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‘And they kill me, only because I am a girl’... a review of sex-selective abortions in South Asia

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Abstract

The low social status of women and the preference for sons determine a high rate of sex-selective abortion or, more specifically, female feticide, in South Asian countries. Although each of them, irrespective of its abortion policy, strictly condemns sex-selective abortion, data suggest high rates of such procedures in India, Nepal, China and Bangladesh. This paper reviews the current situation of sex-selective abortion, the laws related to it and the factors contributing to its occurrence within these countries. Based on this review, it is concluded that sex selective abortion is a public health issue as it contributes to high maternal mortality. Abortion policies of South Asian countries vary greatly and this influences the frequency of reporting of cases. Several socio-economic factors are responsible for sex-selective abortion including gender discriminating cultural practices, irrational national population policies and unethical use of technology. Wide social change promoting women's status in society should be

instituted whereby women are offered more opportunities for better health, education and economic participation through gender sensitive policies and programmes. A self-regulation of the practices in the medical profession and among communities must be achieved through behavioural change campaigns.

Keywords:

Sex-selective abortion | Female feticide | Gender discrimination | South Asia | Social determinants

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