



**International  
Confederation  
of Midwives**

Strengthening Midwifery Globally



## **Non-medical gender biased sex selection**

### **Joint statement**

### **International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) and International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO)**

ICM and FIGO have a long-established, common commitment towards upholding women's fundamental human right to health, reducing the global incidence of perinatal mortality and morbidity, and using evidence based interventions to do so.

This statement in principle supports the 2011 interagency statement "Prevention of gender-biased sex selection by ONCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO."

#### **Statement**

ICM and FIGO emphasize that gender-biased decision making is ethically impermissible. Gender-biased sex selection for male children falsely assumes that males are superior to females and that females therefore are not equal to males. Such gender-biased decision making can take place before the establishment of pregnancy and during pregnancy. It sometimes includes impermissible practices such as infanticide or child neglect<sup>i</sup>.

ICM and FIGO recognise that gender-biased sex selection is a symptom, not the primary cause, of the social malfunction and injustice of sexist discrimination against women and girls<sup>ii</sup>, in violation of their Human Rights. ICM and FIGO therefore warn of possible ethically impermissible effects such as compelling women to continue or end pregnancies in violation of their autonomy and human rights.

ICM and FIGO call for preventing gender bias by promoting the autonomy of pregnant women, emphasizing the equal status and value of both sexes, and labelling discrimination on grounds of gender and sex as gender-biased violation of human rights.

#### **Call to action**

ICM and FIGO, in accordance with the interagency statement, call on **governments** to encourage and achieve behaviour change by:

- Ensuring health-related technologies are not used for discriminatory purposes but within evidence-based guidelines and codes of ethics of professional associations and other relevant bodies.

- Protecting and promoting the autonomy of pregnant women in decision making about the management of pregnancy.
- Committing to and making sustained and concerted efforts together with society, international agencies, and all others working towards the goal of gender equality to prevent gender-biased sex selection.
- Carefully planning and systematically engaging stakeholders at all levels to put in place supportive legal and policy measures to protect the health and human rights of girls and women.
- Using non-judgemental and non-coercive mass-media strategies and other social measures to encourage behaviour change.

ICM and FIGO call on **midwives and obstetricians/gynaecologists** to:

- Be aware of gender-biased sex selection.
- Be aware that gender-biased sex selection, and the intense pressure to produce sons, have serious and profound effects on the mental and physical health of women.
- Refrain from any activity or treatment contributing to, or causing gender-biased sex selection, to protect women's Human Rights and preserve professional integrity based on professional codes of conduct.
- In their interactions with childbearing women, their families and communities promote gender equality and protect the human rights of children and women.
- Work together to promote Women's and Children's Human Rights.
- Consult literature on (inter)national human rights and gender-discrimination, as well as professional ethical codes, to guide them in decision-making with their patients.

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<sup>i</sup> UN.1994. International Conference on Population and Development.

<sup>ii</sup> OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF. UN Women and WHO" 2011 [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241501460\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241501460_eng.pdf)