



Netsilik and Inuit

Infanticide



Sex Ratios for Inuit Groups (males per 100 females)

Group	Juvenile	Adult
Aivlik	180	76
Baffin Land	105	94
Cape Smythe	193	87
Caribou 1900	132	78
Caribou 1923	169	79
Copper	224	104
Netsilik 1902	209	97
Netsilik 1923	200	105

This table provides evidence of female infanticide and high male mortality



Reasons Advanced for Infanticide (I)

- Population regulation
 - Unlikely because
 - No evidence they were pressing against environmental limits and resource fluctuations are so unpredictable that limitations on reproductive females would not be effective
 - The free-rider problem: if some decided not to kill daughters then they would swamp the population at the expense of daughter killers. No evidence that non-family members could force infanticide



Psychological reasons (II)



- Freeman and other argue that it is a matter of male dominance and jealousy towards females.
 - Unlikely because there is considerable evidence that men and women jointly made this decision



A Netsilik Woman's View on Infanticide (contradicting II)

Life is short. We all want to be as prosperous as we can in the time we are alive. Therefore parents often consider that they cannot "afford" to waste several years nursing a girl. We get old so quickly, and so we must be quick and get a son. That is what we parents think, and in the same way we think for our children. If my daughter Quertilik had a girl child I would strangle it at once. If I did not, I think I would be a bad mother.

Rasmussen, 1931



Netsilik Infanticide: Actors & Methods

- More or less passive, child set out to die, in some cases suffocated with fur
- All the preparations for infanticide made by mother
- Decision to kill made by mother, father, or mother's parents.
- However, frequently father has the major role.
- If child is named then it probably will not be killed.
Netsilik believe that spirits of the dead will form the soul of a newborn if a child gets a name. If named then killed, spirit will become angry.



Netsilik Reasons for Infanticide (emic)



Three principle causes of infanticide according to Balikci:

1. When a husband doubts paternity
2. Immediate ecological stress (currently no food available and times are hard)
3. Long term inability to support the child.
Men produce a huge proportion of food therefore one must think twice about producing an unproductive female



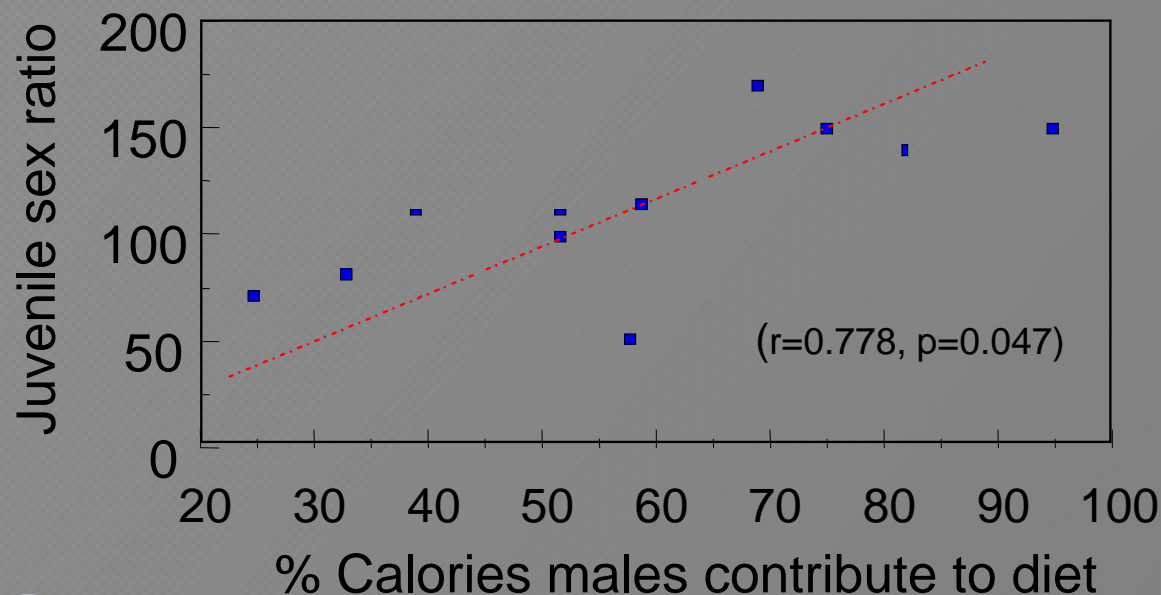
The Need for Hunters & Sex Ratio Balancing (III)

- Males suffer extremely high mortality rates through hunting accidents
- Males produce nearly all the food
- Although females are vitally important in food processing and clothing manufacture, all will starve if there are insufficient hunters
- Sons are favored because they can provide benefits to parents and kin through their hunting efforts that girls cannot.



Difficulty of hunting and variation in sex ratio

- Among Inuit groups where hunting is relatively easy the sex ratio is not so male biased.
- Crossculturally, there is a correlation between the sex that produces most food and biases in the sex ratio.



Yanomamö Infanticide: sex biased?

- Preferential female infanticide, the evidence:
 - Pre-reproductive sex ratio of about 125:100
 - Yanomamö express a strong preference for boys
 - Universal sex ratio at birth about 104:100
- Neel concludes that about 1 of 4 girls killed at birth



Contrary Evidence for Biased Infanticide



- The decision to kill the child is made before the birth of the child
- Evidence that Amazonians have naturally elevated sex ratios (around 110)
- Infanticide data collected by Chagnon (unpublished) shows no biasing

