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A recipe for social disaster

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In China and India, among other countries, sex-selection abortion and female infanticide are growing problems. The ratio of boys to girls in some parts of the world is increasingly out of line -- China averages 120 boys for 100 girls, where the norm worldwide hovers around 105 boys for every 100 girls.

The concept of sex selection against females may well be out of line with Canadian norms, but not so for those representing Canada at the United Nations.

Last week, at the 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, the United States and South Korea brought forward a UN resolution condemning sex-selection abortion and infanticide against girls. And Canada played an instrumental role in killing it.

The theme of the session was "the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child" and the resolution called for the elimination of one of the earliest forms of gender discrimination.

It recognized sex selection against girls as being the result of gender inequality, which, "may be linked to social, economic and political causes." It further called on states to "eliminate the harmful practices of prenatal sex selection and female infanticide," something only one country, South Korea, has had success in doing through a public education campaign.

The resolution called for advocacy and awareness, and developing programs to empower women in places where the right to live is threatened only for the fact that the fetuses are female.

This resolution that now lies dead on the cutting room floor would have acted as public education for those who are not aware of the gravity of the situation. Indeed, there is a link between sex selection and a host of other problems: a rise in violence against women that has already been noted in places where sex selection is common, an upswing in female trafficking, in kidnapped women and a higher demand for prostituted women and girls.

Of course, it has been known for quite some time that China and India show a rising gender imbalance. China now faces a staggering shortage of 50 million young women -- the corresponding number of young men will not find wives or settle down and raise a family.

What is less known is that many other nations are showing the same precarious irregularities: among them Singapore, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Taiwan, South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam and Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. The birth ratio irregularities extend to places such as Egypt, Libya and Tunisia among others.

The trend is even noticeable in certain communities in Canada with high immigrant populations. In Surrey, B.C., for example, where a large Indo-Canadian community resides, in 2000 there were 111 boys for 100 girls. In Richmond, B.C., which has a large Chinese-Canadian population, that rate was 112 to 100 in 2003.

There are other repercussions associated with gender imbalance. There are studies on the aggression effect on society of too many young, single men -- some say this is prejudice against men, others say it is merely a natural reflection of reality.

After all, violent crimes are committed more often by men. Female street gangs are rare. But when millions of young men cannot find spouses, the possibility, indeed, likelihood, of social unrest grows.

This is the thesis of a 2004 book called Bare Branches: The Security Implications of Asia's Surplus Male Population. The authors write that gender imbalance "may very likely influence the course of national and perhaps even international politics in the 21st century."

Gender inequality in the West hinges largely around lifestyle, not life and death. When the West discusses gender parity, it is largely in the context of taking on more diverse responsibilities in the workforce or ensuring equal contributions to housework.

That is the luxury of living in North America. In China, for example, other forms of gender inequality prevail. Forced abortions, the result of the one-child policy, are still commonplace.

Nations like China and India are facing a catastrophe as the gender imbalance grows more and more skewed.

The Canadians at the United Nations took issue, inside sources say, with any number of aspects in the draft resolution and wanted to alter the text so substantially that the countries formerly supporting the resolution could no longer and withdrew it entirely.

Apparently, for some Canadian representatives at the UN, a statutory deference to women's abortion rights takes precedence to the right of women to live in the first place.

Sadly, for them, the fact that millions of women are missing was not enough to agree on a mere statement against female sex-selection abortion and infanticide.

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