent was to help the newly married couple to start their new life together. However, as time progressed dowry turned from an act of generosity to an act of greed. As time progressed, dowry turned into a substantial payment of money or a transaction of jewelry, household items, appliances and even vehicles (O'Brian, 2009 p.225). As a result of dowry becoming a form of

greed, the family of the groom will either request a larger dowry or show discontent with what they already have received. If the bride and her family are unable or refuse to provide a larger dowry, the in-laws will either continuously harass, torture or even murder the wife (Garcia-Moreno, Guedes, & Knerr, 2012 p.3). The most common scenario in which this would occur is with an 'accidental' kitchen fire which was usually caused by the mother in law. This practice is often referred to as Dowry Death or Bride Burning (O'Brian, 2009 p.226). Over time, people recognized that dowry; the cultural practice that they had come accustomed to, had been altered.

As people began to recognize dowry was a serious problem, and that the implications of it had already occurred. The most notable implication of dowry-related femicide is clearly the rise of the death toll. According to the Indian National Crime Record Bureau, the number of dowry deaths had increased by a substantial amount in India. In 1982, there were 392 cases reported, in 2006, there were 7618, in 2009, there were 8,383 and in 2011, there was 8,618 (Laurent, Platzer, & Idomir, 2013 p.65). That means over the course of approximately thirty years, the number of dowry-related deaths had increased by over 8000. In 2011 alone, there were 8618 deaths. That is 8618 less women in India, 8618 families that have lost their daughter, and 8618 families that have killed because the wife could not provide a large enough dowry. In a study conducted by the World Health Organization. In the South-East Asia Region, burns were the third most common cause of death among women aged 15–44 years. Another study conducted in 2001, stated that in India there was an estimated 163 000 fire-related deaths, a figure six times that documented in the national crime statistics (Garcia-Moreno, Guedes, & Knerr, 2012 p.3).

In an attempt to fix the problem a series of laws were put in place. Most notable are The Dowry Prohibition Act and The Protection of Women against Violence Act. The Dowry Prohibition Act is an act to prohibit the giving or receiving of dowry (The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961). The Protection of Women against Violence Act is an act to provide more protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind that occurs with the family and for matter connected therewith or incidental thereto (The Protection of Women From Domestic Violence Act, 2005). Dowry had now turned from a respected cultural tradition, to an illegal activity that is associated with femicide.

### **Congratulations, it's a not a girl**

Female infanticide refers to murdering of female children, because they are seen in their cultures to not have as much worth as a male. This specific practice occurs in places like Southeast Asia, China, India and Pakistan, most notable is in China (Laurent, Platzer, & Idomir, 2013, p.74). Women are perceived as subservient because of their role as homemakers, while men usually ensure the family's social and economic stability. The most common reason for female infanticide is due to economics. In these parts of the world men are seen as the main income-earners of the family. Partially because they are more employable and earn higher wages than that of a woman with the same qualifications. Therefore since males has a greater potential to provide for their families, many people prefer to have a son. In many societies, parents depend on their children to look after them in old age. But in many of these cultures a girl leaves her parental family and joins her husband's family when she marries. The result is that

parents with sons gain extra resources for their old age, when their sons marry, as opposed to when the daughter marries. This gives parents a strong reason to prefer male children. Girls are considered a drain on family resources during their childhood without bringing economic benefits later on. Dowry was also a problem for the family, as they have to provide one to the daughter's new family. Some female infants are killed so that the family doesn't have to pay a dowry when they get married. For families with several daughters this can be a serious financial burden. These economic reasons play a significant role in the preference for a son ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), 2014).

In these regions, many girls are mistreated, abused, starved, murdered and even aborted for the simple reason that they are girls. In India, the common methods of female infanticide include feeding babies with salt to raise their blood pressure, milk mixed with poisonous plants or rice with its husk still on which slices the baby's throat. Recently, to avoid detection, families have started using other methods such as starving or dehydrating the babies or wrapping them in wet towels to induce pneumonia. In China, the one child policy has affected the citizens in that they can only have one child now. As a result of the economic reasons, many couples will have an abortion if they discover they are pregnant with a girl ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), 2014).

Over time the implications of female infanticide in these regions began to surface. These implications include abnormalities in the sex ratio, and abduction of females. The normal sex ratio at birth ranges from 102 to 106 males per 100 females ([www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org), 2014). In India, the gender ratio for children under the age of 15 years old was 117 boys per 100 girls with the average ratio at birth being between 103 and 108 boys per 100

girls. Abnormal gender ratios is not an uncommon occurrence in these regions.

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Montenegro, Albania, Vietnam and Pakistan have all showed an abnormal gender ratio at birth over the past six years, with numbers ranging from 109.9 to 117.6 boys per every 100 girls (Laurent, Platzer, & Idomir, 2013, p.75). In China, The gender ratio is approximately 121 males per 100 females (Greenhalgh, 2013). The approximate number of females under the age of 24 is 201 million, and the approximate number of males under the age of 24 is 230 million (www.cia.gov, 2014). Therefore at least 30 million males will be unable to find a spouse in the future. In the Indian state of Kerala, it is estimated that about 25,000 female newborns are killed every year. It is estimated that nearly 600,000 girls are missing in India each year as a result of sex-selective abortions. As a result of the abnormal gender ratio abductions and the sale of young girls to secure a wife for a son, as well as the trafficking of girls from neighbouring countries for similar purposes (Laurent, Platzer, & Idomir, 2013, p. 74).

In attempt to correct these repercussions, the governments of these places have law created. Among these laws are The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act is an act to prevent the termination of certain pregnancies by registered medical practitioners (The Medical Termination Of Pregnancy Act, 1971). The Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act is an act to provide for the prohibition of sex selection, before or after conception, and for regulation of pre-natal diagnostic techniques for the purpose of detecting genetic abnormalities or metabolic disorders or chromosomal abnormalities or certain congenital malformations or sex-linked disorders and for the prevention of their misuse

for sex determination leading to female infanticide (Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994). South Korea was the first country to report sex ratio distortions at birth because the application of sex-selective technology. As a result in the mid-1990s, the South Korean government began a public awareness campaign warning of the dangers of gender ratio inequality, as well as stricter enforcement of laws forbidding sex-selection technologies (Laurent, Platzer, & Idomir, 2013, p.77).

Dowry deaths and female infanticide are horrific crimes which unfortunately is still evident in today's society. Although the most affected countries are in the eastern part of the world, it could easily be happening in your home country without you recognizing it. These crimes have led to deaths of millions of innocent females, simple because they are females or cannot afford it. Overall, the practice of femicide is morally wrong and unjust.

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