

The uncertain future of gender 'rebalancing' in China

19 June 2014

China is the most gender imbalanced country in the world, with an official sex ratio at birth (SRB) of 117.78 (boys for every one hundred girls) in 2011. Over the past two decades the rise in China's SRB has had a wide range of economic and social consequences. Golley and Tyers investigate the future impact of this rise using demographic and economic projections. Their results suggest that even if the Chinese government takes action to rebalance the sex ratio, the long-term picture is uncertain.

The gender imbalance in China reflects a long-standing cultural preference for sons, and was increased by the introduction of the one-child policy in the early 1980s. The main cause of the rising SRB is sex-selective abortion, made possible – from the mid 1980s – by the widespread use of ultrasound technology. This gender imbalance at birth persists in the population as a whole. China has severely abnormal rates of excess female child mortality, and overall, has the world's highest sex ratio in the total population, despite the fact that women have higher life expectancy.

The higher proportion of males in the population has had a number of effects. Among the economic impacts, it has contributed to [higher levels](#) of savings, as families compete for scarce females in the marriage market. In social terms, an increase in the number of 'surplus' males is said to have caused a 3% increase in property and violent crimes in China between 1988 and 2004.

China's government has recognised that the high SRB is a significant problem, and has made reducing the SRB a national policy priority.

Golley and Tyers examine a number of projections based on different SRBs and fertility rates, and on whether or not appropriate policies are implemented. Because their data are categorised by age group, gender and skill level, they are able to focus on unmatched low-skill males (those most

likely to commit crimes).

They find that by 2030 the number of unmatched low-skill men of reproductive age will be between 27 and 50 million – and rising. Alternative scenarios in which gender 'rebalancing' policies are implemented reveal that the economic impacts of such policies will take time, and not all of them will necessarily be positive. A declining [sex ratio](#) will produce a reduction in savings, which in turn will boost GDP in the short term, though the longer-term effects are less positive. There would also be a reduction in crime and a rise in productivity, and these beneficial effects could outweigh any negative impacts from lower savings.

Golley and Tyers conclude: "Given that China appears to be just part of a concerning global trend ... the economic and other impacts of rising gender imbalances may have far-reaching global consequences in the future."

It is important that 'gender rebalancing' remains high on the Chinese leadership's policy agenda. Although the links between [gender](#) imbalances, savings, crime and productivity are uncertain, there does seem to be significant potential for social unrest in a country the size of China's with more than 25 million unmatched men.

More information: "Gender 'Rebalancing' in China." Jane Golley & Rod Tyers. *Asian Population Studies*, Volume 10, Issue 2, 2014. [DOI: 10.1080/17441730.2014.902159](#). pages 125-143

Provided by Taylor & Francis

APA citation: The uncertain future of gender 'rebalancing' in China (2014, June 19) retrieved 19 April 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-06-uncertain-future-gender-rebalancing-china.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.