health research. Such methods may include passive parental consent, community consent, and/or independent adolescent consent. We feel that these alternate methods may better reflect the South African social context, and serve the interests of South African adolescents who wish to take part in school-based sexual health research. In this, we do not suggest undermining parental authority but rather encouraging parallel efforts to promote shared decision-making about enrolment in important research.

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Where have all the flowers gone?

To the Editor: The title of the recent editorial1 applies too to a related theme: gender imbalance.

The distinction between male and female is a key dimension of population dynamics.2 In some southern and eastern Asian countries, the sex ratio has become skewed towards men, partly in consequence of gender-selective abortions;3,4 in the People's Republic of China, for the sex ratio has become skewed towards men, partly in consequence of prenatal gender testing. The increasing gender imbalance may require a revision of traditional patterns of sexual behaviour, including effective measures against gender-selective abortions. However, measures taken by individual countries might be insufficient – international efforts could be required.4 Unfortunately, for young males in some regions, the damage has already been done, and measures against gender imbalance in today’s newborns won’t help them.

A globalised mankind needs to eliminate the motives for high fertility and gender shifts, and protect and support childless elderly people, unwed mothers and families raising girls. Traditions favouring men as the inheritors and maintainers of lineage and posterity5 should be discouraged.

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Erratum


The images accompanying this report were produced and provided by Dr Jonathan Hack of Sunninghill Radiology, Johannesburg, who is acknowledged and thanked for them. The online paper was corrected some weeks ago.

4. Tortajada I. Chinese would resist having larger families if one child policy was relaxed. BMJ 2010;340:c1212.