

Perceptions of the Male Children: Satisfaction and Expectations

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Abstract: The main objective of the study is to examine the prevalence of sex preference and its causes within the socio-economic and cultural framework along with the parents' material and non-material's expectation of help from their male children. 360 women aged 25-45 years with at least one living child residing in the rural areas of three major districts of the Punjab province Lahore, Rawalpindi and Multan were interviewed. The analysis of the data identified the prevalence of son preference and sex discrimination in the selected areas. Preference for boys is explained in social, economic, psychological and cultural context and this irrational attitude towards family preference has health implications. Material and non-material expectations of parents from their sons seem a prime reason for preferring sons over daughters in Pakistan. Islam condemns all forms of gender discriminations and preferential treatment. It is recommended that people should be informed about the Islamic teachings of marriage, procreation, husband and wife roles, family size and sex preference (sex discrimination) along with the parents' responsibilities in upbringing the children as prescribed in Islam. The parents should also take into account their own circumstances, as well as the implications of their decisions for the balanced development of the children and the society.

Key Words: Value of Children, Discrimination, Gender Roles, Old Age Security, Expectation, Socio-cultural, Parents

Introduction

The preference of son over daughter is observed to be common in many societies especially in developing countries. The analysis of the World Fertility Survey data also indicates that the desire for having equal number of boys and girls is most common and a stronger desire for sons does appear in many countries, notably in Chinese-influenced culture, in South Asia and Muslim countries (Pullum, 1983).

In an attempt to make cross-cultural comparisons of sex preference, Freedman and Coombs (1974) used the data from the U.S. 1970 fertility study and from national studies in Hungary and Belgium in 1966. The authors found mild boy preference and balance preference (equal number of boys and girls) for the U.S. sample with a similar pattern for Hungary and evidence of girl preference for Belgium. They also presented additional cross-cultural material on sex preference for six countries. The author found the highest values to the lowest values went from Korea to Taiwan to Malaysia to the U.S. and finally to the Philippines which showed strong balance preference. Kim and Choi (1981) also found the confirmation of boy preference in the Korean society. The authors stated that the desire for another baby was much higher among women who had less than two sons. The son preference variable serves as an independent variable that has a direct causal effect on the ultimate family size. This desire was a real predictor to offer an explanation of fertility and contraceptive behavior, though after two sons, the differentials in contraceptive use were negligible. Ahmad (1981) used more refined measures developed by Freedman and Coombs (1974) and found the son preference and its association with use of contraceptives in Bangladesh. Data on the sex of a future child were gathered in the Pakistan and Bangladesh Fertility Surveys. In Bangladesh, about 60 per cent of currently married fecund women wanted their next baby to be a boy, while only 7 percent of women showed their desire for a girl. In Pakistan,

71 percent of currently married fecund women who were reported to want another baby, wanted to have boy, 5 percent a girl - 24 percent were undecided (Cleland *et al.*, 1983). Similar behaviour has been found in Jordan, Korea, Nepal and Syria. Nag (1991) examined different sets of data collected during a space of two decades from 1969 to 1988 for Pakistan, India and Bangladesh on stated desire to have additional children. The data clearly indicates widely prevalent preference for sons in all the three countries. Children are an essential ingredient of life. Life without children is thought to be incomplete and like a desert. The pleasures of life are linked with children. People have a firm belief that children are a beautiful gift from God. The in-laws family to childless woman sanctions no guarantee of stability of marital life. Children cement the relationships of husband and wife. This is a common belief in the Pakistani society. High value is placed on sons in the Pakistani society. Parents believe that children particularly male children bring joy and happiness into their lives and also strengthen the marriage bonds. It is a common belief that sons are the arms of the fathers; the more sons and the more strong will be the family. Sons are valued because they continue the family name and the family traditions. Death of the family is sure without a son. Sons are also preferred due to economic benefit because they can help the family economy by working on the farms or in other family enterprises, or by contributing their wages from outside employment. According to Zafar (1993) social motives like, continuity of the family line, stability in marital relations, spiritual satisfaction, etc. are sanctioned by the Pakistani society. The social pressure encourages large families. Factions and feuds is a common feature in the Pakistani culture. Only a large, united cohort of sons and brothers can be confident of holding against the depredations (stealing of goods, money, cattle and crops) that men can expect to face. Male members are considered the strength of the family. It is true that in Pakistan, children are considered to be a blessing of God and an insurance against old age.

In this paper sex discrimination in terms of education, significance of sons for the continuity of family line and family strength is examined. The sex preference is studied in financial terms such as parents' expectations from their sons to support financially their younger brothers and sisters and their own expectations from their sons for old age security. The main objective of the study is to examine the sex preference and parents' material and non-material's expectation of help from their male children.

Materials and Methods

A well-structured interview schedule was constructed to investigate the socio-economic, demographic and cultural dimensions of son preference over daughter. The present study is conducted in rural area of three major Districts - Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi - of the Province Punjab to investigate the issue of son preference. These districts are among the most populated districts of the country. Lahore is 2nd and Rawalpindi is the 4th and Multan is the 5th district with respect to population size and these districts are situated far away from each other. Population situations of three districts present similar characteristics of size and development, making these areas suitable for this study. Significant differences are not expected in the cultural values regarding sex preference because people's lifestyle of these districts is almost the same. Religion and language which are powerful forces influencing lifestyle of people (Hull, 1983) are the same in the areas. The main reason for the selection of three areas was to capture more variation and to increase the scope of the study from the viewpoint of generalization of the research findings. Although regional differences are not expected, but regional differences are investigated to verify the proposition that socio-demographic and cultural settings of the respondents of these districts are the same. Rural married fecund women of age 16-49 years with at least one living child were interviewed in this study.

Appropriate sample size is necessary to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. Keeping in view limited resources 120 respondents - married fecund women from each district were interviewed. Altogether 360 respondents were interviewed from the selected three districts to explore the objectives. From district Multan two tehsils - Shujabad and Multan were selected randomly and from each tehsil three villages were selected randomly to interview 120 respondents-20 respondents from each village. The selected villages from tehsil Multan were BastiBosan Mithar Billiwala and Joke Muhammad Khan Weins from Multan tehsil and Shahpur, Sikanderabad and Khaki Punjani from Shujabad tehsil. From district Lahore the selected six villages were Ramkot, Sultankey, Mohniwal, Wara Gujranda, Nathokey and Atary and from Rawalpindi district the villages were Saroa, Chakry, hoha Khalsa, Sohra and Takhat Parri were selected.

The village list published by Population Census Organisation based on the 1981 Population Census was taken as sampling frame for drawing the sample 360 respondents from the study area. Twenty eligible respondents from each village were identified through systematic random sampling. Where the eligible respondent was not found in the selected household, the

next household was investigated for the identification of the eligible respondent.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic and Cultural Characteristics: As mentioned earlier that the study was conducted in three major districts of Pakistan: Multan, Lahore and Rawalpindi. Identification of the regional variation in the socio-economic and demographic factors is important because socio-economic and demographic differentials influence sex preference. For this purpose descriptive analysis for each of the region was carried out. Descriptive statistics such as mean and Standard deviation of respondents and their husbands' years of schooling, family income, land holding, current and age at marriage of the respondents and their husbands, number of pregnancies, number of alive and dead children, ideal number of children and the respondents' conception of smaller and bigger families which are given in Table 1 are almost similar indicating that the selected respondents from three regions were uniform in their social, demographic and material circumstances. In this situation separate analysis for each of the region to explore reproductive health within the socio-economic and cultural context would be misleading, the combined analysis, which enhances the generalisation of the research findings, would be more suitable and useful.

Sex Discrimination Regarding Education: Prevalence of son preference has been observed within the socio-cultural and economic context. Ministry of Education (1998) also noted the sex discrimination in relation to education. Table 2 reveals that 30.3 per cent of the respondents were in favour of only their sons' education and they viewed that daughters will go to their in-laws house after marriage, so they are others' asset while sons stay with the parents. They also expressed that child bearing and rearing is the prime responsibility along with housekeeping of a Pakistani woman. Only 3.1 percent of the respondents were in favour of daughter's education. They would more likely those respondents who had only daughters. 49.4 per cent of the respondents viewed their equal preference for both sons and daughters.

Cultural Aspects of Son Preference: A number of studies have confirmed the idea that many couples in developing countries view instrumental contribution as a major reason for having children (Fawcett, 1983; Zafar, 1995). They further stated that although financial and practical assistance as well as old age security that children provide were reasons cited by many respondents in attitudinal survey but prime justification for having children was given in terms of preserving the family name or line, enhancement of marital bonds, compassion children provide and their fitting into personal development goals. Lee and Bulatao (1983) in their review on the contribution from children to their parents reported that a study was conducted in Western and Lagos states in Nigeria that investigated children's work and parents' costs. The direct questions asked in the survey to assess the cost-benefits of having children were: "Do you think that the money spent on children (all children under 18 years of age) is more than the value of their earnings and productive work or is less? That is, do you think

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Table 1: Regional Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics	Lahore		Rawalpindi		Multan	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Current age (years)	31.86	5.16	30.05	5.79	31.44	5.43
Age at marriage	18.89	2.80	18.67	2.96	18.48	2.96
Husband's current age	35.91	5.55	34.41	6.78	35.87	5.79
Husband's age at marriage	22.94	2.81	22.89	4.34	22.97	3.57
Years of schooling	1.58	2.80	1.40	2.80	1.33	2.79
Husband's years of schooling	4.91	2.81	4.27	4.53	5.46	4.56
Land holding	8.32	6.90	9.71	12.96	6.54	7.56
Family income	43098.33	25456.31	44576.3	28730.93	44840.0	21578
Number of pregnancies	4.85	2.12	5.14	2.52	5.21	2.41
Total alive children	4.68	2.02	4.70	2.24	4.93	2.26
Number of dead children	0.61	0.93	0.55	0.85	0.70	1.03
Ideal number of children	4.08	1.57	4.06	1.39	3.99	1.39
Ideal number of boys	2.39	1.04	2.38	1.00	2.36	0.90
Ideal number of girls	1.69	0.71	1.67	0.65	1.63	0.71
Conception about big family	5.99	1.66	6.42	1.65	6.53	1.65
Conception about small family	3.60	1.04	3.72	1.11	3.49	0.98

Table 2: Parents Preference Regarding their Children Education

	Yes	No
Sons	109	30.3
Daughter	11	3.1
Both equally	178	49.4
Depends	62	17.2

Table 3: Respondents' Agreement or Disagreement with the Statements Concerning with Sex Preference

Statements	Agreed	No opinion	Disagreed
Male child is a symbol of prestige	85.6	3.3	11.1
Daughters are economic burden	51.7	23.9	24.4
Large number of male children is an asset of a family	80.6	3.3	16.1
Family line continues with the male children	81.4	3.3	15.3
Even wealthy a family without son looks very poor	75.0	4.4	20.6
It is natural that one is happier after having a son than daughter	75.0	4.4	20.6

Table 4: Mother's Expectation from their Sons

Expectation	No. of respondents	Percentage
Expectation to live with son		
Yes	94	26.1
No	6	1.7
It depends	251	69.7
Does not/will not	9	2.5
Expectation for financial assistance		
Yes	164	45.6
No	3	0.8
It depends	184	51.1
Does not/will not	9	2.5
Expectation to help or support their younger brothers and sisters for schooling		
Yes	172	47.8
No	1	0.3
It depends	178	49.4
Does not/will not	9	2.5
Expectation for financial contribution in the family emergencies		
Yes	181	50.3
No	2	0.6
It depends	168	46.7
Does not/will not	9	0.8
Expectation from son (or his wife) for caring		
Yes	187	51.9
No	1	0.3
It depends	163	45.3
Does not/will not	9	2.5
Expectation from son(s) to help in old age		
Yes	193	53.6
No	1	0.3
It depends	164	45.6
Does not/will not	02	0.6

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children make parents financially better or worse off? The analysis of their responses indicates that the majority respondents (86 percent) were of the opinion that money spent on children is greater. They concluded parents in developing countries do not take into account the economic contribution from children for having them. They state (p.250) "since perceived high opportunity costs are not balanced by more than marginal economic contributions, children are more likely to be, from the attitudinal evidence, a net drain". Hoffman and Hoffman (1983)'s framework on the perceptions and costs of children defines "the value of children to parents" derived from psychological needs (e.g., affiliation, social identity, creativity). According to these authors children are viewed as instrumental in fulfilling these values or needs which are defined within the framework of socio-cultural ideology. The authors further stated that the acceptability of alternatives to children by people in developing countries is also seen in the socio-cultural framework.

Ramu (1988) also found reasons in the socio-cultural context for preferring many sons in the Indian subcontinent. He viewed that people desire to have children for a number of reasons: stability of marital relation, marital and spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment, joy and pleasure, proof for one's masculinity and femininity. The preference for sons over daughters is supported in connection to continuation of the family line, old age security, family and women's status, performance of rituals (e.g. shraddha) after parent's death and family strength.

Son preference in the Indian subcontinent has been viewed in the social, cultural, economic and psychological framework. Among the main causes of preferring a son the fear of 'dowry' is quite important. The parents of girls started to think about 'dowry' at the time of a daughter's birth. The parents of a girl are bound to give a 'dowry' of thousands of rupees in the form of gold ornaments, furniture, expensive clothes and crockery to their daughter's husband and his family. Expensive 'dowry' is the surety of stability in marital life.

Kirk (1967) used data from many Muslim countries to discover the causes of high fertility and son preferences. The author argued that high fertility in Muslim countries is due to the distinctive characteristic of Muslim religion. He found causes of strong boy preference to be related to the socio-cultural context. The author summarized the important sources of son preference in the Muslim societies:

"Sons are valued in Muslim Societies for many purposes: for continuity of the family line and land ownership; for their contribution to agriculture; to strengthen family numbers in village rivalry and strife; for support in old age; for religious intervention at and after death". (p.568).

The above analysis shows that son preference varies across and within nations. Seklani (1967) investigated the issue of son preference for the Middle East and North Africa. Many qualitative descriptions of these areas emphasize the importance of sons. Some studies attribute the concern for sons to Islamic influences, some to Arab culture and some to the social and economic conditions of the area. The author stated that there was a concept of an ideal woman was tied up with producing sons. The issue of son preference and its reasoning has been rarely investigated in the Pakistani environment.

The studies related to Pakistan and the Indian subcontinent, already discussed reveal that son preference is a social problem in the region. The review of these studies also pinpoints that son preference is seen in the socio-cultural and economic context, which plays a crucial role in the fertility decision-making process. Different questions were asked from the respondents in order to investigate the intensity of son preference. The preference for sons is clearly reflected from the respondents' responses. Table 3 shows that about 86 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that a male child is a symbol of family prestige and 81.4 percent of the respondents viewed that family line continues with the male children. 75 percent of the respondents agreed with each of the statements that "even wealthy a family without son looks very poor" and "it is natural that one is happier after having a son than a daughter". About 52 percent of the respondents also expressed that daughters are economic burden. Majority of the respondents believed that natural pleasure and the concept of economic prosperity is really linked with having sons. With son(s) the concept of family life is meaningless. A wealthy person without sons is regarded as poor person. The real wealth and power of a family is only with sons. The in-depth interview with the respondents reflects the presence of severe intensities for son preference in Pakistan. The respondents expressed that the real pleasure comes in the life of a woman only at the time of the birth of a son. On this occasion, the behaviour of in-laws towards the woman improves and is really noticeable. Their views also reflected that a son's birth not only raises the status of a woman in the home, but also a woman feels self-recognition on the occasion. Severe intensities for sons are clearly emerged from one of the participants' views:

"Whoever says that they are equally happy on the birth of a daughter and son, they tell a lie. It is not seen that parents celebrate the birth of a daughter and at this time, parents' feelings are not different from the feelings, which develop at the time of death of any family member. On the other hand, every parent celebrates (distributes sweets and invites friends for meal) on the birth of a son even if it is the birth of the 12th son. If a woman produces continuously 3 or 4 daughters, the marital life of the woman is always under threat of dissolution. Because it is dire desire of husband and parents-in-law to have an heir for the property and the family. I am telling you my eyes have seen such an event, when I went to see my sister in hospital. One lady was sitting beside me in a desperate mood. She was saying that if she could not produce a son this time, she would be divorced because I had already produced four daughters. After some while I saw that the hospital officials looking for a woman who recently gave the birth to a female baby. Really, no one feels pleasure on the birth of a daughter because parents have to face a number of problems in the form of dowry, bad relatives, and blames during the upbringing of daughters".

Parents' Expectation: The preference for many children particular sons is due to the fact that the parents in developing societies like Pakistan have financial expectation from them. They expect and desire that their elder sons provide financial assistance to their

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younger brothers and sisters in their education, marriages, and house construction etc. The parents also desire that their sons look after and help them when they will be old. Fawcett (1983) also pointed out the traditional sex-role distinctions also influence perception of the value of children. The author is also of the opinion that in a society where women are usually financially dependent on men - tend to place greater significance on security from children. For example, in Turkey, women placed more value on large families than men for strengthen the marital bound because women mainly rely on the conjugal relationship as a source of status. The author further explored that in societies where gender-related factors are prominent (husband holds a dominant position in a society) like Turkey, Pakistan and India women place greater emphasis on the value of sons for stability of marital relations, respect gain and old age security.

Findings on the issue of financial expectation of parents from children reveal that the respondents had financial expectation from their son(s) (Table 4). A few respondents reported that they had no such expectation from their son(s). 45.6 percent of the respondents wanted to take salary or money from their son(s) while 51.1 percent expressed that it depends on the circumstances. 47.8 percent of respondents said that they have expectation from their son(s) that they help financially their younger sisters and brothers in their schooling. A vast majority of the respondents expected to be look after by their sons when they are old. When asked how much help they expected. 47.8 percent of the respondents were expecting a great deal of help while 51.7 responded whatever their sons can afford (Table 5) It emerged from the study that Rural Pakistani parents have financial expectation from their sons. In the in-depth interview with the respondents provides the reasons for this financial expectation. Majority of the respondents expressed that they had given birth to them, look after and protected them from hot, cold, tough and rough weather and also financed their education. They viewed that in return having such financial expectations from the son(s) is natural.

Table 5: Amount of Help Expected by the Respondents

Amount	No. of the Respondents	Percentage
A little	002	00.6
What they can afford	186	51.7
A great deal	172	47.8

Discussions: The review of the studies and findings of the present study support the idea of son preference and sex discrimination. The preference for boys is explained in social, economic, psychological and cultural context and this irrational attitude towards family preference has health implications (World Bank, 1998). The contribution of socio-cultural forces in defining severe intensities of sex preference is established in this study. Material and non-material expectation of parents from their sons seem a prime reason for preferring sons over daughters in Pakistan. It is also observed from the respondents' responses that their son preference over daughters linked to their Islamic conception.

There is no room in Islam to differentiate between a son and a daughter. As it is mentioned in the Qur'an: "O our Lord! give us in our wives and offspring the joy of our eyes and make us examples to those fear thee" (Sura 25:74). It is obvious from this holy verse that children (both sexes) are for spiritual satisfaction, not merely sons. The criterion for marriage defined by the religion as discussed earlier, completely rules out the idea that stability in marital relations is linked with having sons. The continuity of the family line is not Islamic thinking. A noteworthy example is of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He had five children according to the Sunny school of thought and two according to the Shi'a belief from his eleven wives. His only son died in infancy but he never desired for a son although the Maccans taunted HIM as 'the sonless'.

There are a number of verses and traditions that strongly condemn sex discrimination. In the pre-Islamic era the girl was looked upon as a burden to be tolerated out of a man's chivalry. Islam condemns preferential behaviour and emphasises on equity between males and females from their first day of life. God also shows His displeasure at the resentment shown by some people when the birth of a girl was announced to them. The Qur'an says: "And when one of them receives tidings of the birth of a female child (for him), his face darkens in sadness and disappointment. He hides himself from the folk because of the disgrace of that which he has tidings. (He argues with himself) shall he keep it in contempt, or bury it alive? Be advised that their plans are very bad" (Sura 16: 58-59). During the period of the 'dark ages' burying daughters alive was a common practice. Islam prohibited that practice and stated that it was great sin. Those people who buried alive daughters will be punished on the day of judgement. The Qur'an says: "The girls who have been buried alive will be asked what their crime was for which they were murdered" (Sura 81:7-8). From these verses it is clear that there is no difference between a girl and a boy. Equal treatment for boys and girls is the ethos of Islam. There is no room in the religion to give any preferential treatment to a boy or a girl. The holy Prophet condemns sex preference (son over daughter or daughter over son). He said that "Be fair in dealing with your children just as you would like them to be fair in dealing with you", "Fear God and deal equitably with your children, he who has female child and does not bury her alive nor does he oppress her or give preference to his son over her, will be admitted to paradise by God". He also said, "Do not hate having daughters, for they are the comforting dears". Preferential treatment and sex discrimination are not the ethos of Islam, cultural values attached to a son such as continuity of the family line, old age security and fear of dowry are not Islamic reasons for son preference over daughter. Thus there is a need to make people aware that preferential treatment and sex discrimination are socially, morally and religiously are not positive behaviour. It is recommended that people should be informed about the Islamic teachings of marriage, procreation, husband and wife roles, family size and sex preference (sex discrimination). Stress should be placed

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on responsibilities of parents involved in the upbringing of children as prescribed in Islam. It is recommended that parents should take into account their own circumstances, as well as the implications of their decisions for the balanced development of the children and of the society. It is also stressed that all children irrespective of their sex should enjoy equal facilities in their upbringing and social status.

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