

The Other Side of Failed Reproductive Rights:  
Lessons from Studying Infanticide

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According to the World Health Organization, infanticide (and female infanticide in particular) continues to occur at alarming rates around the globe. The precise numbers are difficult to determine because data is not often collected in the developing countries in which they predominantly occur. Even when there are statistics, they fail to disaggregate deaths by infanticide from other causes of child mortality. Children under the age of one have the highest mortality rate due to violence than any other childhood age group. While these are crimes of violence to be sure, they are also acts of desperation borne by poverty, sexual shaming and the unavailability of contraceptive and abortion rights. Infanticide impacts girls and women disproportionately. Infanticide is one of the few crimes committed predominantly by women, and it is committed predominantly against girls. Its causes are complex.

The way in which a society treats cases of infanticide-- in particular the factors it deems to be mitigating in such cases—speaks volumes about its views on crime and gender. The treatment of infanticide cases reveals a society's cultural values involving issues such as personal autonomy and responsibility for women, reproductive freedom, the role of motherhood and sexuality. This is a critical “next generational” issue for women in a global context as it rests at the intersection of health, inequality, reproductive rights and personal accountability.