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The Battle against Gender Bias

A Qualitative Case Study on UNFPA's efforts to Frame
Female Feticide in India

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Abstract

India's battle with gender bias against girls is deeply rooted within its patriarchal society. Since the 1980's, a substantial rise of sex-selective abortions on female fetuses has resulted in a significant decline of girls in India. This phenomenon reinforces practices that violate women's rights and bodily autonomy, and is also referred to as 'female feticide'. Despite various efforts to target the alarming sex ratio imbalance, policies and research remain insufficient in various ways. Since the UNFPA introduced female feticide as a human rights violation, this thesis aims to examine how it, as an international authority, frames challenges and solutions regarding female feticide in the national context of India. Through a feminist institutional lens, it examines gender norms within structural inequalities that are otherwise ignored by stakeholder incentives. The data consist of UNFPA published documents, and employ the 'What's the Problem Represented to be' method. The findings identify three overarching categories regarding female feticide, as *son preference*, *growth of prenatal diagnosis technologies* and *low fertility*, and reveal a complex interplay between various factors that reinforce the UNFPA's understanding of female feticide, but also shortcomings within its policy framework.

Key words: female feticide, gender bias, son preference, India, feminist institutionalism

Words: 9910

List of abbreviations

CPD	Country Programme Document
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSR	Child Sex Ratio
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
PCPNDT	Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
WPR	‘What's the Problem Represented to be?’

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, India has gained global attention for its rapid economic growth and being the most populous nation in the world. However, the growing international influence fails to adequately reflect the socio-economic disparities that persist within India. Despite its economic advancement, many communities within India still experience one of the biggest challenges of poverty, inequalities, and violation of women's rights (Oxfam, 2022). Gender bias against girls has been an entrenched phenomenon in India since ancient times and still permeates various aspects of Indian society in contemporary times. Throughout history, it has taken on many forms of gender-based violence that has been widely practiced for killing the girl child. However, since the introduction of prenatal technologies (*e.g. ultrasonography*) in the 1980s, India has experienced a substantial rise in sex-selective abortions for their abilities to predetermine the sex of the fetus. The misuse of prenatal technology for sex-selective purposes triggers unnatural sex ratios, being that significantly more males than females are born every year (Kaur & Kapoor, 2020, p.114), with an estimate of around 400 000 gender-biased abortions occurring annually in India (UNFPA, 2021). This phenomenon is widely recognized as 'female feticide' (Noori Ansari, 2018).

The international community holds significant influence in advancing gender equality and reproductive rights in the global arena. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, organized by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), played a pivotal role in recognizing women's rights and introducing global incentives to target female feticide across regions (UNFPA, 2019).

This thesis is a part of the academic debate that examines the underlying factors for sex selection that reinforce gender bias against girls. By investigating how female feticide is understood through an international authority, it aims to analyze

how the UNFPA frames its understanding of female feticide in the context of India. Drawing upon a feminist institutionalist lens, I proceed to explore how gender norms manifest in the UNFPA's policy framework, with the intention to acquire comprehensive insights into the multifaceted dynamics of female feticide.

1.1 Defining female feticide

Herein, I introduce the concept of female feticide to explain its significant meaning for this thesis. Female feticide is the term for sex-selective abortion of the female fetus, in the preference of a male offspring. This act is considered a violation of women's rights, as the right to life is solely determined by gender (Noori Ansari, 2018). This practice has historically predominated across countries in the Asia-Pacific region (Shah et al. 2018). Female feticide is the modernized practice of female *infanticide*, the intentional killing of the girl child, that dominated before prenatal technologies. Daughter neglect is a similar method that deals with unwanted girls by discriminating against their rights to fundamental resources such as nutrition and health care, these practices are most prevalent in rural communities that practice sex selection (Dube et al. 1999, pp.2-3). Nonetheless, female feticide reflects not only upon its medical definition of 'sex-selective abortion', but on the ethical and political implications it poses on individuals and society (Graham et al. 2008).

Sex-selective abortion is primarily measured by Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and sex ratio. The Indian CSR is the number of girls per 1000 boys aged 0-6 years, and sex ratio equals the number of females per 1000 males (Census of India, 2011). A balanced CSR is considered 950 females per 1000 males, but remains significantly lower across various Indian states, particularly in the north-western region (*see Figure 1.1 below*) (UNFPA, 2021). India has experienced an overall CSR decline from 945 to 927 between 1991 and 2001, and decline from 927 to 914 between 2001 and 2011 (Jha et al. 2011, p.1).

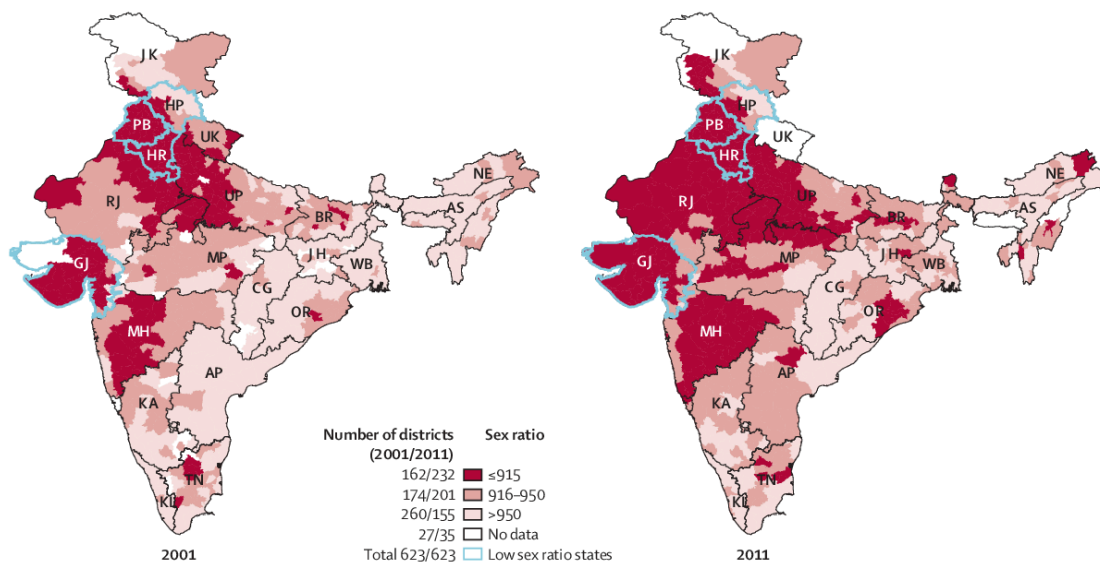


Figure 1.1 Illustration of CSR increase between 2001 and 2011 in India's districts (states) Source: Jha et al. 2011, p.5.

1.2 Research aim and question

With this thesis I aim to explore how the UNFPA frames female feticide in India, following its ICPD agenda in 1994. Through a feminist institutional lens, it examines gendered institutions within the organization's representation of the 'problem' (Bacchi, 2009). The research aspires to enrich the current academic debate on the of millions of 'missing women' in India, a phenomenon that reinforces gender discriminatory practices, such as domestic violence, bride trafficking and child marriage (Croll, 2001; Arya & Khurana, 2014). It further aims to highlight the structural inequalities that reinforce gender bias, despite progressive development indicators (Shah, et al. 2018). Hence, this study includes investigating how the UNFPA relates female feticide within the broader context of its core principles in its policy framework. For instance, it aims to examine how

the UNFPA's framing of female feticide is influenced by external and internal dynamics, such as political sensitivity and institutional responses when addressing nationally anchored policies and practices. To achieve these aims, the thesis is guided by the following research question:

How does the UNFPA frame challenges and solutions regarding female feticide in India?

1.3 Relevance and scope

The United Nations (UN) is a leading actor in shaping the global discourse on human rights and development. Starting in 1975, the UN announced the International Women's Year, which developed into the 'decade for women'. This global initiative influenced various incentives by India's government to refine its legislation on gender-based violence (Burte, 159-160; Bhaswatee, 2021). Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals portray the organizations commitment towards achieving world-wide gender equality that cannot be reached without empowering women and protecting the girl child (Bhaswatee, 2021).

The UNFPA is the UN's agency responsible for promoting its core principles of gender equality and women's reproductive rights. Through collaboration with over 150 countries, it advocates the right to safe, equal, and healthy lives to achieve "a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled" (UNFPA, 2023). The UNFPA's policy framework is a relevant aspect to incorporate into development research, as it frames an international understanding of national embedded policies and approaches. Since the UNFPA's framework operates across transnational borders it is dependent on cooperation with its member states (Risse & Ropp, 2009; United Nations, n.d). Hence, I consider it essential to investigate how the UNFPA navigates its critical evaluations with maintaining government alliance. The

UNFPA has operated in India since 1974, where it partners with various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, civic society, the private sector, academic and medical institutions, and media to advocate its core principles (UNFPA, n.d). Moreover, UNFPA India supported the amendment of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act 2016, that adopted UNFPA-driven guidelines for improved implementation (MOHFW & UNFPA India, 2016). The relevance of the Act is further demonstrated in *section 3.2*.

1.4 Delimitation

This research is delimited to the UNFPA's policy framework that emerged from the ICPD agenda in 1994, to present time. This time frame is relevant since the PCPNDT Act was established the same year. Although many policies approach female feticide, this thesis focus on the PCPNDT Act because it is India's main legislation that prohibits sex selection (MOHFW & UNFPA India, 2016). The data collection is delimited to the published documents authored by, or collaborated with, the UNFPA on its official website. Moreover, A further delimitation is its set to the broader context of social norms. For instance, I focus on cultural dynamics but do not delve into particular subjects of religion or caste, since these would require a more cross-cultural research focus, rather than a national one. India is approached as one entity since the research is based on a national context. It is important to acknowledge that female feticide has never been a universal practice, but always been more prevalent in India's north-west communities (Dube et al. 1999).

1.5 Outline

I commence this thesis by presenting background on female feticide in India to provide relevant context to my study. This is followed by a literature review that

will enhance the relevance of my research and how it contributes to existing knowledge on gender discrimination and women's rights. Thereafter, I introduce my theoretical framework and methodology, which integrates in the subsequent analysis section. Finally, I summarize the synthesis of my findings in the concluding chapter.

2. Background

India was the first country in the world to implement government-funded family planning schemes, in 1952, but also the first developing country to legalize abortion, in 1970. (Kaur & Kapoor, 2021, p.113). These initiatives are important considering the following trajectory of the country's reproductive rights. The concept of 'missing women' was first introduced in Amartya Sen's revolutionary article "More than 100 million women are missing" in the *New York Review* in 1990. Sen's findings gained worldwide attention for the gravity of the situation, as it revealed severe disparities in female mortality across Asian and African regions in comparison to the West. Illuminating the structural inequalities of women's rights played a pivotal role in motivating research on female feticide, further calling for international action on gender-sensitive interventions (Croll, 2001, p.225; Sen, 2003). Subsequently, the ICPD 1994 introduced Programme of Action, applied to 179 governments, that constituted both national and international development initiatives (UNFPA, 2019), including to:

“[...] eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which result in harmful and unethical practices regarding female infanticide and prenatal sex selection”

(UN, 1994, p.19)

This was the first time sexual and reproductive health was addressed as a development initiative. Female feticide became re-framed as a human rights concern, rather than its sole medical definition (United Nations, 1994). Since 1994, the UNFPA has maintained its global front face by incentivizing stakeholder meetings on both international and national levels (Rahm, 2020).

The prenatal sex selection is pronounced illegal by the government (MOHFW & UNFPA India, 2016), but despite various governmental incentives to target female feticide, the 2011 Census provided conflicting results (*see Figure 1.1*), as the CSR recorded 7.1 million fewer girls than boys (Melhado, 2011, p.162). Nonetheless, female feticide is more prevalent in urban areas amongst higher socio-economic classes due to their access and affordability to reproductive health services (Kaur & Kapoor, 2020, pp.112-113). However, due to ultrasonography's recent portable capacity, rural communities that usually engage with alternative sex-selective techniques, have started adopting female feticide as well. Patriarchal gender norms are believed to reinforce the preference for sons (Arya & Khurana, 2014), which is observed in the following chapter.

3. Literature review

The underlying reasons for female feticide have been highly debated and include an extensive amount of research on structural inequalities that reinforce gender bias against girls in India. This section encompasses the *main* components of female feticide within previous research to contextualize the scope of my study.

3.1 Historical perspective of female feticide

The earliest recordings of sex-selective practices were constituted by British officers during colonial rule. Scholars argue that the colonial incentives to target the adverse sex ratios were methods to justify colonial rule and supremacy in India. This subsequently obstructed the development of women's reproductive rights, rather than entertaining a gender considerative purpose (Chitnis & Wright 2007; Dube et al. 1999). The colonialist framing of female infanticide dominated as economic concerns, which Dube et al. (1999), argues depended on the colonial reinforcement of a capitalist patriarchal structure that perceived men as assets and women as expenses of capital (Dube et al. 1999). Theorists argue that the colonial legislative framing of female infanticide has continued to influence the interpretation of sex-selective practices as a demographic concern, which maintain gender bias within the social and legal discourse of female feticide in postcolonial India (Sen, 2002; Dube Bhatnagar et al. 2005), thus current policies continue to prioritize population control initiatives, rather than women's rights concerns (Kaur & Kapoor, 2020).

3.2 Technological impact on sex selection

The leading argument for India's declining CSR is the misuse of prenatal technologies for sex-selective purposes. Between 1980 and 2010, an estimated 4.2 – 12.1 million gender-biased abortions were executed (Jha et al. 2011, p.1), displaying the severe gender disparities in India's reproductive landscape. To combat the declining CSR, the Indian government established the PCPNDT Act in 1994, which criminalizes sex-selective abortions and the use of prenatal technologies for sex determination (Arya & Khurana, 2014, p.51).

The PCPNDT Act is widely criticized for its insufficiency in targeting its rightful purpose, as research indicates that both the 2001 and 2011 Indian Census Reports revealed regressive results (Arya & Khurana, 2014, p.51; Jha et al. 2001, p.1). On the other hand, Nandi and Deolalikar (2013, p.222) underscore that absence of sex-selective bans would have accelerated execution of female feticide extensively. Their findings estimate the prevention of a minimum 106,000 sex-selective abortions throughout various rural areas, thanks to governmental schemes aiming to regulate adverse CSR.

Following India's rapid population increase, the academic discourse connects son preference to the 'two-child norm', which is an active policy advocacy aiming to halt population growth. The probability for sons is lower for families adopting this norm, as studies indicate that son preference is reinforced through misuse of prenatal technologies to manipulate the sex of the forthcoming child, given that the firstborn is a girl. However, the desire is to have *at least* one son, rather than *only* sons (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011, pp.121-122; Jayachandran, 2017, p.134). As the legislative discourse is oriented towards prohibiting sex-selective abortions, it does not specifically state that female feticide itself is an illegal practice outside of its medical context (Graham et al. 2008). The difficulty of determining the reason behind seeking abortion makes medical practitioners take on personal definitions of the law, resulting in women being denied ultrasound and abortion rights, forcing her to reside in unsafe methods instead, which is a direct violation of women's reproductive rights (Graham et al. 2008; Nagpal, 2013).

3.3 Socio-cultural influences on female feticide

India's patriarchal gender roles label men as financial gain and women as financial liabilities, thus parents are dependent on sons to secure financial support in their elderly lives (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011, pp.128-129). This socio-cultural structure, also referred to as *patrilineal kinship*, reinforces son preference as women are married off into their husbands' families. Women in India have been historically referred to as *paraya dhan*, which translates to 'other's property' (Arya & Khurana, 2014, p.50). The academic discourse identifies the dowry system as a primary cause of female feticide. This system demands the bride's parents to pay off their daughter to the groom's family (Singh, 2021). Although the practice was prohibited by Indian law in 1961, it remains a widely practiced tradition across all classes in Indian society; higher class equals higher demand, thus, not all parents can afford to have a daughter. If they fail to meet the dowry demands, the bride is exposed to various forms of gender-based violence by her husband's family, which may even result in her death (Shrivastava, 2020). Furthermore, the significant decline in female births has resulted in a shortage of potential wives, as a result, young girls are being trafficked and sold as brides (Arya & Khurana, 2014, pp.52-53). Child marriage, although banned by Indian law, is believed to be an alternative method since it requires lower dowry expenses (Suarez, 2018). According to UNICEF (2023) one-third of the world's child brides are located in India, which stresses child marriage as a growing concern. Scholars such as Argya and Khurana (2014) state that such practices are consequences of female feticide as they predominate in areas with adverse sex ratios.

3.4 Integration with current research

The effectiveness of the UNFPA's transnational influence is demonstrated in the example that when female feticide within both India and China became

internationally acknowledged, neighboring countries quickly embraced the ICPD agenda to prevent similar outcomes. Nevertheless, Rahm (2020, p.49) further states that the global policy recommendations on female feticide has more-or-less stagnated to its original definition from 1994, due to challenges of bridging national interests with international agendas. Elaborating upon this, DeJong (2000) underscores that UNFPA-driven reforms have been successful in countries with higher democracy, thanks to their advancements in engaging civil society and governmental actions. In contrast, Asian regions with less progressive democracy, face challenges in adapting to international reform programs (Dejong, 2000). When analyzing the broader field of India's overall policy ineffectiveness, corruption has been proven as a common denominator that obstructs its reformative development and structural inequalities (Corbridge, 2012; Verma & Sharma, 2018).

Previous research highlights the structural inequalities and biases against girls that operate within India's political and public sphere. The current academic discourse demonstrates the UNFPA's crucial role in influencing change, alongside the empirical puzzle of adapting its international framework to context-specific problems. This study aims to include gendered narrative in approaching the challenges and solutions the UNFPA encounters within its framing of female feticide in India.

4. Theoretical framework

In this section I present the lens through which I will interpret my analysis. I then explain how it correlates with the research method, and how the two integrate as complementary components in my analysis section.

4.1 Feminist institutionalism

Feminist institutionalism employs a ‘new institutionalist’ perspective within feminist theory determined to uncover gendered norms within institutional regulations. The concept of ‘institutions’ is widely contextualized to adapt the contemporary nature of both *formal* and *informal* institutions (FIIN, 2024). Formal norms concern documented rules, such as laws and regulations, while informal norms employ undocumented rules developed by human interactions through time (Eriksson Skoog, 2005, pp.21).

As highlighted by Krook and Mackay (2011), feminist institutionalism is an additional framework that bridges the gap between neo-institutionalism and feminist political science. Neo-institutionalism is a political science approach that emphasizes how political outcomes are influenced by norms and regulations within institutions, while feminist political science investigates how gender biases emerge within politics and power dynamics. By merging the two frameworks, feminist institutionalism introduces a gendered narrative to institutional analysis. Drawing upon feminist theory, this framework critically explores the intricate gender power dynamics within institutions, and how they are influenced by continuity and change within political and public spheres (Krook & Mackay, 2011). Regarding women’s reproductive rights, Thomson (2018) used feminist institutionalism to examine how policy changes in abortion laws either foster or hinder gendered norms within institutions. The findings demonstrate the lack of

support for, and presence of, women in institutions, as a causal explanation as to why formal institutions may be resistant to progressive gendered change within policies (Thompson, 2018). Analyzing gendered power dynamics within institutions brings valuable insights into women's reproductive rights beyond its legal context, and stresses the need to analyze the critical role supportive actors have in fostering gender considerative change.

According to Krook and Mackay (2011), continuity and change within formal and informal institutions have different outcomes for men and women, since gender has no significant status in development policies. However, feminist institutionalism has recently been assessed by Feminist International Relations theorists, to investigate how gendered institutions within international organizations, such as the UN, are influenced by external and internal change (Holmes, 2020). Building upon these insights, Basu (2019), underscores that international institutions, specifically the UN and its agencies, are important domains for feminist institutionalist research when studying gender power dynamics. Intergovernmental institutions not only have the authority to demand governments to take gender-specific measures but also increase ascendancy across transnational borders beyond governmental jurisdiction.

The presented characteristics of feminist institutionalism are relevant to this thesis considering how social indicators operate within the UNFPA's policy framework of female feticide in India. Through feminist institutionalism, I will critically examine how the UNFPA challenges gendered norms regarding female feticide in India, while allowing to identify potential gaps and biases within its framing of the problem. The formal and informal institutions are conceptualized to align with the research aim; The formal institutions entertain established structures, policies, and programs, while the informal institutions encompass socio-economic and cultural norms and practices within the formal ones. These refer both to the institutional dynamics within the UNFPA itself and how the UNFPA navigates its policy framework in relation to formal and informal institutions regarding female feticide in India (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Basu, 2019)..

4.2 Bridging the frameworks

In this thesis, I will bridge the theoretical framework with the methodology ‘What’s the problem represented to be’ (WPR) by Bacchi (2009), since both entertain policy analysis approaches.

As presented above, feminist institutionalism seeks to uncover how gender power dynamics perpetuate within the political and public sphere. Krook and Mackay (2011) challenge how formal and informal institutions constitute the ‘rules of the game’, and how such political institutions proceed to affect the everyday lives of men and women. Furthermore, the theoretical framework addresses the limitations these pose on stakeholders, as to what extent a gendered institutional approach can bring innovative reform that promotes gender equality (Krook & Mackay, 2011). In addition, Bacchi’s WPR approach entertains both theoretical and methodological characteristics, as it provides a critical approach to analyzing institutional norms and the deeply rooted assumptions within problem representations (*explained in section 5.2 below*). This enables research to address gendered norms when examining the underlying power dynamics of socially accepted institutions (Bacchi, 2024b, 2024c).

By bridging the two frameworks, it provides a comprehensive approach to analyze the complex dynamics of how gendered institutions manifest within policy frameworks, and enhance a profound foundation to examine the key elements in problem representations. The dual approach will allow to analyze ways in which the UNFPA’s strategies challenge patriarchal norms and practices within the broader field of women’s rights and gender equity.

5. Methodology

In this section I present the research design and method to justify the applied characteristics of Bacchi's WPR approach, as explained in the theoretical framework, that guide my methodology. The latter sections describe the study's selected data collection, limitations and ethical considerations.

5.1 Research design

The research is designed as a qualitative case study that aims to critically analyze how the UNFPA frames female feticide in India, following the ICPD 1994 convention (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pp.149-151). As a UN agency, it holds a significant role in targeting human rights concerns, particularly those regarding women's rights and bodily autonomy, in national contexts (UNFPA, 2023). India is a relevant case to study since its increasing international influence shadows domestic problems that remained partially unchanged despite its excessive growth, particularly problems that reinforce gender bias against girls. As a large country with the largest population in the world (Oxfam, 2022), India's legal and social status challenges how the UNFPA's policy framework approaches nationally manifested policies and incentives. Hence, an international perspective is crucial for comprehensive knowledge on gender equality within the development discourse (Basu, 2019).

5.2 Research method

The method employs Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the Problem Represented to be' (WPR) approach. According to Bacchi (2009), the nature of a problem is

significantly shaped by how policies define the representation of a ‘problem’, and recognizes the complex interplay between power relations (Bacchi, 2009, pp.1, 40). It is important to distinguish that my research examines the framing of policies and incentives within a chosen *context*, rather than a specific *policy*. Nonetheless, Bacchi encourages researchers to adopt WPR as an analytical lens to examine how gender power dynamics influence the shaping and perception of policies, which applies to the UNFPA’s role in facilitating change within institutions. The WPR approach thus provides a critical analysis of how the UNFPA’s core principles manifest within its policy framework when addressing challenges and encouraging solutions regarding female feticide in India (Bacchi, 2009, 2024a).

These are the foundational questions that Bacchi (2009, p.2) propose for policy analysis:

1. What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the ‘problem’?
3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?
6. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

Since Bacchi’s proposed questions do not translate directly to the unique scope of this study, they are revised to analyze framings within policy frameworks, rather than direct policy analysis. I apply WPR questions 1, 2, 4 and 5 as these are of

highest relevance to my research aim and question. Although question 3 and 6 have rich qualities, they do not correspond with this study's scope. The applied questions are revised as in the table below.

Table 1. Revised WPR Questions

Research Question	Original Questions	Revised Questions
How does the UNFPA frame challenges and solutions regarding female feticide in India?	1. What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?	1.1 What is the problem of 'female feticide' according to the UNFPA policy framework?
	2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?	2.1 What assumptions underlie the UNFPA's representation of 'female feticide' in India?
	3. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?	3.1 What are the critical gaps and challenges?
	4. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?	4.1 What effects are identified by the UNFPA's representation of 'female feticide' in India?

5.2.1 WPR questions

As aforementioned (*see section 5.2*), the first question aims to introduce the problem representation within a specific policy, in this case, the chosen context of female feticide. This problem representation lays the foundational guidelines to the following WPR questions (Bacchi, 2009, p.1).

The second question aims to investigate the conceptual logics of the problem representation. These include exploring deeply-rooted social and cultural values within the structural representation of the ‘problem’. Thus, the conceptual logics explore underlying assumptions that shape the UNFPA’s understanding of ‘female feticide’ (Bacchi, 2009, pp.5-7).

For the third question, I merge ‘What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?’ and ‘Where are the silences?’, leaving out ‘Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?’ since it does not fully align with the research question. The refined WPR question enables me to identify gaps and limitations in UNFPA’s framing of female feticide. This includes a critical evaluation of UNFPA-demonstrated gaps regarding India’s efforts to address female feticide, alongside personal reflections on what might be *missing* within the policy framework, or potential contradictions in between (Bacchi, 2009, pp.12-13).

Finally, the fourth question approaches a ‘problem’ from an outcome perspective, aiming to expose power dynamics that obstruct progressive policy reformations. Bacchi (2009) criticizes policies to represent victims *of* a problem *as* the ‘problem’. Such representations negatively influence how those concerned identify themselves and each other to their contemporary environment. For instance, policy representations of gender inequalities influence how females identify their role in society, and can explain why mothers are reluctant to have daughters. Subsequently, it discourages marginalized communities from challenging power relations and social norms, while governmental incentives become perceived as a benevolent act (Bacchi, 2009, pp.16-17).

By combining these questions in my analysis, this study aims to provide a thorough investigation of how an international actor addresses gender disparities and socio-economic deficiencies within a national context of a ‘problem’.

5.3 Data collection

The data is carefully selected to constitute of highest relevance to the research aim and approaches the concept of female feticide through several aspects. The data consists of nine published documents authored by, or collaborated with, the UNFPA from its official website. Dating from 2007 and onward, the documents are developed from the ICPD 1994 agenda. These include responses to the PCPNDT Act and the Indian Census of 2001 and 2011, and its Country Programme evaluations. The data further encompasses a wide variety of empirical material, including UNFPA-driven research, alongside evaluations of its operational incentives in India. As shown in *Table 2* below, the data range from UNFPA’s international and regional documents, but also from its specific country unit in India. Further demonstrating that the UNFPA not only operates from its international platform, but has established its operational context to national-level India. This is e.g. prevalent in the data containing the UNFPA’s evaluation of its latest 9th Country Programme Document (CPD) [2018 – 2022] for India.

Table 2. Final data collection

Title	Authors	Year	Pages	In text reference ¹
Characteristics of Sex-Ratio Imbalance in India and Future Scenarios	UNFPA, Guilmoto, C.Z	2007	36	(UNFPA, 2007)
Preventing gender-biased sex selection	UNFPA, OHCHR, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO	2011	28	(UNFPA, 2011)
Sex imbalances at birth: Current trends, consequences and policy implications	UNFPA Asia-Pacific, Guilmoto, C.Z	2012	88	(UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012)
Sex ratios and gender biased sex-selection	UNFPA Asia-Pacific, UN Women	2014	72	(UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014)
Masculinity, intimate partner violence, and son preference	UNFPA India, ICRW	2014	130	(UNFPA India, 2014a)
Synthesis of Research on Gender Biased Sex Selection – Insights and Learnings (2001-2012)	UNFPA India, UNICEF	2014	52	(UNFPA India, 2014b)
Preventing Son Preference and undervaluing of girls in Asia Pacific	UNFPA Asia-Pacific	2020	16	(UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2020)
UNFPA – Country programmes and related matters	UNFPA India	2022	68	(UNFPA India, 2022)
Annual Report 2022	UNFPA India	2023	12	(UNFPA India, 2023)

5.3.1 Ethical considerations

This thesis acknowledges the complexities of covering all female feticide as it intersects with multifaceted factors within the development discourse. The data provides perspective on how the UNFPA evaluates its global responsibility and how its core principles are communicated throughout its policy framework. Women, girls, and families are particularly exposed to the gender-discriminatory practices that female feticide entails (Singh, 2021). Thus, it is crucial to recognize that the findings derived from the data analysis do not adequately portray the lived experiences of the affected population. Since sex selection and gender bias

¹ Some reports have individual actors, however since they are published under the UNFPA's jurisdiction, they are referred to as UNFPA in the analysis section for clarification purposes.

predominates in the north-western regions, the study acknowledge that female feticide is not generalizable to all of India (Dube et al. 1999, p.82), but only for communities where sex selection and gender bias is a pervasive concern.

5.3.2 Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that the information that is chosen to integrate in my analysis is selected to align, information in the documents that are not relevant in the framing of challenges and solutions of female feticide is excluded. The external validity of my findings is limited to the Indian context, indicating that the UNFPA's framing of female feticide is not generalizable to other regions as these entertain different factors that reinforced the practice. Furthermore, the findings are only interpretive to selected material, and not to the real-world context (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pp.110; Stake, 2010). Because the findings are interpretive, they are based on the researcher's perspective. Therefore, this study does not exclude additional interpretations of the data, but leaves room for alternate conclusions from the provided data collection. While striving towards objectivity, I am aware of my personal biases and potential biases within UNFPA's policy framework. Since the polices are authorized by the UNFPA itself, it is crucial to apply a critical approach in analyzing gaps and challenges that are silent (Stake, 2010, pp.15, 164-165; Bacchi, 2009). Nevertheless, I am positive that this study provides valuable insights to the gender equality and women's reproductive rights discourse.

6. Analysis

In this chapter, I apply the revised WPR questions (*see Table 2*) to guide my research question: *How does the UNFPA frame challenges and solutions regarding female feticide in India?* Moreover, the analysis is interpreted by feminist institutionalist lens. The first two sections (*6.1 and 6.2*) focus on constructing UNFPA's framing of female feticide, followed by the latter sections (*6.3 and 6.4*) that take on more critical reflections of the data.

6.1 Problem representation of female feticide

In order to understand how the UNFPA frames female feticide in India, it is crucial to identify its problem representation. The UNFPA states that: "Gender biased sex selection is a discriminatory practice against girls which is embedded in a complex net of socio-economic and cultural factors" (UNFPA India, 2014b, p.6). The complex net is grouped in three overarching categories: "Son preference", "Growth of prenatal diagnosis theory" and "Low fertility" (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.10). Below, I elaborate upon these groupings to analyze: *What is the problem of 'female feticide' according to the UNFPA policy framework? (see Table 1).*

6.1.1 Son preference

Patriarchal values are considered to reinforce gender bias as it facilitates the social benefits of birthing a son. The UNFPA addresses the patriarchal values as: "Gender biased sex selection is a manifestation of the subordinate status of women in society" (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, Foreword), adding to the statement that: "Imbalanced sex ratios are an unacceptable manifestation of

gender discrimination against girls and women and a violation of their human rights” (UNFPA, 2011, p.12). These framings lay the foundation of how female feticide is contextualized within gendered institutions, portraying a socio-cultural understanding of the ‘problem’ (UNFPA India, 2014b; Bacchi, 2009; Krook & Mackay, 2011). Subsequently, the UNFPA critically examines the government and society’s role in targeting female feticide: “Governments often profess that they ‘cannot change culture’, even though campaigns have already been successfully conducted against age-old social practices labeled as social evils or superstitions” (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.67) and “[...] the role of internalised social norms and values which continue exercising significant control even when laws and the policy environment may be promoting gender equality” (UNFPA India, 2014b, p.6). By challenging the notion that socio-cultural factors do not intersect with the structural components of policies, the problem is represented not only as individual-based concerns but as a lack of comprehensive state-level approaches as well.

The UNFPA considers its 9th CPD incentives to be at the forefront in shaping progressive policies on sexual and reproductive rights in India, particularly for vulnerable communities (UNFPA India, 2023). Alongside women’s empowerment programs, it promotes programs for changing young males attitudes on son preference, through “positive masculinity” workshops in schools (UNFPA India, 2023, pp.60-61). Since knowledge about sexual and reproductive rights fails to target the larger cohort of India’s youth, the UNFPA put strong emphasis on resources and skills to be equally accessible for women and girls, as for males. Investment in youth is considered crucial to target the underlying causes that reinforce female feticide in the long run (UNFPA India, 2023, pp.5, 30; UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.65).

6.1.2 Growth of prenatal diagnosis technology

The UNFPA labels the “systematic preference for boys” as the main driver for sex-selective abortions. Although modern technology has accelerated this practice, it is not considered the “root cause” of female feticide. The UNFPA-driven research reinforces this argument with its findings that prenatal technologies for sex determination “does not necessarily” equal abortion of the female fetus, in regions where son preference is insignificant (UNFPA, 2011, p.v). Subsequently, India’s sex ratio imbalance is defined as: “a demographic manifestation of gender inequality resulting from extreme discrimination against women/girls before birth” (UNFPA India, 2014, p.3), which recognizes the direct impact sex selection pose on violating of women’s rights.

In addition, the 9th CPD emphasize collaboration with influential stakeholders, such as the media and civil society organizations (CSO) to unite improvemt of the PCPNDT Act with anti-child marriage programs. This dual incentive is believed to improve women and girls social value (UNFPA India, 2022, p.4; UNFPA India, 2023, p.27). The UNFPA’s engagement in facilitating stakeholder cooperation underscores its efforts to integrate social concerns into legislative enforcement.

6.1.3 Low fertility

The UNFPA merges India’s demographic crisis with its social inequalities. It proceeds to criticises the government-induced two-child norm to be problematic: “[...] primarily because it is a violation of human rights, especially among the poor, but also because of its perceived effects on sex selection”, particularly being recognized in north-western India as: “a highly gendered version of fertility decline” (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.36). When advocating for action, the UNFPA characterizes “public shaming” as an effective method that motivates stakeholders to improve their performances. For instance, publicly shaming areas with alarming sex ratios, motivates local stakeholders to improve their approaches. Similarly, on the international level, publicly exposing a country’s regressive development indicators regarding female feticide forces governments

to act in attempts to save their global reputation (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.65).

The 9th CPD results provided further successful development outcomes. For instance, the UNFPA supported the Indian government in introducing two new forms of contraceptives while significantly increasing the share of midwives receiving education on maternal mortality prevention. These implementations are motivated to not only entertain family planning purposes but also provide women with “greater choices in regulating their own fertility” and tools to “realize their reproductive choices” (UNFPA India, 2023, pp.4, 13).

This section finds that UNFPA’s problem representation of ‘female feticide’ in India is dominated by multifaceted factors that intersect with the broader context of gender discrimination. Its progressive development outcomes demonstrate that its understanding of the ‘problem’ is guided by its core principles of gender equality and reproductive rights.

6.2 Underlying assumptions of female feticide

This section aims to analyze: *What assumptions underlie the UNFPA’s representation of ‘female feticide’ in India? (see Table 1)*. The UNFPA claims that the current discourse on female feticide is divided between three themes: “culture”, “violence”, and “political economy”. The assumption is that these approach themes are approached separately, creating a one-sided understanding of female feticide (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, pp.40-41). The UNFPA argues that one theme should not be approached without the others. For instance, cultural factors (*e.g. dowry and patrilineal kinship*) cannot be understood without addressing gender-based violence and economic factors. Likewise, family dynamics are influenced by socio-economic conditions and gender norms, vice versa (UNFPA India, 2014b, p.7; UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014). Hence, I proceed

to examine the UNFPA's attempts to demonstrate these themes interplay within the three overarching categories presented in the previous section.

6.2.1 The patriarchal structure

Firstly, *son preference* is related to the patriarchal society that values sons over daughters, not only in India but across countries with adverse CSR in the Asia Pacific region (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2020, p.1). On the national level, the UNFPA distinguishes between rural and urban motives for sex selection, stating that son preference in rural areas dominates by “traditional institutions” and “dependence on sons for [...] support in old age”, while son preference in urban areas is mainly practiced through sex-selective abortions (UNFPA, 2020, p.3). Although son preference plays out differently between rural and urban areas, the UNFPA claims the common denominator for son preference to be the *dowry system*. This is motivated by the following statements: “[...] investment in sons generally appears to offer more ‘returns’ to families within a kinship system characterized by dowry and patriarchy” (UNFPA, 2007, p.20) and, “The burden of dowry has become emblematic of the cost of bringing up a daughter in contemporary India” (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.vii). In alignment with previous research (*see section 3.3*), the UNFPA recognizes dowry for its symbolic role on gender bias.

It makes the distinction that *son preference* and *daughter neglect* are two separate phenomena of gender bias “[...] as each operates in its own manner and differently for men and women” (UNFPA India, 2014a, p.69). Son preference employs the social and cultural desires for male offspring, while daughter neglect entertains violating girls’ receive adequate resources (UNFPA India, 2014a, p.69). Building on these assumptions, the UNFPA states that: “Women must perpetuate the lower status of girls through son preference” (UNFPA, 2011, p.5), which stigmatizes women as both victims and reinforcers of gender discriminatory practices. It demonstrates how gender norms collectively impact women’s self-image and the

detrimental effects it poses on a country's progressive development (UNFPA India, 2014b, pp.8-9; Bacchi, 2009, pp.16-17).

While domestic violence and adverse CSR have no strong correlation (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.35), gender-based violence and son preference are both reinforced by toxic masculinity. The UNFPA-driven research finds that males with higher education- and income- level and absence of parental gender bias in their childhood, show lower tendencies of domestic violence and are more likely to value sons and daughters equally in India (UNFPA India, 2014, pp.68-69), underscoring why positive masculinity and investment in youth plays a pivotal role to combat female feticide (UNFPA India, 2014b).

By critically engaging in India's historical conceptualization of the female feticide, it questions how “[...] the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, demography, the actions of the state, and [...] resources of feminism taken us forward, compared to the agendas, prevarications and rationalizations in evidence during colonial rule?” (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.4). The UNFPA agrees with academic scholars that colonial approaches to address female *infanticide*, was motivated to justify their rule in India, further recognizing its influence on postcolonial policies to only emphasize demographic concerns of sex selection (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.3).

6.2.2 Medical technology and dowry

Secondly, the *growth of prenatal diagnosis technology* is perceived as a “relatively safe and medically controlled” procedure that oversees marital health concerns while feeding the cultural practices that trigger gender inequality and “jeopardizes sustainable development” (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2020, p.1). While the PCPNDT Act has tools to criminalize sex-selective misuse of technology, it lacks cooperative engagement from medical practitioners and CSO. According to

the UNFPA, the lack of such bureaucratic efforts explains the uneven implementation of the Act across India's regions (UNFPA, 2007, p.22).

Elaborating upon this, the UNFPA divides conceptual logics of female feticide between the assertions of supply and demand, where supply is defined as “medical technologies” and demand as “dowry” (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.23). To put it in perspective, since the 1980s, medical practitioners have advertised prenatal technologies as “Rs. 500 now or Rs. 50,000 later” (cited in Gandhi and Shah 1992)”, which emphasizes that sex-selective abortions saves dowry expenses for the long-run (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.25), while for dowry: “It is the idea that dowry is a modern phenomenon linked with capitalist modes of development and the devaluation of women and their labour, that then makes it possible to see dowry as a primary ‘cause’ for the practice of sex selection as well” (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.24). Its distinction of supply and demand interlinks cultural practices with economic development. This correlation is further explained as: “The increased, indeed ‘monstrous’ practice of dowry, translates quite simply into growing daughter aversion and therefore to fewer girls being born” (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.26).

6.2.3 Demographic concerns and additional discriminations

Thirdly, *low fertility* is assumed as the desire for smaller families (*e.g.the two child-norm*) which motivates the misuse of sex-selective technologies to secure sons (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2020, p.1). With means to understand the domino effect spreading female feticide to new regions in India (UNFPA, 2007, p.26), the UNFPA highlights the positive significance socio-economic status imposes on adverse sex ratio. Claiming that higher socio-economic classes as the main perpetrators of female feticide to a higher degree, their social status triggers lower classes to take on their practices with aims to improve their own status (UNFPA, 2007, pp.19-20; UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.32). Thus, the UNFPA argues that: “Fertility decline has been a clear illustration of such top-down diffusion”

(UNFPA, 2007, p.19). Research is encouraged to study regions with balanced CSR, as it would provide individual and community-based understanding of factors that reinforce progressive gender norms (UNFPA India, 2014b, p.9).

The 9th CPD illustrates UNFPA-driven efforts to re-frame gender bias by advocating for education and community involvement as crucial components to achieve long-term solutions for gender discriminatory practices (UNFPA India, 2023, p.5). Moreover, the UNFPA emphasizes policies regarding female feticide to target additional discriminatory practices: “Politicizing the ‘social’ bias against girls cannot be advanced without also politicizing the ‘naturalized’ bias against disability” (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.12). The UNFPA’s policy framework thus includes suggestions to juxtapose gender-sensitive policies to approach additional forms of discrimination as well. In addition, its acknowledgement on the social acceptance that devalue girls is provided in the following statement:

“There are very few known philosophical or religious principles that bar individuals or groups in India from envisaging a deliberate choice in the sex composition of their offspring. [...] To a large extent, rapid fertility decline itself has shown that people have accepted the principle of controlled fertility, and it may therefore logically follow that manipulating the ‘content’ of one’s fertility is part of this fundamental behavioural change.”

(UNFPA, 2007, p.18)

The assumptions that underlie UNFPA’s framing of female feticide in India highlight the complex interplay between various factors between *culture*, *violence* and *political economy*, ranging from historical assumptions to internal dimension of gender dynamics across legal and social contexts which underlie its framing of female feticide in India.

6.3 Critical gaps and silences

In this section I analyze: *What are the critical gaps and silences? (see Table 1)*, including UNFPA-identified knowledge gaps in India's contemporary gender equality and development discourse, followed by the silences and contradictions I have observed in analyzing the UNFPA's policy framework on female feticide in India.

6.3.1 Knowledge gaps

Probably the most critical gap is India's policy failure of considering gendered norms within formal institutional change, leading policy reformations to exacerbate women's reproductive rights instead of improving it. In alignment with previous research, the UNFPA criticizes the legislative discourse to not account for the significant proportion of women seeking abortions for alternative purposes: "Discouraging health-care providers from conducting safe abortions for fear of prosecution places women in greater dangers than they would otherwise face" (UNFPA, 2011, p.6), which force women to reside to unsafe abortions, for reasons other than sex selection (UNFPA, 2011, p.5), which adds to the current discourse on protecting maternal health (Graham et al. 2008; Nagpal, 2013).

The UNFPA acknowledges that technological factors that dominate the legislative discourse on female feticide shadow fundamental social factors of the abortion procedure as demonstrated in:

"The simplest step to counter sex imbalances at birth appears to be banning prenatal sex selection [...] since it aims at a specific decision or behaviour of the individual or family, with no consideration for the root cause of son preference that drives this

action or behaviour.”

(UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.60)

This excerpt claims that policies are limited in challenging gender norms because they disregard the root causes of gender bias, further urging policies to approach the “deeply rooted gender discrimination against women and girls” that trigger sex-selective practices (UNFPA, 2011, p.1). In doing so, it encourages both government and civil society to document the efficiency of CSR-related policies (UNFPA, 2011, p.vi; UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.12).

The UNFPA highlights India’s social acceptance of female feticide as induced by gender biases within institutions of “marriage systems”, “family formation” and “property inheritance laws” (UNFPA, 2011, p.1). It proceeds to acknowledge the challenge to predict outcomes of social norms within institutional change. For example, India’s marriage institution is a product of past social structures, thus they do not align with change in modern economic demands (UNFPA, 2007, p.20). This shows how informal institutions within the formal ones can be resistant to change, as failure to address underlying gender biases within legislative contexts result in insufficient understanding of the power dynamics that reinforce female feticide in India.

Furthermore, there exists a knowledge gap in the perspectives of healthcare providers that is crucial for understanding the supply side (*see section 6.2.2*), however, it is challenging to target such actors due to their influential position within the higher socio-economic classes (UNFPA India, 2014b, p.8; UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, pp.61-63)

6.3.2 Silences and contradictions

How the public and policy representations may be influenced by power dynamics in government institutions, is found silent within the UNFPA’s framing of female

feticide in India. Its policy framework publicly exposes corruption tendencies of private healthcare providers and local administrations (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, pp.61-63), and indirectly criticizes India's systemic flaws as the absence of a pension system makes parents dependent on financial support from their sons in old age (UNFPA, 2007, p.19). However, the UNFPA's framework does not delve deeper into the systemic flaws of India's government. As highlighted by Corbridge (2012) and Verma and Sharma (2018), India's overall policy insufficiency is a result of corruption. This determining factor remains silent throughout the UNFPA's critique of the government's insufficient policy implementations. It can be argued that as an intergovernmental organization (*see section 3.4*), its dependency on governmental alliance dominates its approach to to preserve a cooperative relationship with its member states (Risse & Ropp, 2009). Nevertheless, the UNFPA states that:

“Discrimination against daughters is visible in such practices as sex selection before birth or, in poorer households, by discrimination in the health, nutrition and education of girls, as well as in marrying a daughter at an early age to avoid paying a higher dowry. Combatting such practices is a priority of the Government of India, working with a number of organizations and civil society actors for strong implementation of the act prohibiting sex selection and carrying out on-the-ground outreach efforts.”

(UNFPA India, 2023, p.23)

This statement reinforces the above mentioned argument, as the UNFPA defines combating sex selection as a *priority* of the government, which contradicts its criticism against India's insufficient government initiatives, such as the PCPNDT Act, as it dominating in demographic concerns and population control motives, rather than women's rights purposes (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.47). The following excerpt illustrates this contradiction: “Restricting access to certain reproductive technologies in order to prevent an imbalanced male-to-female ratio

in a given society should not result in the curtailing of the human rights of women” (UNFPA, 2011, p.4). However, since the previous statement is recent (2023) it can also be argued that recent UNFPA-driven collaborations with India’s government has improved this critical assessment.

Furthermore, on one hand, the UNFPA claims that women and men with a strong son preference are “typically older, less literate, poorer and more likely to be rural-based” (UNFPA India, 2014, p.68). On the other hand, it defines the higher socio-economic classes as the main perpetrators of female feticide due to its social status (UNFPA, 2007, pp.19-20; UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.32). The contradictions in these framings is another silence that require further clarifications between intersectional indicators between son preference and sex selection.

The presented gaps and silences reveal critical aspects that are lacking in India’s progressive development trajectory and covered flaws within the UNFPA’s policy framework that it seeks to cover.

6.4 Identified effects of female feticide

The UNFPA emphasis on stakeholder collaboration is crucial for promoting human-rights and gender equality (UNFPA India, 2023, p.24), and an important role in approaching female feticide in India. Hence, this section proceeds to analyze *What effects are identified by the UNFPA’s representation of ‘female feticide’ in India?*

6.4.1 Research and advocacy

The UNFPA emphasize the importance of incorporating extensive research on local levels within India, for a comprehensive understanding on the “changing

dynamics in patterns of sex selection” as although the north-western regions in India have high CSR imbalances, the regional motives behind female feticide vary significantly (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.38), which is also true for the underlying reasons behind men and women’s son preference (UNFPA India, 2014, p.51). Elaborating upon these recommendations, the UNFPA encourage research to examine the intersecting dynamics within two dominating markets that distinguish between the value and cost of women, as portrayed in:

“[...] the compulsory institution of marriage and the increasingly depressed labour market [...] – most visible in the difference represented by daughters and prospective daughters in-law in hypergamous marriage markets, where sons marry ‘down’ while girls marry ‘up’.”

(UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.38)

The UNFPA considers the problematization of how the higher socio-economic classes reinforce female feticide to be understudied. In extending this argument, UNFPA-driven research finds that India’s progressive development indicators, such as higher education level and age in marriage, show strong correlations with adverse CSR (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.47). This indicates that progressive development indicators do not necessarily equal lower levels of gender discrimination (UNFPA, 2011, p.2; UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.47), and advocates for further research on higher classes to expand the understanding of cultural and socio-economic factors that reinforce female feticide in India’s urban societies (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, p.47; UNFPA India, 2014b, p.26). As emphasized in the theoretical framework, this identified paradox reveals how failure to address gendered norms within institutional change can preserve structural inequalities that hinder social development within policies.

Elaborating upon “public shaming” outcomes (*see 6.1.3*), the press is perceived to have an influential role in facilitating policy change:

“While also stressing the role of individuals (women, doctors, bureaucrats, etc.), the press [...] utilize census data in order to place collective blame on entire localities. The press [...] reported in detail some of the most visible aspects of the enforcement of the PC & PNDT Act, such as decoy operations conducted by NGOs or the prosecution of medical doctors. Scandals related to abortions (such as the frequent discovery of fetuses dumped in the open after possible illegal abortions) have also made headlines.”

(UNFPA, 2007, p.25)

The UNFPA estimates the trajectory on targeting female feticide to be “slow”, but following its desired direction for the long-run. Hence, it encourages legislative acts to integrate with campaigns, as such platforms hold influential power to acknowledge gender norms within cultural and social institutions perpetuating son preference (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.11). It is further argued that female feticide emanates from the minds of its practitioners, rather than technology, which is emphasized as failure of public awareness to target its righteous audience (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014). In further alignment with the ICPD agenda, the UNFPA in India consistently engages with media attention to promote its core principles as means to influence the public's awareness of the issue (UNFPA India, 2023, p.35). This is explained within the following statement:

“Community, religious and political leaders are targets of prime importance for these campaigns because of their potential to generate trickle-down effects. It is also essential for the medical community, often hastily blamed for the very existence of prenatal sex selection, to be part of the campaigns through its associations and prominent members because of their influence on the healthcare system and their role as sex selection providers.”

(UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012, p.65)

Nevertheless, the UNFPA's requirement for all policies to be "gender-friendly" is yet to be achieved (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, p.66). The three themes ... / the intersection thus demanding for more nuanced understanding (UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014, pp.40-42)

The multifaceted approach in framing female feticide demonstrates the importance of the UNFPA's operational context, and how UNFPA-driven incentives that promote gender equality and women's reproductive rights have facilitated progressive change in the battle against female feticide.

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze how the UNFPA adapts its policy framework to enhance its core principles within a national context. In my analysis I have demonstrated various factors that shape UNFPA's framing of female feticide in India, and its operational outcomes. The analysis concludes the framing in three overarching categories: *son preference*, *growth of prenatal diagnosis technology* and *low fertility*, which further include intersectional themes and effects within them. Its framing puts strong emphasis on women's right to bodily autonomy through its collaboration with various stakeholders, promoting gender equality in both the political and public sphere. The findings further reveal that the UNFPA's engagement constitutes a significant role in re-framing India's national agenda on female feticide, but also highlights critical gaps and challenges. All-in-all, this leads to the question that lies at the heart of this research, namely: *How does the UNFPA frame challenges and solutions regarding female feticide in India?*

This research states that international authorities play a decisive role in addressing challenges and guiding solutions. As an intergovernmental actor, the UNFPA's framing regarding female feticide in India holds dominant influence in portraying a global image of India. Furthermore, its framing introduces the unique finding that institutions that are resistant to gender-progressive change explain the regressive results presented in India's Census Reports, which can explain why progressive development indicators do not necessarily equal gender equality improvements.

The UNFPA frames challenges regarding female feticide to lie within the patriarchal structure that reinforces deeply rooted gender bias against girls in Indian society. Although female feticide is executed by sex-selective technologies, it is the failure to target gender inequalities within legislative incentives that restrict progressive development. Moreover, the UNFPA frames solutions regarding female feticide as those that unite bottom-up and

gender-sensitive approaches. It further provides important demands to policies that prohibit sex selection to not obstruct women's right to abortion and bodily autonomy. The findings also identify significant gaps regarding navigation challenges, suggesting that its constructive approach to the government that avoids direct critique, or negative portrayal, as means to maintain government collaboration.

In conclusion, the UNFPA's international authority has proven to have significant influence on enhancing progressive policy incentives regarding female feticide in India. Gender equality and women's reproductive rights cannot be achieved without targeting the underlying factors that prevent such development. Hence, gender is a fundamental component in bridging India's social landscape and legal discourse. Through a gendered narrative, this study has uncovered gender power dynamics that reinforce female feticide, which in turn reveal possibilities to incorporate additional forms of discrimination in the policy incentives. Based on the UNFPA framing, the findings highlight how gender bias differs between intersectional components such as age, class, and geographical context, which can explain why gender norms have significantly different outcomes within institutions.

Moving forward, future research is encouraged to engage in qualitative research to gain perspectives of real world experiences, alongside regional-centered analysis between India's progressive and regressive states. Analyzing how gender power dynamics within government regulate the relevant policy outcomes, is a further field to examine. Finally, as this analysis encompasses the portrayal of the UNFPA's own incentives, research is encouraged to make its own conclusions regarding the effectiveness of UNFPA's policy framework from an external approach, which limits institutional biases and political sensitivity therein. After all, continuous advocacy is necessary towards achieving gender equality and women's reproductive rights.

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Appendices

Figure 1.1

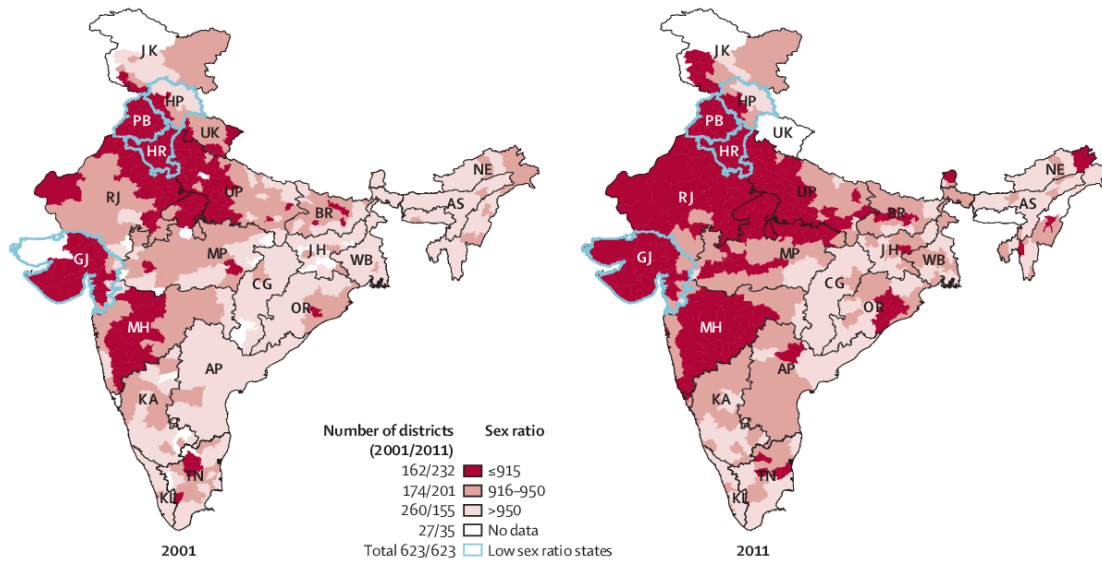


Table 1

Revised WPR Questions

Research Question	Original Questions	Revised Questions
How does the UNFPA frame challenges and solutions regarding female feticide in India?	1. What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?	1.1 What is the problem of 'female feticide' according to the UNFPA policy framework?
	2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?	2.1 What assumptions underlie the UNFPA's representation of 'female feticide' in India?
	3. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?	3.1 What are the critical gaps and challenges?
	4. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?	4.1 What effects are identified by the UNFPA's representation of 'female feticide' in India?

Table 2

Final data collection

Title	Authors	Year	Pages	In text reference ²
Characteristics of Sex-Ratio Imbalance in India and Future Scenarios	UNFPA, Guilmoto, C.Z	2007	36	(UNFPA, 2007)
Preventing gender-biased sex selection	UNFPA, OHCHR, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO	2011	28	(UNFPA, 2011)
Sex imbalances at birth: Current trends, consequences and policy implications	UNFPA Asia-Pacific, Guilmoto, C.Z	2012	88	(UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2012)
Sex ratios and gender biased sex-selection	UNFPA Asia-Pacific, UN Women	2014	72	(UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2014)
Masculinity, intimate partner violence, and son preference	UNFPA India, ICRW	2014	130	(UNFPA India, 2014a)
Synthesis of Research on Gender Biased Sex Selection – Insights and Learnings (2001-2012)	UNFPA India, UNICEF	2014	52	(UNFPA India, 2014b)
Preventing Son Preference and undervaluing of girls in Asia Pacific	UNFPA Asia-Pacific	2020	16	(UNFPA Asia-Pacific, 2020)
UNFPA – Country programmes and related matters	UNFPA India	2022	68	(UNFPA India, 2022)
Annual Report 2022	UNFPA India	2023	12	(UNFPA India, 2023)

² Some reports have individual actors, however since they are published under the UNFPA's jurisdiction, they are referred to as UNFPA in the analysis section for clarification purposes.