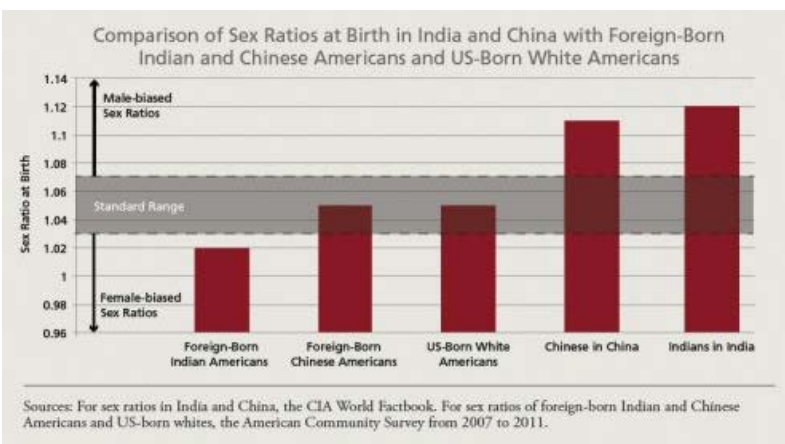


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Study debunks notion that Asian Americans prefer boys over girls

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In analysing census data from 2007-2011, researchers found that the at-birth sex ratios of Asian Americans are the same as white Americans. Arthur J Pais reports



As South Dakota became the eighth American state to ban sex-selective abortion, the proponents of similar laws continue argue that they are needed to stop Asian immigrants from aborting female foetuses.

The Prenatal Non-discrimination Act, a bill to outlaw sex-selective abortion pending in the United States Congress, states, 'evidence strongly suggests that some Americans are exercising sex-selection abortion practices within the United States consistent with discriminatory

practices common to their country of origin.'

However, a new multi-disciplinary report, by the University of Chicago's International Human Rights Clinic, the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, and Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health, says Asian Americans do not prefer boys.

"These bills are supported by narrow and outdated data," said Sital Kalantry, who was clinical professor of law and director of the International Human Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School when the research was undertaken, and who is now at

the Cornell Law School.

"To assume that just because so many Indians in India use sex selection abortion as a means to ensuring that they have at least one boy that Asian immigrants do the same in the United States is a racial stereotype," she continued. "While there are supposedly 50 million women missing in India, our researchers found that foreign-born Indians in the United States are actually having more girls than white Americans."

When you take all of the US births of foreign-born Chinese, Indian and Koreans into account, their at-birth sex ratios (the number of girls per 1,000 boys) are skewed towards female children, she pointed out. This is in stark contrast to places like India, where the sex ratio stands at 940, as per the most recent Indian census.

In analysing census data from 2007-2011, researchers found that the at-birth sex ratios of Asian Americans are the same as white Americans. In fact, when foreign-born Chinese, Indian and Korean families have two boys, their third child is more likely -- than white Americans -- to be a girl. Yet, when these same groups have two girls, their third child is more likely to be a boy than white Americans. This suggests that families that already have two kids have a desire to have at least one girl and one boy in their family.

'This report debunks the myths that have been used to advance an anti-abortion agenda that stigmatises Asian American and Pacific Islanders,' said Miriam Yeung, executive director, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. 'We have long thought of this type of legislation as "wolves in sheep's clothing."

'This research lays bare the disguise, and what remains is legislation that promotes racial stereotyping and is deeply offensive to Asian-American families.'

Legislation to ban abortion based on the sex of the foetus was the second most popular anti-abortion ban in 2013. California, home to the largest population of Asian Americans in the United States, considered and rejected moving this ban out of committee months ago.

Critics of the legislation asserted it is unnecessary and misdirected, and that it stereotypes Asian Americans and restricts women's access to health care.

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The report asserted that despite the lack of conclusive data that Asian Americans are 'importing' sex-selective abortion practices to the US, legislators have cited to son- preference practices in China and India to limit access to abortion for women in the United States.

'In fact,' the report added, 'lawmakers supporting this legislation largely ignore the 11 other countries that have sex ratios at birth that are skewed in favour of males -- including six European countries. Despite claims to the contrary (by proponents of these bans), only four countries other than the United States -- China, Kosovo, Nepal, and Vietnam -- have laws explicitly prohibiting sex-selective abortion. Most anti-sex selection laws globally prohibit practices related to assisted fertility. Sex-selective abortion laws in the United States, however, do not prohibit sex selection achieved through use of assisted fertility technologies.'

"I don't condone the widespread son-preference in places like India, which is due to a number of factors," Kalantry said. "However, some of the economic factors for having boys in India are less prevalent in the United States. Lacking a national pension system, boys provide for parents in old-age in India, whereas girls are thought to leave the parents family when they are married. Even though dowry is illegal, it is still practiced and can be a huge economic burden on poor and middle-class families particularly."

The surplus of men is creating crises in India where some emerging studies have shown that is correlated with an increase in violence against women, added Kalantry, who has also studied acid violence against women in the subcontinent.

For lawmakers and conservative crusaders who urge sex-selection abortion ban, a film made two years ago comes very handy. The documentary, *It's a Girl*, about sex-selection abortions in India and China, is widely screened by pro-choice groups across America, and was an official selection for the Amnesty International Film Festival.

The film talks about babies killed in wombs, young girls trafficked, and offers cases of extreme dowry abuse.

"That part is true," said law professor Sital Kalantry of Cornell University. "But how many people know why this film was made and that it was made by a church?" She said the film suggests that "Indians are savages, the women are victims, and the Americans are the saviours."

Kalantry says she became suspicious after realising the film does not acknowledge its funding sources. Eventually, she figured out that its director Evan Grae Davis is also known as Evan Davis, former (he says) media director of the pro-life Harvest Media Ministry. Shadowline Films based in Arizona, which produced the documentary, has the same address as Harvest, and the two entities are linked in other ways.

'Whether or not the intent of the movie is to push states to adopt sex-selection abortions bans, pro-life groups seem to be using it for that,' Kalantry wrote in Slate. 'Although no one supports sex-selective abortion, pro-choice groups correctly worry that such laws could be misused to restrict abortion more broadly.'

Arthur J Pais in New York

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