

## FEMALE INFANTICIDE IN RAJASTHAN, INDIA

In the far western Indian state of Rajasthan, bordering Pakistan amidst the arid Thar Desert, lies the city of Jaisalmer. Nicknamed *The Golden City*, Jaisalmer has a rich history dating back to the 12th century; yet, many of the human rights abuses faced by people in the Indian sub-continent are especially prevalent in Jaisalmer. Gender-based discrimination and violence make life particularly dire for women and girls.

The most prevalent and alarming issue in Jaisalmer is **female infanticide and foeticide**. This is a dangerous practice rooted in the misconception that girls are a greater financial burden on the family than their lives are worth. Coupled with government inaction for several decades, this practice and preference for boy children are further exacerbated by new technologies that facilitate sex-selective abortion. Although numerous policies were enacted in the late 1990s to curb sex determination and new government programs were put in place to encourage girl children, the plight of girls remains.

Although the sex ratio in India is steadily improving, the child sex ratio is in fact declining, with the share of girls declining faster than that of boys. **In Rajasthan, the child sex ratio is 888 girls per 1000 boys and Jaisalmer specifically has a ratio of 874 girls to 1000 boys.** The census also revealed that of total deaths in Rajasthan, over 20% of them were infant deaths. Overall, the female child population (age 0-6) between 2001 and 2011 dropped by 3 million. One journalist referred to this as “the silent genocide.” Female infants are sometimes tragically killed by opium poisoning, starvation, or even being crushed with stones. The reality of this “silent genocide” is revealed in the village of Devda, where a low sex ratio meant that there were only 18 girls in a population of 25,000 men.

Even past infancy, things do not get easier. Rajasthan is the third largest state in India and ranks as the worst for female literacy. The latest census revealed that only 52.12% of women are literate in Rajasthan, compared to the already low national average of 65.46%. Many families pull their daughters out of school as they often see it as an unnecessary cost. With only 72.1 % of girls between 15-17 years attending school, Rajasthan also has the lowest female school attendance in the country.

*This data demands an increased investment on women and girls across Rajasthan and in Jaisalmer specifically.*

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<sup>1</sup> Female infanticide refers to the deliberate killing of newborn female children and female foeticide refers to sex-selective abortion, although UN agencies use female infanticide to refer to both.

<sup>2</sup> Asian Center for Human Rights, *Female Infanticide Worldwide: The Case for Action by the UN Human Rights Council*. (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Child sex ratio is the number of girls per 1000 boys ages 0-6

<sup>4</sup> Asian Center for Human Rights, *Rajasthan's Record on the Missing Girls: India's One-Eyed King in the Land of the Blind?* (2017), 8

<sup>5</sup> Government of India Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Central Statistics Office, *Children in India 2012 - A Statistical Appeal* (2012)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Choudhry, Preeti. “In Rajasthan’s Jaisalmer, Daughters are Born to Die,” June 10, 2011. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/west/story/in-jaisalmer-daughters-are-born-to-die-135966-2011-06-20>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ali, Syed Intishab. “Rajasthan Not a Place for Women: Survey,” July 12, 2016.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/Rajasthan-not-a-place-for-women-Survey/articleshow/53166207.cms>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.