

# Missing : 163 million women by mara hivistendahl essay samples

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## **Analysis of “Missing: 163 Million Women” by Mara Hvistendahl**

The essay “Missing: 163 Million Women” by Mara Hvistendahl discusses the basic sexism of a world in which women are shrinking in Asia and elsewhere in the world. Here, she discusses the very important issue of the population changing to favor boys over girls; in many parts of the world, particularly India and China, more boys are being born than girls. “People were not simply having fewer children. They were having fewer girls. Population growth had been slowed, in part, by reducing the number of daughters” (Hvistendahl). The result of Hvistendahl’s investigation is a very interesting look at infanticide, cultural ideas of gender and family pride that may have terrible consequences for the world if it goes on much longer.

One of the most interesting things about the essay is the cultural ideas behind making sure families had more boys than girls. Hvistendahl talks about how infanticide is more of a myth now than ever, but that is because of a more horrible truth: “pregnant women were taking advantage of a cheap and pervasive sex determination tool—ultrasound—and aborting if the fetus turned out to be female” (Hvistendahl). It becomes clear throughout the essay that, generally speaking, many in Asian cultures have a certain shame and cultural anxiety about having a daughter. By connecting economic progression to the rise in male newborns, it becomes less about cultural tradition and more about fast efficiency.

The consequences of this issue become clear due to Hvistendahl’s urgent writing. The author paints a clear picture of a world without women in the US, saying that the loss of the same 163 million women in the US would

mean the elimination of all women in the country. Because of the different ratios of men to women that are coming about in Asia, there will be disastrous effects on the world population, especially if the same thing were happening in America. Hvistendahl also connects this problem with the need for a solution: “ Skewed sex ratios in the developing world have led to a slew of secondary human rights abuses, and those are issues the rest of the world must address” (Hvistendahl). These secondary human rights abuses include even further systematic hurting of women and use in the sex trafficking industry; because there are more men than women, men have to use more dishonest means to find women, like buying mail-order brides and so on. This kind of activity is horrifying, and Hvistendahl correctly points out how terrible the concept of a continent full of bachelors might be.

The sex trade has exploded in Asia, according to the author, and it will get worse, as the “ supply of women will dry up” after a few generations (Hvistendahl). This is a very worrying idea, as sexual reproduction is needed for our species. If all of Asia, in a worst case situation, runs out of women, how many family lines will simply end? Would it be the end of Asians as we know it? Hvistendahl appropriately points out how bad this situation is, likening it to the AIDS crisis.

Going back to the idea of the sex selection being a cultural idea, it leaves me wondering about the basic social concepts that go into wanting only men. It seems to imply a favoring of masculinity over femininity, and an implication that a family is weak if it has a daughter. Maybe they do not want their daughters to be assaulted by men, a common occurrence in countries where sex trafficking is prominent. The oppression that these women must feel is

probably made worse by the fact that they were only lucky enough not to be aborted before being born; Asian cultures prefer boys over girls, and so that decision is apparently made out of disappointment that they would not bear a son. However, this cultural idea is building up to the point where many areas of Asia will run out of women, which is why Hvistendahl is advocating for more exposure and discussion of this topic: “ the practice remains mostly invisible, a pervasive and yet quiet epidemic observed only by demographers scrutinizing birth registration records years after the fact” (Hvistendahl). Because there are no women to complain, the issue is not talked about as much as it should be.

In conclusion, Hvistendahl’s essay on the women shortage in Asia is an interesting read. It is fascinating to see the effects of ancient traditions and ideas of gender being expanded into the world of today, with its global market and the international communication of the Internet making these old-fashioned ideas look more antiquated. Hvistendahl raises awareness of an important topic that has long-term effects if it is not addressed, like crime rates and health care problems. By talking about it in a way that many people are not, Hvistendahl has opened my eyes to a practice I did not realize was doing such harm, or was even existent in so much of the world. I have long been aware of the injustices that face women in the world today, especially in countries with more traditional customs, but I had no idea how bad it was getting. To get to the point of actually preventing female children from being born is a perspective I simply do not understand, as it does harm to the human race. I simply cannot believe it is simply due to family pride, and so I wish that Hvistendahl had gone into the reasons for these cultural

ideas. That being said, it is certainly a subject for further investigation, which I am interested in looking into.