

Shortage of women due to sex-selective abortion in India giving rise to 'wife-sharing'

INDIA, October 28, 2011 (LifeSiteNews.com) - Reports from some northern Indian states that have the worst gender imbalance in the country due to sex-selective abortion say that "wife-sharing" among brothers is becoming a common occurrence.

"In every village, there are at least five or six bachelors who can't find a wife. In some, there are up to three or four unmarried men in one family. It's a serious problem," said retired police constable Shri Chand, 75, in a Reuters report.

"Everything is hush, hush. No one openly admits it, but we all know what is going on. Some families buy brides from other parts of the country, while others have one daughter-in-law living with many unwedded brothers."

A woman who reportedly escaped from such a situation in the Baghpat district of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh recounted that she was forced into bearing children for her husband's two brothers, who could not find wives for themselves.

"My husband and his parents said I had to share myself with his brothers," said the woman. "They took me whenever they wanted - day or night. When I resisted, they beat me with anything at hand," the woman stated, adding that she had never filed a police complaint because of fear.

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Although gender determination tests and sex-selective abortion were officially outlawed in 1994, Indian census records show an ever-increasing ratio of boys to girls due to sex-selective abortion of daughters, because existing laws are not being enforced.

According to the 1991 national census, the age 0-6 sex ratio was 934 girls to 1,000 boys, which declined to 927 in the 2001 census, and to 914 girls aged six and under for every 1,000 boys in 2011.

The natural worldwide average sex ratio is 1,050 girls to every 1,000 boys.

Northern districts of India have the worst ratios, with areas in some states such as Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan having just 798 girls for every 1,000 boys under the age of six.

A study published in May in the British medical journal The Lancet, estimated that up to 12 million selective abortions of girls have occurred in India in the past three decades, and that increasing wealth and improving literacy are fueling a crisis of "missing girls."

"There were 4 million to 12 million selective abortions from 1980 to 2010 and just in the last decade, about 3 to 6 million, so the problem is increasing," said Dr. Prabhat Jha of the University of Toronto's Center for Global Health Research, and lead author of the study.

The cultural preference for boys in India leads to further neglect of girls who do survive to birth.

"After birth, son-preference continues to persist, leading to the neglect of girls and their lack of access to nutrition, health and maternal care in the critical early years," a UN report stated.

Some parents go so far as to name their daughters "Nakusa" or "Nakushi," which mean "unwanted" in Hindi.



There is, however, a growing movement in India to "save the girl child," to fight against sex-selective abortion, female infanticide and daughter neglect.

Sudha Kankaria of the organization Save the Girl Child pointed to an initiative by a health officer in Maharashtra state, that gives girls named Nakusa the opportunity to officially change their first names.

Health officer Dr. Bhagwan Pawar of the Satara district near Mumbai arranged a renaming ceremony last week that saw 285 girls receive certificates with their new names along with small flower bouquets. Some of the girls chose names of movie stars or Hindu goddesses, or traditional girls names such as "Vaishali," which means "prosperous, beautiful and good."

A fifteen year old took the name "Ashmita," which means "very tough" or "rock hard" in Hindi. "Now in school, my classmates and friends will be calling me this new name, and that makes me very happy," she said in an AP report.

"Nakusa is a very negative name as far as female discrimination is concerned," said Dr. Pawar.

“When the child thinks about it, you know, ‘My mom, my dad, and all my relatives and society call me unwanted,’ she will feel very bad and depressed. We have to take care of the girls, their education and even financial and social security, or again the cycle is going to repeat,” added Kankaria, but stressed that giving the girls new names was just the beginning of helping them.

“We need to provide them with access to education, healthcare and opportunities which will help them make decisions for themselves and stand up to those who seek to abuse or exploit them,” Neelam Singh, head of Vatsalya, an Indian NGO working on children’s and women’s issues, told Reuters.