

War on women

The UN has received a stark warning about the growing global incidence of sex selected abortions and prenatal sex selection. Speaking about the growing popularity of 'son preference', demographics expert Dr Eberstadt from the American Enterprise Institute termed the trend a 'Global War Against Baby Girls'. China's demographics have been permanently skewed by the practice, and India is following suit. Most African countries are becoming increasingly vulnerable to this preference as well. In some areas there is a three to two ratio of boy to girl births. And as all these baby boys grow up into men, the practice of trafficking women will just become worse. Interestingly, this is not just a developing world phenomenon – it is increasingly popular in Latin America and Eastern Europe as well. Bizarrely, rising levels of education have worsened the problem in some countries. Making sex selection abortions illegal across the world may not cure the problem – it made the practice more popular in South Korea. Eberstadt warned that the world is 'moving to the realm of science fiction' with the ratio of boys to girls already at levels 'beyond nature'. (*Friday Fax* 2006; 8 December, www.thefactis.org/default.aspx?control=ArticleMaster&aid=1636&authid=11)

Small ecstasy use harmful

Taking even a small amount of ecstasy can cause brain damage to first time users. University of Amsterdam researchers did brain scans and memory tests on people with no history of ecstasy use but who were at risk of doing so in the future. Repeating the tests 18 months later, the 59 people who had used ecstasy showed evidence of decreased blood flow and memory loss. The class A drug is used by about half a million people in the UK. Long term or heavy ecstasy use can also damage neurons and cause anxiety, confusion, depression and insomnia. (*BBC News* 2006; 28 November, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/6190538.stm)

Demand for increased hospice care

Help the Hospices say that urgent government action is required to ensure that every patient with a terminal illness has access to hospice care, if they so desire. The charity found that many marginalised groups (for example homeless people) do not know how to access hospice services. Funding and referral problems are identified as problem areas, as is the issue of regional variation in the number of hospice beds. The Department of Health is now preparing a new palliative care strategy. (*BBC News* 2006; 8 October, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/5412290.stm)

Doctor MP admits liberal abortion aim

Liberal Democrat MP Dr Evan Harris has admitted that his aim in promoting a review of the abortion law is in fact the liberalisation of abortion. Writing in the *Guardian* in response to accusations from the pro-choice lobby that he might be secretly anti-abortion, Dr Harris said, 'Since there is currently a large pro-choice majority in the Commons, pro-choice campaigners should recognise that it is sensible to have a rational review of the medical, scientific and social issues as a precursor to an early parliamentary debate on liberalisation'. He then urged the pro-abortion lobby not attack each other. (*The Guardian* 2006; 10 November, society.guardian.co.uk/health/story/0,,1944262,00.html)

Conscientious objection in the pharmacy

A Muslim pharmacist working for Lloyds Pharmacy refused to supply a woman in her thirties with the morning after pill. After she complained, a spokesperson for the chain of chemists did apologise to the woman. However, he went on to support the pharmacist, and referred to the conscience objection clause in the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain's ethics code: '...if supplying the morning-after pill is contrary to a pharmacist's personal, religious or moral beliefs they are entirely within their rights not to supply it'. (*Telegraph* 2006; 14 October, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/10/14/npill14.xml)

Cystic fibrosis screening

Following on from the announcement that Chancellor Gordon Brown's youngest child has cystic fibrosis, *The Daily Mail* has publicised pre-implantation genetic haplotyping, a screening technique that checks embryos for up to 6,000 inherited illnesses. Born in October, twins Thomas and Freddie Greenstreet are the first British babies to be born after undergoing this screening test, arranged after their older sister Lizzie was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis. There is now pressure to introduce the test for routine NHS IVF treatments. (*Daily Mail* 2006; 30 November, www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=419761&in_page_id=1770)

Adult stem cells for chronic back pain

Patients' own mesenchymal bone marrow stem cells are being used in a Manchester trial to regenerate the nucleus pulposus of degenerated intervertebral discs. Researchers are aiming to start pre-clinical trials in 2007, and hope that this innovative treatment might be available within three years. So maybe soon NHS GPs will have a bit more to offer the UK's twelve million chronic low back pain patients than codeine and another sick note. (*BBC News* 2006, 30 November, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/6196644.stm)

Poor family planning and emergency contraception

When it comes to birth control, Scottish couples are not planning ahead. A study published in the *Lancet* looked at 4,000 women attending antenatal clinics and another 900 seeking abortions; its findings suggest that up to one in three Scottish births are not planned. Ten percent of births were totally unintended, and a further quarter of mothers were uncertain about their intention to conceive. Emergency contraception use was low, even amongst those women with no intention of conceiving. Lead researcher Professor Glasier said, 'Emergency contraception is unlikely to make a substantial difference to pregnancy rates'. (*BBC News* 2006; 17 November, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/edinburgh_and_east/6153736.stm)

Money isn't everything

It's official – money does not make you happy. A survey by MTV confirmed that young people in developing nations are at least twice as likely to feel happy than their peers in the developed world. Indians top the happiness chart whilst only eight percent of Japanese youngsters said that they were happy! Less than one in three British 16-34 year olds reported happiness. Even more interesting: 'The happier young people of the developing world are also the most religious'. (biz.yahoo.com/prnews/061120/nym178.html?.v=57)