

Has China's campaign against female feticide done more harm than good?

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Why are female fetuses aborted in China? Boys are considered a greater asset for farming, but why has the number of families in the cities who want a boy at any cost doubled?

Sociologist Lisa Eklund from Lund University in Sweden has studied why families in China choose to abort [girls](#).

When it emerged that far more boys than girls were being born in China, a nationwide campaign was started against sex-selective abortion. Nonetheless, the imbalance between the [sexes](#) continued to increase. At the time of the census in 2005, almost 121 boys were born for every 100 girls. Last year's census showed that the ratio had improved somewhat. But it is still too early to celebrate, in Lisa Eklund's view: the narrowing of the gap does not necessarily mean that girls are valued more highly.

Although the imbalance in the [sex ratio](#) is highest in [rural areas](#), Lisa Eklund sees a worrying trend in the cities. In the 1990s, the number of families who wanted to have a son at any cost doubled (from 2.8 per cent to 4.5 per cent).

"This doubling came at the same time as cuts in the state welfare system in the cities, which meant that adult sons were given a more important role in providing for the social and [financial security](#) of the elderly", she says.

Lisa Eklund says that the government's "Care for girls" campaign, which

aimed to increase the value placed on girls, may have done more harm than good. Families receive extra support if they have girls and in rural areas exceptions are made from the one-child policy if the first child is a girl.

"By compensating parents of girls in various ways, the government reinforces the idea that girls are not as valuable as boys", says Lisa Eklund.

While writing her thesis, Lisa Eklund lived in China and worked for the UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund). She carried out a lot of field work, including in rural areas of Anhui Province:

"One important reason that families in rural areas want sons is that they are expected to take over the farming. Although that is a poor argument", says Lisa Eklund. "Young people, both men and women, are moving away from rural areas. Of those who stay, women provide just as much help as men. In fact, it is the elderly who end up taking greater responsibility for the agriculture."

However, there are also other reasons why sons are seen as more important for families. It is traditional for a girl to move in with her husband's family when she gets married and she thus cannot look after her own parents when they grow old. Boys also play an important role in ancestor worship – they ensure that the family name lives on.

Provided by Lund University

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