

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE PHENOMENON OF MISSING WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the issue of missing women as a consequence of gender-based violence, i.e., selective birth policies and unequal access to resources, as well as the projection of the number of women and men in the two most populous countries in the world. The socio-economic consequences that gender imbalance could cause are analysed later, not only in China and India, but also beyond the borders of the mentioned countries. Today, more than ever, by connecting people into a “global village”, phenomena in one part of the world cause disturbances across the planet. While progress in combating violence against women and improving support for victims is visible in many countries, new forms of violence are emerging. The Indian Nobel Prize winner and economist Amartya Sen was the first to notice that more than one hundred million women have “disappeared”. The decrease in the number of women will lead, among other things, to an increase in the number of men who will live alone, marriage migration, an increase in the number of kidnapped women, forced marriages, trafficking of women, sexual exploitation and abuse of women, as well as the accumulation of bachelors’ capital.

Keywords: missing women phenomenon, gender-based violence

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INTRODUCTION

The women's struggle for gaining a better position in society and the right to education has been going on for decades. In the future, only those societies that distribute usable knowledge through their education systems, encourage its implementation, and make knowledge available to all members of society will have a perspective [1]. In some parts of the world, education and knowledge are used to battle injustice. However, it is not easy to change thousands of years of male dominance.

Violence against women has dimensions of human rights, health, economy, crime, and social justice. Women's experiences and the prevalence of male violence are gradually becoming known. The World Bank estimates that violence causes far more diseases in women than malaria and traffic accidents combined, and, like cancer, it is an equally serious cause of death and disability among women during their reproductive years [2].

All over the world, women suffer from intimate partner violence, marital rape, rape by known men or strangers, incest, feticide (Removal of a female foetus by illegal methods is discussed in [3][17]. and sexual harassment; they are subjected to trafficking for forced labour and prostitution, forced into marriages [13][14]⁵, and are victims of honour killings [16]⁶, other forms of femicide, and female genital mutilation. All the aforementioned acts are classified as gender-based violence because they are committed almost exclusively by men against women and are openly or tacitly supported by gender inequalities at the social level. Cultural, social, and religious norms, as well as economic inequality, undermine legal norms and favour perpetrators. The term "gender-based violence" indicates the connection between social and economic status and the vulnerability of women in the family and society in general.

MISSING WOMEN PHENOMENON

While progress in the means of combating violence against women and improving support for victims is visible in many countries, new forms of violence are emerging [15][18]⁷. The impact of violence on women and girls is significant. There are 50 million fewer women in southern Africa today than there would be if it were not for selective abortions, violence, and neglect. Girls and women have less access to food than boys and men, are denied the right to education, and are forced into marriages based on family interests, with little or no access to appropriate health care [2].

The untimely death of women and girls due to gender discrimination, unequal access to resources, violence, and neglect is known as the "missing women phenomenon". The Indian Nobel Prize winner and economist Amartya Sen was the first to notice this phenomenon and estimated that more than one hundred million women have "disappeared" [4][5][6].

The ratio of the male to female population in the world is 101 men to 100 women. Analyses, however, show that in recent decades the gender imbalance has been increasing, which has been contributed to by a

⁵ Arranging child marriages is widespread in South Asia and rural sub-Saharan Africa. In rural India, 47% of girls are married before the age of 18 (UNFPA report). The Indian state of Bihar has the largest number of marriages entered into by children, amounting to 69%. One third of all girl brides are found in India. According to UNFPA, if the current rate of child marriage in the world continues, every day 39,000 girls will be married too young. See: Reywan, V., *Changing Attitudes on Child Marriage in India*, <https://globalvoices.org/2013/03/09/changing-attitudes-on-child-marriage-in-india/>, accessed 11.11.2022. In South Sudan, 52% of girls get married before the age of 18. According to a World Vision report, for most of these girls, marriage has deadly consequences. South Sudan has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world. A girl in South Sudan is three times more likely to die in childbirth than to finish school. As girls at this age are not yet physically or mentally ready for marriage and pregnancy, childbirth is a painful, traumatic, and most often fatal experience for them. If they survive childbirth, the girls are left with serious health problems. Increasingly, families understand that their girls can continue their education, obtain employment, and help the family financially in this way, instead of being subjected to forced marriages and bride sales. See: *Levels of Violence Against Women and Girls in South Sudan Among the Highest in the World Reveals Groundbreaking Study*, <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/levels-violence-against-women-and-girls-south-sudan-among-highest-world-reveals>, accessed 13.10.2022.

⁶ According to the estimate of the United Nations, about 5,000 honour killings occur annually. Women's organizations from the Middle East and Southwest Asia, however, suspect that more than 20,000 women worldwide are killed each year because of honour and that many killings are classified as suicides to avoid prosecution.

Honour killings also occur in Western countries, Russia and Canada within migrant communities. Robert Fisk, *The crime wave that shames the world*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-the-crimewave-that-shames-the-world-2072201.html>, accessed 13.10.2022.

⁷ Human trafficking has surpassed drug smuggling as one of the world's fastest-growing criminal activities, although estimates of its scale vary. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, between 700,000 and 2 million people are trafficked annually (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, 2009), while the United States *Trafficking in Persons Report* estimates that between 600,000 and 800,000 people are trafficked annually, mostly for commercial sexual exploitation (U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2005), of whom approximately 80% are women and girls.

decrease in the fertility⁸ rate and the rapid development of technology that allows parents to determine the sex of the foetus. Prenatal sex selection and the favouring of sons in some countries have resulted in ratios of between 110 and 120 boys at birth to 100 girls [7]. As the biological sex ratio at birth is between 104 and 106, continued gender selection and favouring of boys will lead to serious social and economic consequences. This unnatural phenomenon is characteristic of societies permeated by social, cultural, political, and economic injustice towards women, which manifests itself in violence and violations of women's human rights. The growing number of missing women points to cultures in which women's inequality is deeply rooted. By favouring male children, patriarchal environments contribute to the discrimination of women and girls in society, creating a climate conducive to violence.

The number of women is decreasing due to gender discrimination in Asia (mostly India and China), the Middle East, and North Africa, but this phenomenon is also found in immigrant communities in the USA and former USSR countries, especially in the Caucasus region. It is estimated that 2,000 Chinese and Indian immigrant girls between 1991 and 2004 were not born because of their gender [8].

Over 90 million women are "missing" in the expected population of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Table 1. Number of missing women in certain Asian countries

Number of Missing Women for Selected Asian Countries Using Census Data							
Country	Year	Actual Number of Males	Actual Number of Females	Actual Sex Ratio	Expected Sex Ratio	Expected Number of Women	Missing Women
Afghanistan	2000	11.227.000	10.538.000	106.5	96.4	11.646.226	1.108.266
Bangladesh	2001	65.841.419	63.405.814	103.8	99.6	66.105.842	2.700.028
China	2000	653.550.000	612.280.000	106.7	100.1	652.897.103	40.617.103
India	2001	531.277.078	495.738.169	107.2	99.3	535.022.234	39.284.065
Pakistan	1998	68.873.686	63.445.593	108.6	99.2	69.429.119	5.983.526
South Korea	2000	23.068.181	22.917.108	100.7	100.0	23.068.181	151.073
Taiwan	2000	11.386.084	10.914.845	104.3	100.2	11.363.357	448.512
Total		90.292.573					

Source: [9]

How many women disappear as a result of selective birth policies is most visible in the youth population (up to 19 years of age), as shown by the data from Guilmoto's research from 2010.

Table 2. Percentage of women in the population aged 0 to 19 in certain Asian countries

Country	Gender gap 0-19 age group (2010)	Percentage of females
Afganistan	265.000	3
Bangladesh	416.000	1.4
China	25.112.000	15
India	12.618.000	5.3
Nepal	125.000	1.8
Pakistan	206.000	0.5
South Korea	336.000	6.2
Singapore	21.000	3.5
Vietnam	139.000	1

Source: [10]

The estimate of the United Nations Population Division is that out of 117 million missing women (mostly from China and India), 39 million are under 20 years of age, which corresponds with the data from Guilmoto's research. Demographic estimates are based not only on the growing number of unborn girls due to prenatal sex selection, but also on the excessive mortality of women in recent decades.

⁸ Fertility is defined as the average number of children a woman gives birth to during her reproductive years. A fertility rate of 2.1 ensures simple population replacement. In most developed countries, as well as in Serbia, the total fertility rate is significantly below 2.1. In developed countries with low fertility, population size is maintained through stable immigration, while in Serbia the total number of inhabitants is continuously decreasing.

CONSEQUENCES FOLLOWING THE DECREASING NUMBER OF WOMEN

A decrease in the number of women is going to lead, among other things, to an increase in the number of men who will live alone. The following simulation is based on estimates for China and India, since analyses show that in these countries 95% of girls under the age of 20 “disappear”. The simulation shows the expected number of male marriages per hundred female marriages and the percentage of men who will remain single at the age of 50. It also contains an alternative scenario based on the later entry of men into marriage by two years, i.e., at the age of 30.5.

Table 3. Imbalance in the number of men and women ready for marriage in China and India

	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050	2060	2070	2080	2090	2100
China										
Marriage Squeeze	99	124	160	157	155	144	127	121	115	110
Percentage of single men at age 50	3.3	3.2	4.1	9.3	14.5	14.6	12.8	9.6	7.2	6.0
Marriage Squeeze*	99	117	148	144	145	140	124	122	118	112
Percentage of single men at age 50*	3.3	3.1	3.2	6.9	10.6	11.1	10.8	8.8	7.4	6.6
India										
Marriage Squeeze	104	125	145	158	164	157	141	134	129	125
Percentage of single men at age 50	1.1	1.3	2.4	5.0	8.0	10.0	10.2	8.6	7.2	6.5
Marriage Squeeze*	104	112	118	122	122	120	116	117	119	119
Percentage of single men at age 50*	1.1	1.3	1.7	3.0	4.5	5.7	6.4	6.3	6.4	6.7

Source:[7]

*alternative scenario based on the later entry of men into marriage by two years, i.e., at 30.5 years of age

As the number of potential grooms during the observed ten-year intervals increases in relation to the number of potential brides, the number of male marriages is proportionally reduced, which results in an increase in the number of single men during the following period, and the imbalance of expected “male” and “female” marriages (marriage squeeze) becomes more acute. Men who remained single before the age of 50 are assumed to try to get married in the following period. The simulation also includes corrections for mortality and remarriage. As the results show, the later entry of men into marriage moderates the imbalance.

The consequences of the selective birth policy that is taking place today are going to leave an indelible mark on the structure of the population over the next 50 years. Let us therefore consider the year 2060. While 14.6% of unmarried Chinese men or 10% of bachelors in India may not appear alarming, when we take into account that out of the total world population (7,509,980,484; Socio-economic statistical information about India (2022)), 1,373,541,278 people live in China [11] and 1,331,703,761 in India (Socio-economic statistical information about India (2022)), this means that in 2060, in the two most populous countries in the world, where one third of the world’s population lives, there will be approximately 337,891,153 men who will live alone because of missing women. Placed in a patriarchal context, such as that of these countries where traditional marriage is the basis of family formation, the consequences of demographic changes are going to emphasise the importance of women as wives and mothers and, above all, their reproductive roles in a dominantly male society. Theoretically, changes in the demographic environment are going to lead to greater pressure on women to achieve higher fertility rates and to marry earlier. Insisting on women’s reproductive responsibility will come into conflict with the need for longer education and better employment prospects, often associated with later female marriages and lower fertility. There is an obvious conflict between the struggle for women’s independence, on the one hand, and the emphasis on women’s reproductive duties, on the other, in countries affected by a lack of marriageable women in the total population.

Predictions based on existing demographic trends and estimates of missing women indicate that in China and India the number of men seeking marriage will exceed the number of women available for marriage by 50% in the next few decades (men who remain bachelors in one period will attempt to marry in the next), which will lead to delayed entry into marriage, rivalry among bachelors, longer education, and greater investment in training and personal development. The accumulation of wealth and property will affect national economies through higher incomes and increased savings. On the other hand, the number of illegal organisations responding to the demand for sex workers or wives is likely to increase. An increase in trafficking in women inevitably leads to an increase in various forms of violence against women in countries facing a shortage of brides. The postponement of marriage is also linked to an increase in organised prostitution and the spread of HIV.

The lack of women may change family law norms in the direction of allowing homosexual unions.

In regions where the consequences of missing women are already being felt, men who cannot marry resort to “importing” brides from the poorest rural areas, disadvantaged economic backgrounds, other ethnic groups, or remote regions. International marriage migration to Asia is already noticeable. The main destinations today are Taiwan and South Korea, while migrations of women from Nepal, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, Mongolia, and other neighbouring countries of China and India are expected (UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (2012)). When neighbouring countries are unable to offer enough women, there may be an increase in emigration from China and India (already among the countries with the largest numbers of emigrants), as well as illegal migration to countries outside Asia.

The gender imbalance caused by selective prenatal sex selection will contribute to an increase in the number of kidnapped women, forced marriages, trafficking in women, sexual exploitation, and abused women.

Growing pressure on women to marry and fulfil their traditional reproductive duties, forced polyandry, an increasing demand for sex workers, the advancement of trafficking networks, weak public representation, limited influence on political decision-making, and strong institutional control by dominant men will lead to family and gender laws that favour male interests. As a result, one third of the world’s women, due to prenatal sex selection currently taking place in certain countries, will face gender discrimination in the coming decades, which will ultimately lead to an increase in violence against women through the deprivation of their strongest weapon in the struggle for equality knowledge. Returning women primarily to a reproductive role will, among other things, deprive many Asian women of educational opportunities, better labour market positioning, higher earnings, opportunities for choice, and political influence factors that significantly contribute to the reduction of gender-based violence.

CONCLUSION

While in the natural sciences there are certain patterns of relationships among phenomena that occur with such regularity that laws are derived from them, there are no such principles in the social sciences [12]. Social phenomena are the result of the interaction of numerous factors with often unpredictable outcomes. As life is the most inventive creator, even the noblest ideas often serve purposes that their creators did not imagine. The possibility of early detection of the sex of a child, along with the recognition of women’s right to freedom of decision regarding childbirth, although representing advanced civilisational achievements, has in highly patriarchal societies opened the door to new forms of gender-based violence with long-term consequences.

Today, more than ever, by connecting people into a “global village”, phenomena in one part of the world cause tremors across the planet. Prenatal sex selection and other forms of gender-based violence not only violate the human rights and freedoms of women, but also contribute to increases in human trafficking, both illegal and legal migration, with accompanying economic and social implications. Raising awareness of the scale of violence against women has led to the adoption of the first international acts aimed at improving the position of women as one of the prerequisites for a stable social community. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, yet in the 21st century it still seems that equal opportunities do not exist. When considering numerical indicators and unequal access to resources, it appears that women are walking a path over which men are flying with new technologies.

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