

# DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE GIRL CHILD



*FEMALE INFANTICIDE*

*FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING*

*"HONOR" KILLING*

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# The Girl Child

## TEACHER RESOURCE

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## What Does Your Class Know?

- Does the United States provide equal opportunities for men and women...and girls and boys?
- If the US does provide equal opportunity between sexes, how does it do so?
- What is discrimination? What examples of discrimination come to mind?
- Have any of the men or women within the classroom been witness to sexual discrimination or has anyone found themselves the victim of discrimination because of his or her gender?
- Is anyone familiar with the following words:
  - Female Infanticide
  - Female Genital Cutting (FGC)
  - "Honor" Killing
- If so, could someone in the class describe any of the above terms?

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## Words to Know When Discussing the Girl Child

**Child:** The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as a person under the age of 18. A girl child is thus a female younger than 18 years of age.

**Discrimination:** Treatment or consideration based on class or category rather than individual merit; partiality or prejudice

**Dowry:** Money or property that a bride's family must give to the family of her husband as a requirement of marriage.

**Female infanticide** is the murder of a female infant. It occurs often as a deliberate murder or abandonment of a young girl or infant.

**Selective Abortion** is also called gender-selective abortion, sex-selective abortion, or female feticide-selective abortion. It involves the abortion of a fetus because it is a girl. Many women from communities or cultures with a preference for boys practice selective abortion.

**Female Genital Cutting (FGC)** is the practice that involves the removal or the alteration of the female genitalia. It is a centuries-old practice found in many countries among people from various religions and beliefs, most prevalent in Africa. Other terms for FGC include Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), female genital circumcision, female genital operation, or clitoridectomy.

**“Honor” Killing** is the practice of killing girls and women who are perceived to have dishonored a family's reputation by allegedly engaging in sexual activity or other improprieties before or outside of marriage. “Improper” behavior justifies grounds for killing. It has expanded to include transgressions, which are not initiated by the girl, including rape, incest, sexual abuse and sexual rumor.



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## Facts and Statistics

More children worldwide face obstacles and adversity today than ever before. Many have no choice but to live in areas plagued by multiple forms of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination. These conditions provide the means through which female infanticide, female genital cutting, and “honor” killing occur.

- Currently, 60 million girls are reported as “missing” as a result of infanticide, sex selective abortions, and neglect.
- At least 130 million girls alive today have undergone Female Genital Mutilation, and two million more are at risk every year.
- It is reported that at least 5,000 women and girls are murdered each year for “honor’s sake” by members of their own families.
- Practices such as honor killing, female infanticide and sex-selective abortion, and Female Genital Cutting occur most frequently in societies which view a girl child as culturally and economically less advantageous than a boy child.
- United Nations statistics, national reports and studies initiated by non-governmental organizations repeatedly show that girls, as a group, have lower literacy rates, receive less health care, and are more often impoverished than boys.

### SOURCES:

Youth Advocate Program International: [www.yapi.org](http://www.yapi.org)

United Nations Children’s Fund: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

Amnesty International: [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

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## Female Infanticide

**What?** The deliberate killing of a girl child.

**Who?** Girl children who are born in societies where poverty, overpopulation, and male-bias are prevalent. These girls are killed at birth or soon after birth because of their gender. They are killed by their mothers or other, more dominant members of the immediate family, such as fathers or grandmothers.

### Where?

Female Infanticide occurs in regions where poverty and overpopulation are prevalent. It predominantly occurs in societies where girl children are not viewed as economically advantageous. Female infanticide has been reported in the following countries:

China  
North Korea  
The Middle East (Algeria, Egypt, Turkey)  
Africa (Cameroon, Liberia, Madagascar, Senegal, Nigeria)  
South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan)

### Why?

Several factors contribute to the harsh reality which exists for girls in these at-risk societies. These factors include:

- LINEAGE:** Boys are more valued than girls in preserving lineage, as family lineage and names are carried by males.
- INCOME:** Children must often help with the family income and are expected to care for their parents. In male-dominant societies, males can produce more than girls, providing higher economic contributions to the family.
- DOWRY:** A girl child's family must pay a dowry to her husband's family. Impoverished families cannot afford or do not want to invest in the marriage of their daughter. They prefer sons who will bring money into the family, rather than take it away.
- PROTECTION:** Some women resort to Female Infanticide and feticide in order to protect their daughters from a life of objectification and subjugation in a society dominated by men, where there is a prevalent male child bias.
- GOVERNMENT:** In China, there is a stringent law known as the "one child policy." It was enacted in 1979 in order to control population growth. Many Chinese people choose to keep a boy child over a girl child because of the cultural tradition of sons taking care of their elderly parents, while daughters are sent to take care of the families of their husbands.

### Sex-Selective Abortion:

This is the abortion of a fetus because it is female. Medical technology has made it possible for parents to discover the sex of a fetus at earlier and earlier stages of pregnancy, so many women from communities with a preference for boys practice sex-selective abortion before a daughter's birth.

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## Female Genital Cutting (FGC) or Female Genital Mutliation (FGM)

**What?** The practice that involves the removal or the alteration of the female genitalia.

**Who?** Most often the victims of **Female Genital Cutting** are young or adolescent girls from cultures that believe FGC will prevent girls from being promiscuous and prevent them from engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage. There exists a widespread cultural belief that FGC will allow girls to be “purified”, thus keeping them virgins for their future husbands. Of the millions of girls who must endure FGC, half of all cases are performed on infants under one year old.

### **Where?**

FGC occurs in:

- 28 African countries
- Muslim populations in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, India, Middle East, Egypt, Oman, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates
- Indigenous groups in Central and South America
- Cases of FGC have been reported in the following as well:
  - Australia      Denmark
  - Canada          France
  - Italy              Sweden
  - The Netherlands
  - The United Kingdom
  - The United States

**Why?** Cultural beliefs, attitudes that women should be subservient to men, a lack of equal and appropriate education and poverty all contribute to the prevalence of FGC. UNICEF describes some specific reasons for why FGC occurs:

**Sexual-** belief that FGC maintains female chastity, increases male sexual pleasure

**Sociological-** belief that FGC is an important part of identifying with cultural heritage, womanhood, social integration

**Hygienic and aesthetic-** belief that the external females’ genitalia is unclean and unsightly

**Religious-** the belief that FGC is a religious rite of passage

**Other-**belief that FGC enhances fertility and promotes child survival

**Effects:** FGC results in both physical, and psychological impairment to the individual. It can lead to pain, shock, hemorrhage, damage to organs, chronic infections, serious complications with sexual intercourse and childbirth, and even death. Depending on whether the practice is prevalent in her society, the woman may feel either downcast and anxious, or accepted because she has undergone the right of passage. Either way the practice is extremely dangerous, and its effects remain with the woman for the rest of her life.

135 million women in the world today have undergone FGM  
2 Million women are currently at risk - that’s 6,000 each day  
85% of all cases occur in Africa

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## “Honor” Killing

### What?

The murder of a girl or woman based upon her actual or perceived immoral behavior and the fear that it will reflect poorly upon the reputation of her husband and/or family.

### Who?

So-called “Honor” Killings have been carried out on women who have failed to keep marriage contracts, refused to agree to arranged marriages, requested divorce, flirted with men other than their husbands, received phone calls from men, failed to conform to family or household normalities, or for “allowing” themselves to be raped.

### Where?

Afghanistan	Italy
Bangladesh	Jordan
Britain	Morocco
Brazil	Norway
Ecuador	Pakistan
Egypt	Peru
India	Sweden
Iran	Turkey
Iraq	Uganda
Israel	
Venezuela	

### Why?

Women are claimed to be killed for “honor’s sake” after violating sexual norms, being victims of rape or sexual rumor. This is a custom in many cultures where women are treated as property and business contracts. Often, a woman is killed in the name of “honor” when her family is unwilling or unable to pay her marriage dowry.

## Cases of “Honor”

### Killing:

- In August, 2004, 16 year old Ateqeh Rajabi was hanged publically in Iran for having sexual relations out of wedlock. She was not believed to be mentally competent at the time of the hanging, nor did she have access to a lawyer at any stage.

(Amnesty International)

-In 2002, 16 year old Heshu Yones(of Kurdish origin) was stabbed to death by her father in their London, England home because he suspected she was becoming “westernized” by her Christian boyfriend. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

-In 2003, Rofayda Qaoud was raped and impregnated by her two older brothers in Palestine. Her mother persuaded her to commit suicide in order to preserve the “honor” of the family. When Rofayda refused, her mother snuck into her room at night and suffocated her, along with slitting her wrists and hitting her across the head.

([http://www.sullivan-county.com/w/cul\\_death.htm](http://www.sullivan-county.com/w/cul_death.htm))

Although many cases go unreported, an estimated **5,000 females are killed each year.**

**None of these killnigs are honorable.**

<http://womensissues.about.com/cs/honorkillings/a/honorkillings.htm>

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## Case Studies

### Female Infanticide in Tamil Nadu, India

#### Background:

According to UNICEF, up to 50 million girls are missing from India's population due to the country's gender discrimination. The Indian female to male ratio is significantly less than the world average: worldwide there are approximately 105 female births for every 100 male births, while in India there are only 93 women for every 100 men. Female infanticide is accepted as the primary cause of this disparity.

#### Lakshmi's Case:

Lakshmi was twenty years old, and lived in the rural state of Tamil Nadu in southern India. She already had one daughter, and upon the arrival of a second girl, Lakshmi saw no other option but to kill this second daughter. Lakshmi admits that she refused to nurse the newborn for the three days of her short life. To silence the infant's cries of hunger, she fed the infant a poisonous combination of sap and castor oil. The baby died soon afterward. When asked how she could have taken her own child's life, Lakshmi, now 28, answered, "A daughter is always liabilities. How can I bring up a second?... Instead of her suffering the way I do, I thought it was better to get rid of her."



#### Tamil Nadu Today:

The Indian government and Non-Governmental Organizations have begun to address the issue of female infanticide. In 1992 the Tamil Nadu government instituted the "cradle scheme," under which a mother can secretly leave her child in a cradle kept outside the Social Welfare Department. The government then helps raise the child. In 2003, more than 600 babies were received in this manner. Still, many find this solution to be ineffective. There are also various punishments for people who commit the act. However, the risk of execution by hanging in Tamil Nadu did not stop Lakshmi from committing female infanticide. As in Lakshmi's case, the perpetrators of these crimes are rarely actually punished.

#### Sources:

Dahlburg, John-Thor, "Where killing baby girls is 'no big sin,' *The Los Angeles Times* (in *The Toronto Star*, February 28, 1994).

Kumar, Sampath, "Life for India baby girl killers," 17 April, 2003, BBC News, World Edition, ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/2956065.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2956065.stm)).

Kumar, Sampath, "India rights campaign for infanticide mothers," 17 July, 2003, BBC News, World Edition ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/3071747.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3071747.stm)).

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## Case Studies

### Female Genital Cutting (FGC) in Ethiopia (East Africa)

#### Background:

FGC is widely practiced throughout Ethiopia. Approximately 54% of girls in the country are subjected to this mutilation. The procedure often results in infection and hemorrhaging, and can cause long term problems in the areas of child birth, neurology, etc. The government claims that it wants to help raise the status of women by eliminating legal and customary practices like FGC. But there is no national plan of action to fight against this particular abuse, and people who participate in FGC have not been prosecuted to date.

#### Hannah's case:

Hannah\* was genitally cut when she was eight years old. She was convinced to go along with the procedure knowing little about what was about to be done to her. She understood it to be a ritual, a ceremony, a process that would allow her to become a woman according to tradition.

Six women held Hannah down to perform the procedure. There was no anesthesia or pain medication at any point in the procedure. The cutting almost caused Hannah to lose consciousness because of the immense pain. The practitioner was paid the equivalent of a dollar for



the procedure.

Girls like Hannah who do not undergo FGC experience torment and abuse. Directly following the procedure, they are often unable to attend school because of sickness and complications from the procedure. If they are not circumcised, they are ridiculed by their classmates.

\*Name has been changed

Sources:

**UNICEF**, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia\\_18246.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia_18246.html)

**GTZ Promotion of Initiatives to end FGM**, [http://www.gtz.de/fgm/downloads/eng\\_ethiopia.pdf](http://www.gtz.de/fgm/downloads/eng_ethiopia.pdf)

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## Case Studies

### “Honor” Killing in Jordan (Southwest Asia)

#### Background:

The country of Jordan has an ongoing problem with the prevalence of honor crimes. Law enforcement is poor regarding the treatment of perpetrators, and the press is reluctant to report most cases. The Jordanian government attempted to reduce the number of killings by amending the penal code to impose harsher punishments for those involved, but women’s rights groups in the country say that this has made little impact, and that the killings remain constant. There is also a common legal defense to men who commit these crimes of so called honor in “the heat of passion”. Although few people have been able to use this defense, people convicted of these murders rarely go to jail for long period of time; in these few cases they are imprisoned for less than two years.

#### Rania’s Case:

Twenty-one year old Rania Arafat did not want to marry the man her family had chosen for her. She was secretly seeing her Iraqi boyfriend, with whom she wanted to elope. Her aunts came up to her and said that they had arranged a secret meeting between the two. They brought her out into an open patch of land in the



suburb of the capital city of Amman, where they slowly walked away and let her own brother, Rami, shoot her in the back of the head.

Her “crime” was being in love with a man that was not sanctioned by her family and cultural ideals.

The punishment for men like Rami is not harsh in Jordan. They are usually sentenced a few months in jail, even less if they hold minor status.

Source:

**Gendercide Watch**, [http://gendercide.org/case\\_honour.html](http://gendercide.org/case_honour.html)

**State Department**, <http://state.gov-human-rights-report-Jordan-2003>

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## Discussion Questions

- 1.) Given the information provided, list three reasons why women face prejudice around the world.
- 2.) Children throughout the world face many issues. What are some that you did not know about before?
- 3.) What are good steps towards changing discrimination against the girl child?
- 4.) Should education of girls and boys be equal throughout the world?
- 5.) Do you think that equal education would provide more equal rights and less discrimination against girls?
- 6.) Who should be in charge of making changes regarding the issues we have discussed today?
- 7.) Why do you think people continue to commit these acts, even though there are laws against them in some cases?
- 8.) What do you think you can do to help?

## The Importance of Girls' Voices

"Today's girl child is tomorrow's woman. If tomorrow's woman is to become an equal partner with man in social change and development, this is the time to accord the girl her rightful share of human dignity and opportunity"-Agnes Aidoo, "The Girl Child" UNICEF

In 1990, The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recognized the need to focus on the plight of the girl child. Their efforts saw the production of over 80 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which work specifically on these issues. In 1998, they employed the use of girls from countries around the world to tell their own stories in order to put faces to the issue at hand. Here are some examples of what they had to say:

"I hope you will not listen to us as children, but as members of the society who are the future leaders of tomorrow"  
- The Gambia

"In our country, parents prefer sons, not girls. Girls are less educated than boys are. Girls still comprise only 37% of total primary school enrollment. In Nepal girls have a very hard life, especially girls who are not in school" - Nepal

Source:

Purcell, Mary, "The Importance of Girls' Voices," in Action for Girls, International Network for Girls newsletter, September 2004, number 15.

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## In the Classroom

- 1.) Have the children break into groups. Each group will be given one focus area regarding discrimination against the girl child (i.e. "Honor" Killings, FGC, Female Infanticide). The students will present the information on their given topic to their classmates. Encourage Power point, slides, newspaper articles, video, etc.
- 2.) Have students brainstorm how they would propose changes in these issue areas. They can present these ideas in short speeches in front of the class. Follow each speech with a discussion of the effectiveness of this proposal.
- 3.) Letters or Posters:
  - Write to government
  - Poster about how to promote or change or eliminate the issue
- 4.) Organize an awareness week
  - Class presentations
  - School assembly
- 5.) Research countries in which the issues occur, and discuss.

## Just In Case...

### Student Experience

- If you know the student has personal experience with this, let him/her know of the class in advance.
- If the student volunteers this information, ask the student if he/she would to talk about the experience.

### Student Openly Emotional

#### Crying

- Don't draw attention to the student.
- Follow up with the student.

#### Angry

- Ask the student questions to try and channel the emotion positively.

#### Skeptical

- Find out what questions the student has.
- Encourage the student to complete additional research about the topic and report to you or the class.

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## Beyond the Classroom

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Write local or national political officials and demand feedback on their role in preventing discrimination against girls worldwide.
- Get involved; learn more about topics dealing with youth, tell your parents about what you are learning, engage in conversation with teachers, family and friends about such issues, support organizations that work to prevent these atrocities.
- Read, research, and write about current youth issues in the local newspaper, school paper, and/or national paper.
- Participate in or plan a rally, protest, or a meeting about the issue.
- Volunteer at your local non-profit organization.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Youth Advocate Program  
International  
[www.yapi.org](http://www.yapi.org)  
UN High Commission on  
Human Rights  
[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

UNICEF  
[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)  
Amnesty International  
[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)  
Gendercide Watch  
[www.gendercidewatch.org](http://www.gendercidewatch.org)

US Senate  
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US House of Representatives  
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[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)