**Bride-burning claims hundreds in India**

August 18, 1996

NEW DELHI, India (CNN) -- In parts of India, husbands regard their wives as property that apparently can be disposed of at will. Indian police say that every year they receive more than 2,500 reports of bride-burning -- a form of domestic abuse often disguised as an accident or suicide.

These women are burned to death over wealth -- because their husbands or in-laws are unhappy with the size of the dowry that accompanied them into the marriage.

The number such cases reported to police is rising, due either to an increase in the number of burnings or to more willingness by victims to report them. And should the woman survive, the toll is heavy.

Three years ago, [Sunita Bhargava](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9608/18/bride.burn/bhargava.sm.jpg) was married with children -- and, she said, emotionally abused by her husband and mother-in-law.

"My mother-in-law used to say that my husband was too educated for me, that he didn't get a fair dowry," said Bhargava, who now lives alone in a New Delhi slum.

The emotional abuse eventually turned physical, she said, when her husband and his mother scalded her with boiling water. Desperate and in pain, Bhargava dowsed herself in kerosene and set herself on fire, [severely burning 40 percent of her body.](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9608/18/bride.burn/burn.lg.jpg)

"I miss my daughter and fear the evil that may befall her," she said. "Though I passed these times, somehow, to my children I am dead."

Police have set up [special offices](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9608/18/bride.burn/office.lg.jpg) where women can report cases of domestic abuse, but Mohini Giri, head of India's National Commission for Women, said she believes the authorities need to do more.

"Fire was used by most people who did this kind of crime ... (because) they thought that they will not leave any evidence behind," she said. "Whereas if you use a knife, there is an evidence that someone else has done it."

The practice is unlikely to end soon, however, as long as current Hindu attitudes about the place of women in a marriage prevail. Those attitudes -- and the practice of bride-burning -- cast an ironic pall over a tradition of the Hindu [marriage ceremony](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9608/18/bride.burn/wedding.jpg) in which the bride and groom walk together around a flame.

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| **India: The Missing GirlsA society out of balance**By Neil Samson Katz and Marisa Sherry April 26, 2007 |
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| Many families continue to voluntarily abort female fetuses at alarmingly high rates.

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In 2006, when my wife and I traveled to India to live and work, the one issue that kept grabbing our attention was northern India's deep cultural preference for sons over daughters. The desire for sons can be so great, that some families, after having a girl or two, will abort female fetuses until they bear a son. The practice is called female feticide or sex selection.In some ways this is a very old tale. Long before medical abortion became available, unwanted girls were killed after birth or not given enough food and medicine to survive. But modern technology has changed that. Ultrasound machines, which make it possible to determine the gender of a fetus, have spread from big city hospitals to small country clinics. Portable machines are taken to remote villages by motorcycle. As a consequence, infanticide has given way to feticide.Despite a law banning sex selective abortion in force for a decade, as many as half a million female fetuses are aborted each year in India, according to a 2006 study in the British medical journal, *The Lancet*. Some believe those numbers are high, but it is clear there is an imbalance in the country's population. A 2001 government census revealed that there were 795 women for every 1000 men in Punjab, India's rural heartland. The numbers were no better in the posh neighborhoods of South Delhi. The statistics are even more surprising for new births. In Punjab, we visited small farming villages where there were five girls for every ten boys between the ages of zero and six. My wife and I wanted to understand this lopsided ratio and why so many Indians prize sons over daughters so much so that they are willing to abort female pregnancies in hopes of having more sons. Our travels took us across rural Punjab and much of New Delhi. Everywhere we went, we asked the question, why are sons so important? We sat with government officials, country doctors and city specialists. We took tea with rural midwives, health workers and college students. We met one woman rushing to the ultrasound clinic to discover if her five-month-old fetus was a boy or a girl. If it was a girl, she flatly told us, she would abort it.Almost everyone we met told us that female feticide was rampant, but not in their homes. The reasons given were varied: from needing a son to light a parent's funeral pyre to hoping a male bread winner will care for his parents as they grow old and infirm. But one reason consistently stood out amongst the rest: dowry, the high price families must pay to marry off their daughters.Dowry is illegal in India, but that law is almost universally ignored. For poor and middle class families, the resulting expenses can create crushing debts. For the wealthy, smaller families are becoming the norm. And many feel if they are only to have two or three children, they must have at least one son.None of this is said in the open. In the past, newspapers and billboards advertised sex selective abortions. Today, the laws are tougher and the practice has gone underground. But it is clear from the numbers that it is far from going away and that India's girls continue to go missing.  |

**Indian woman and baby burned alive for dowry, police say**

By **Harmeet Shah Singh**, **CNN - February 3, 2014**

**New Delhi (CNN)** -- Police in eastern India have arrested the husband and parents-in-law of a young woman for allegedly burning her and her baby girl alive.

The primary motive behind the January 30 attack is suspected to be dowry-related, as alleged by the parents of the dead woman, Jharkhand state police superintendent N.K. Mishra said.

The three suspects poured kerosene on Annu Devi, 22, and the baby girl at their village home in the state's Dumka district and set them on fire, Mishra said.

The 1-year-old child died instantly, and the mother later succumbed to her injuries in a hospital, police said.

A court has sent the three suspects to jail to await trial, Mishra told CNN.

Asked whether the fact that Devi gave birth to a girl was also a motive, Mishra said: "That could be a factor. But it was mainly for dowry. Her family has said in their complaint she was harassed for money and other things."

Devi married three years ago, Mishra said.

Dowry is banned in India, but giving expensive "gifts" to the grooms and their relatives at weddings hosted by the brides' families remains a common practice in the country.

Police across India registered 8,233 murders of women as dowry deaths in 2012, according to national crime data.

**India's lost girls (Feb 2003)**



Ultrasounds seal the fate of female foetuses

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A marriage crisis is hitting thousands of men in parts of rural India which are running out of potential brides. The traditional preference for boys instead of girls has led to widespread abuse of modern pre-natal scans. The technology should protect the health of mother and baby.

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But, wrongly used, it is a death sentence for unwanted girls.

The practice of determining the sex of a foetus and aborting girls is illegal, but widespread. The worst affected states, such as Haryana and Punjab, now have some of the most skewed sex ratios in the world - and the proportion of baby girls is still falling.

A whole generation of young men is failing to find brides. Many are now resorting to "buying" girls from poor communities outside the region to bear their children. Government officials raid clinics to make sure doctors are not abusing modern technology by tipping off parents they were carrying girls.

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| Indian girlsPrejudice against girls runs deep |

In many clinics, the illegal and systematic abortion of girls is common practice. In Punjab, special prayers of thanks greet the birth of a boy. Prejudice runs deep. Girls are born into silence.

"People say, you have two girl children, you have done some sins in your past life," said office manager Surinder Saini. "With a boy child, people say your generation will propagate, your older age will be safer. This is the concept of our society."

Mr Saini is a fierce campaigner against female foeticide. He and his wife have two daughters. But even they aborted their third child after tests showed it was a girl. All those years of prejudice against girls are finally coming back to haunt this society.

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There is such an acute gender imbalance here that it is causing real social problems. Young men are coming of marriageable age, only to discover there is no-one left for them to marry. The young girls who would have been their brides never had the chance to be born. The villages are full of frustrated bachelors. In Haryana, a quarter of the female population has simply disappeared. Many now see buying wives from outside as their only option.

"I couldn't find a local girl," said Chandram, who purchased a wife last year from Bangladesh. "So I had to go outside to get married. But it wasn't cheap." His bride looked about 15. Now she is thousands of miles from home. They have just had their first child - a baby girl. She looked sickly, struggling to survive. The ghosts of missing babies are closing in. If newly-weds continue with this brutal practice of eliminating girls, this whole region is on course for catastrophe.