



national asian pacific american women's forum

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Sex Selection: A Fact Sheet

(Information Taken and Adapted from the Campaign to End Sex Selection, www.endsexselection.org)

What is Sex Selection?

Sex selection refers to the practice of choosing the sex of a child before or after pregnancy. With the development and marketing of new reproductive technologies, sex selection is becoming increasingly popular and widespread in the United States. In most of the world, sex selection is used to guarantee the birth and survival of baby boys, exacerbating discrimination against and abuse of girls. Historically, sex selection has been practiced more often in Asian communities in the U.S. and in Asia.

What technologies exist to enable sex selection?

Ultrasound, amniocentesis, and chorionic villus sampling (CVS): These prenatal screening techniques enable the determination of a baby's sex while in the womb. Amniocentesis and CVS are invasive procedures requiring lab facilities, while ultrasounds are both noninvasive and portable devices, making them the primary means of sex determination in India and China.

Baby Gender Mentor: This home kit claims to allow a pregnant woman to determine her baby's sex as early as 5 weeks into pregnancy through a DNA test.

Sperm Sorting: A patented procedure called MicroSort Sperm Sorting separates sperm bearing X and Y chromosomes. Depending on whether a girl (X) or boy (Y) is desired, the X- or Y-bearing sperm are introduced through intrauterine insemination or *in vitro* fertilization.

Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD): PGD is used as part of *in vitro* fertilization. The embryos created outside the body are tested for genetic abnormalities, and increasingly to determine their sex. Only embryos of the desired sex are reintroduced.

What social, ethical, and reproductive challenges does sex selection raise?

Sex Selection and Sex Discrimination: Most sex selection is gender-biased. The decision to have a child of one sex is often based on narrow gender stereotypes that can often limit the expectations of what a girl can do and increase the pressures for how a boy should be. Sex selection encourages expectations such as moms who want girls to dress in pink and take shopping and dads who want boys to take over the family business and play sports.

Sex Selection and Gender Violence: In most societies, male children have historically been more valued than female children. In the case of sex selection, "undesired" female children may be neglected and denied equal nutrition, health care, and educational opportunities. Because of the greater value placed on sons, women may be coerced to undergo abortions of female fetuses, or forced to use technologies that would increase the probability of conceiving a male child.

Disability Rights: People with disabilities are acutely aware that many medical technologies exist to minimize the number of disabled people born into this world. The justification for sex-selection is often premised on the acceptance and extension of disability de-selection. This type of selection can lead to a form of eugenics where only certain types of children are allowed to be born.

Normalization of "Selection" and "Design" of Children: If we can select the sex of children today, where would we stop in the selection of other traits such as intelligence, skin tone, and eye and hair color? Sex selection as a concept and practice opens the door for these forms of selection and can turn children into designable commodities.



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How is sex selection marketed in the U.S.?

“Family Balancing:” As family size shrinks in the U.S., sex selection is offered to “balance” the sex of children in a family. It is seen as justified for families with one or more children of one sex to choose to have a child of the other sex.

“For the woman who can’t wait to open her Christmas presents:” The Baby Gender Mentor offers parents the “fun information” of their child’s sex as early as possible in pregnancy. What implications does this early knowledge have on people who want to have children of a particular sex?

“Desire a Son?” and “A Boy or Girl: You can choose the gender of your baby:” Ethnic-specific advertisements in South Asian and Asian community papers and media highlight the pervasive son preference in the community.

What policies and laws regulate sex selection?

In the U.S., sex selection technologies and marketing are largely unregulated. The American Society of Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) has drawn a distinction between medically-indicated sex selection (to prevent X-linked genetic disorders) and “social” sex selection for reasons such as family balancing. They recommend against “social” sex selection. However, they have no enforcement mechanism and there is no legal regulation of sex selection technologies in the U.S., only professional self-regulation with no sanctions or consequences.

No national or state laws address selection technologies. For instance, sperm sorting and PGD are perfectly legal, and kits like the Baby Gender Mentor require no licensing or oversight.

A woman’s ability to have a sex-selective abortion is protected by law. The reasons why any woman chooses to have an abortion are private. No woman’s health group wants to see any limits placed on a woman’s ability to access an abortion given the current politically threatening and polarized abortion debate.

Recommendations:

End the Supply of Sex-Selective Technologies:

- ✓ Stop the advertising and marketing of sex selection technologies.
- ✓ While protecting women’s right to abortion, develop regulation and oversight policies for selection technologies and practices.
- ✓ Work with a global network of women’s advocates to end sex selection practices in the U.S., United Kingdom, Canada, South Asia, China, and Korea.

End the Demand for Sex-Selective Technologies:

- ✓ Raise awareness in community settings about the issue of sex selection, and promote a dialogue about the importance of gender equity and the equal valuing of girls and boys alike.
- ✓ Train women’s anti-violence organizations to respond to sex selection and to support women who may experience pressure and abuse related to sex selection.
- ✓ Build grassroots campaigns to remove ads for sex selection services and to persuade clinics not to offer such services.
- ✓ Begin discussions within the women’s reproductive rights and health movement about the importance of developing policies on sex selection that protect the health and rights of women and children.

For more information, visit

www.endsexselection.org, a Campaign to End Sex Selection, or call 510/625-0819 x304.

NAPAWF, the Center for Genetics and Society, the Committee on Women, Population & Environment, and Manavi are part of this national campaign.

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