Son Preference and Perinatal Mental Health
A Review in East and Southeast Asian Countries With Confucian Beliefs

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Introduction

Prevalence: The global prevalence of perinatal mental health issues (e.g., depression, suicide): **10% - 13%** (WHO, 2023)

Significance:

- Heavy emphasis on **hormonal changes** undermines the role of sociocultural factors (Palacios-Hernández et al., 2024).
- Son preference as a result of **Confucian beliefs on patriarchy, lineage continuity, and filial piety** in East and Southeast Asian countries imposes pressure and expectations on mothers (den Boer & Hudson, 2017).

→ **Increased stress and risk for mental health issues**.

- There has not been **a review** to summarize the evidence linking son expectations with perinatal mental health among this population.

Methodology

A literature search was conducted across three databases: **PubMed, PsycINFO,** and **Web of Science**

Search strategy: 4 search terms

- **Key terms:** (“Sex Preference” OR “Gender Preference” OR “Son Preference”) AND (“Maternal Mental Health” OR “Pregnancy-Related Anxiety” OR “Postpartum Depression” OR “Maternal Stress” OR “Pregnancy-Related Stress” OR ”Maternal Psychological Distress”) AND (“China” OR “Vietnam” OR “South Korea” OR “Japan” OR “Thailand” OR “Philippines” OR “Indonesia” OR “Malaysia” OR “Cambodia” OR “Myanmar” OR “Laos” OR “Singapore” OR “Timor Leste” OR “Brunei” OR “Hong Kong” OR “Taiwan” OR “Mongolia” OR “North Korea”)

Discussion

Key Findings: Son preference negatively affects maternal mental health across all stages of birth, even after birth

Implications:

- Healthcare providers should receive **training on facilitating on-site mindfulness activities and empathetic listening** to support mothers.
- Educational programs to raise **public awareness** of son preference.

Limitations:

- Low level of generalizability (studies from **China, Vietnam & Hong Kong**).
- Lack of **valid tools** to measure son preference.
- Inconsistent definitions of **"primiparous"** across studies.

Future directions:

- Explore how son preference **before and after birth** affects the development trajectory of perinatal mental health issues.
- Explore the role of **family support** in the link between son preference and perinatal mental health.

Results

> *“He [the husband] has expressed to me [the wife] that a **son** would **be our own,** while a **daughter** would eventually **belong to someone else as a bride**”*
> *Zhang et al. (2024)*

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram for the review process

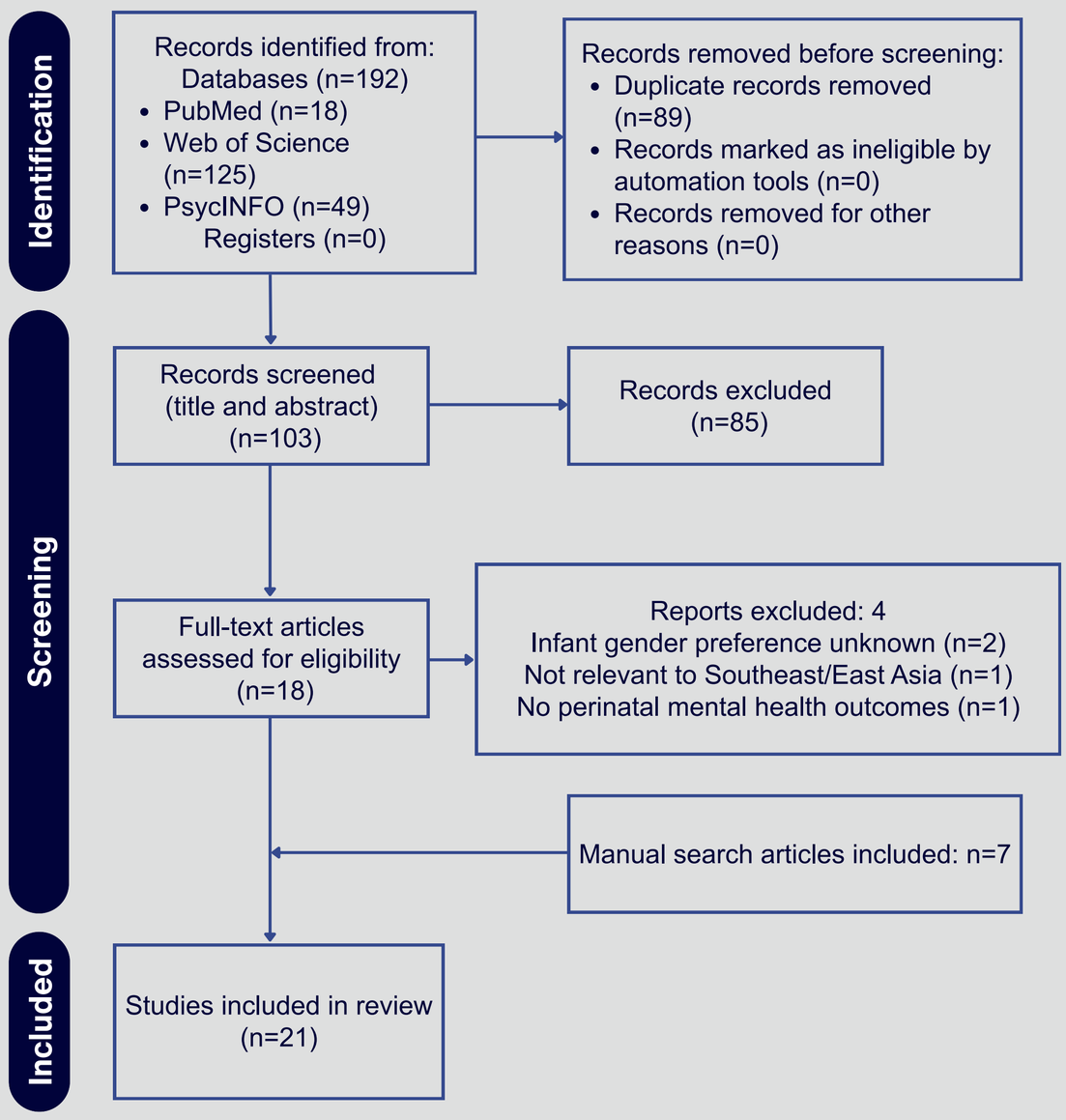
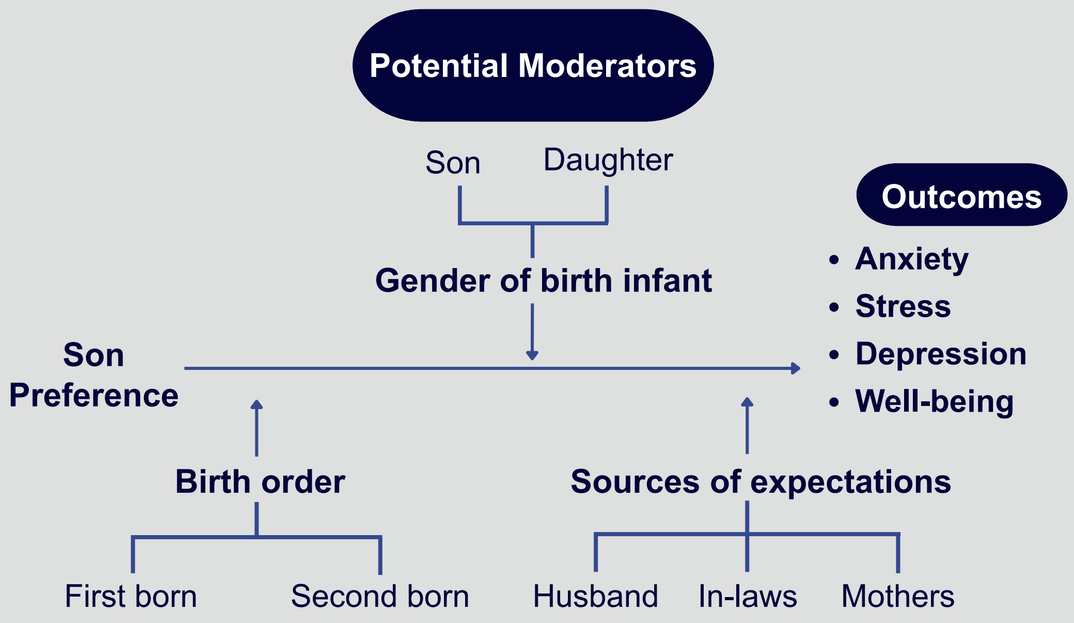


Figure 2. The relationship between son preference and perinatal mental health outcomes



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Full Reference List & Supplementary Materials

Primary References

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